

*SCIENCE AND  
SENSATION  
IN  
ROMANTIC  
POETRY*

**NOEL JACKSON**



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## SCIENCE AND SENSATION IN ROMANTIC POETRY

Romantic poets, notably Wordsworth, Blake, Coleridge, and Keats, were deeply interested in how perception and sensory experience operate, and in the connections between sense-perception and aesthetic experience. Noel Jackson tracks this preoccupation through the Romantic period and beyond, both in relation to late eighteenth-century human sciences, and in the context of momentous social transformations in the period of the French Revolution. Combining close readings of the poems with interdisciplinary research into the history of the human sciences, Noel Jackson sheds new light on Romantic efforts to define how art is experienced in relation to the newly emerging sciences of the mind and shows the continued relevance of these ideas to our own habits of cultural and historical criticism today. This book will be of interest not only to scholars of Romanticism, but also to those interested in the intellectual interrelations between literature and science.

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# SCIENCE AND SENSATION IN ROMANTIC POETRY

NOEL JACKSON



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*For Nora*





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My wife Nora has shown and given me more courage, faith, and love than I ever thought possible. With gratitude and love, I dedicate this book to her.

## Abbreviations

- BL Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. W. Jackson Bate and James Engell. 2 vols. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- CJ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J.H. Bernard. New York: Hafner, 1951.
- CL *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs. 6 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956–1971.
- CN *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn. 5 vols. New York: Bollingen, 1957–2002.
- JK John Keats, *Complete Poems*, ed. Jack Stillinger. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978.
- JKL *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958).
- LB William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. R.L. Brett & A.R. Jones. London: Routledge, 1965.
- LEY *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, vol 1: *The Early Years, 1787–1805*. 2nd edn, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. ed. Chester L. Shaver. Oxford: Clarendon, 1967.
- NA Charles Bell, *Idea of a New Anatomy of the Brain*, in *The Way In and the Way Out: François Magendie, Charles Bell, and the Roots of the Spinal Nerves*, ed. Paul F. Cranefeld. Mt. Kisco, NY: Futura, 1974.
- P William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill. New York: W. W. Norton, 1979.
- P2V William Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800–1807*, ed. Jared Curtis. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971.

- PNB John Keats, *John Keats's Anatomical and Physiological Note Book*, ed. Maurice Buxton Foreman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934.
- PWR John Thelwall, *Poems, Chiefly Written in Retirement*. 1801; rpt. Oxford: Woodstock, 1989.
- SPP Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, 2nd edn, ed. Donald H. Reiman & Neil Fraistat. New York: W. W. Norton, 2001.
- STC Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1912.
- WB William Blake, *Complete Poetry and Prose*, rev. ed., ed. David Erdman. New York: Anchor, 1988.
- WH William Hazlitt, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe. 21 vols. London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1930–1934.
- WW William Wordsworth, *The Poems*, ed. John O. Hayden, 2 vols. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977.
- WWP *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser. 3 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1974.
- Z Erasmus Darwin, *Zoonomia; or, the Laws of Organic Life*, 2 vols. London: J. Johnson, 1796.



## INTRODUCTION

### *Lyrical forms and empirical realities: reading Romanticism's "language of the sense"*

This is a book about the literary uses of sensation in the period of British Romanticism. Its subject is a language that emerges in this period for describing forms of sense experience unique to the poet and to the encounter with poetry. Working from a contemporary understanding of aesthetics as a science of *aisthesis* or sensuous experience, Romantic poets give shape to a literary practice defined in a close relationship to the contemporary sciences of physiology and the science of mind, and develop an aestheticized vocabulary for articulating the social and political ends to which such scientific knowledge was considered crucial. Focusing on a few contexts and nineteenth-century legacies of this vocabulary, the following chapters situate in relation to the human-scientific project of the late eighteenth century the experiential idiom that William Wordsworth calls, in a characteristic *double-entendre* from the "Lines, written a few miles above Tintern Abbey," "the language of the sense" (LB, 109).

To summarize the argument, I contend that the vocabulary of embodied aesthetic experience represented for Romantic poets a powerfully charged site for defining and defending the political work of aesthetic culture. Developing a framework for understanding the uniquely social logic of this inward-turning language, this book seeks to show that a considerable degree of historical self-consciousness inhabits the empirical representations of Romantic poetry. Moreover, my study finds in Romantic poems an often strikingly self-conscious ambivalence about the precise political ends that could be served through the medium of aesthetic experience. Examining the creation of a self-consciously scientized literary practice in which sensation was conceived as a language, and poetic form and language as sensuous media, this book makes a case most broadly for the relevance of Romanticism's investment in embodied aesthetic response to our own habits of cultural and historical criticism today. Against what has sometimes amounted to a critical tendency to place into opposition the categories of historical analysis and aesthetic response, my study reads

a politics of aesthetic experience that is articulated from within the categories of the aesthetic itself.

That contemporary critical discussion of aesthetics should return so insistently to the literature of British Romanticism is scarcely surprising in light of this period's standing as the first in which the category of the aesthetic emerges as a distinct object and mode of knowledge. The notion of the aesthetic as an independent realm of experience is, to rehearse what is by now a familiar story, an invention of the eighteenth century, where it takes its conceptual foundation primarily from the fields of moral philosophy and empiricist psychology. From its first coinage by Alexander Baumgarten, aesthetics was defined as a philosophical enterprise that takes as its focus the sensuous encounter with works of art; as a "science of sensation, of feeling" (the phrase is Hegel's, from the first of his *Lectures on the Fine Arts* [1835]),<sup>1</sup> it existed for years from its inception as a discipline in which artworks were considered principally with regard to the feelings that they depict and evoke. This psychological approach to aesthetic response gained prominence towards the end of the eighteenth century, persisted well into the nineteenth, and remains to some degree with us still; it survives, most obviously, in efforts to define the somatic, emotional, and cognitive effects of the work of art. Though the term "aesthetic" and its cognates does not enter widely into the English language until the late nineteenth century (and even then, as Marc Redfield has pointed out, generally appears as a term of abuse<sup>2</sup>), British writers of the late eighteenth century routinely designated poetic language as a privileged medium for representing, embodying, and – though in terms often qualified – communicating experiences of powerful sensation or feeling. Indeed, Wordsworth's oft-cited declaration that "Poetry is passion; it is the history or science of feelings" suggests an investment in the topic of aesthetic experience that goes beyond the immediacy of "feeling" to reflect on the conditions of its production. At once anticipating Hegel's characterization of traditional aesthetic thought and suggesting a role for poetry that surpasses the merely psychological function that Hegel critically ascribes to the field of philosophical aesthetics, Wordsworth defines poetry as a self-reflective endeavor which, as "passion," presents a source of deeply-felt human experience, and, as a "history or science of feelings," provides a sophisticated commentary on such experiences, thereby installing poetry as a mode of both social and aesthetic inquiry in its own right (Wordsworth, Note to "The Thorn," LB, 289).

Such claims for the status of the aesthetic as a self-reflective, experiential domain in which the work of philosophy is at once perfected and

overcome have featured prominently in critical assessments of European Romanticism, which have shown this assertion to have been central to the self-definition of Romantic authors.<sup>3</sup> These same claims have been of course a source of profound unease as well for many of Romanticism's modern readers. That "knowing refusal of any critical position outside a self-confirming belief-system" that Paul Hamilton has recently labeled "the ideology of immanent critique" has in reference to the autonomous aesthetics of the Romantics themselves proved troublesome to a diverse body of scholars – from Georg Lukács to Pierre Bourdieu in Continental scholarship, and from the new humanism of early twentieth-century Anglo-American criticism to the new historicism of century's end – who have read Romantic literary aesthetics as ahistorical, and hence most deeply ideological, in proportion to its patently "aesthetic" preoccupations.<sup>4</sup> The commitment of Romantic writers to preserving the autonomy of artistic reflection has been thus frequently described as constituting an aesthetics wholly and solely immanent to itself – a self-regarding formalism whose consequence, as Lukács described it, was "a seemingly deliberate withdrawal from life" – and accordingly incapable or unwilling to conceive a practicable alternative to its own ineffectual divinity.<sup>5</sup>

It is towards an effort to re-frame such charges, and to consider anew the possibility of a critique immanent to *aisthesis* or feeling, that the interdisciplinarity of the present study – the conjunctive "and" of *Science and Sensation in Romantic Poetry* – is chiefly dedicated. For while sustained by its commitment to the generalizability of aesthetic response, Romanticism's language of poetic experience does not solely derive its pretensions to social efficacy from the supposedly representative character of the poet's sensibility. On the contrary, this language acquires an explicitly social dimension from its close relationship to contemporary sciences with whose theorists and practitioners Romantic poets shared an acute interest in the organs and activities of human sense perception. As historians of medicine have long asserted, this is a period that saw considerable advances in the understanding of the brain and nervous system, and these scientific developments were significantly refashioning the study of the mind, formerly the province of philosophy, along anatomical and physiological lines.<sup>6</sup> Attending to Romanticism's engagement in, and mutual emergence with, these fields of medical investigation, literary historians have in the last decade begun to trace new sources for some characteristically Romantic models of mind, positing a vitally physiological basis for this period's conceptions of consciousness, cognition, and subjectivity.<sup>7</sup> In reconstructing the embodied basis of Romantic thought,

these accounts have sharpened our sense of literature and science as closely related enterprises in this period; Jennifer Ford offers a particularly strong version of this claim when she asserts that, in debates concerning the nature of the imagination, “there was no clear distinction between theorists and practitioners of medicine and those of poetry.”<sup>8</sup>

If the kinship of medical science and literary aesthetics suggests a clear epistemological context for the preoccupation of Romantic poets with human sense perception and the operations of the brain, the proximity of these fields was just as importantly a factor in poets’ efforts to imagine a wider sphere of influence for their art. From the sciences of sensation, I argue, Romantic poets derive a basis for self-conscious reflection on the social and political claims of imaginative work. Such assertions for the social efficacy of aesthetic response grew most clearly out of an empiricist intellectual context in which sense experience was regarded as the most significant basis of the individual’s mental and moral life. In *The Temple of Nature; or, The Origin of Society* (1803), for instance, the physician, medical theorist, and poet Erasmus Darwin placed sensation at the fount of the human sciences, at once its first object of research and its ultimate foundation. Darwin’s invocation to the enlightened muse of his poem thus begins in accents owing, however distantly, to Locke:

Immortal Guide! O, now with accents kind  
 Give to my ear the progress of the Mind.  
 How loves, and tastes, and sympathies commence  
 From evanescent notices of sense?  
 How from the yielding touch and rolling eyes  
 The piles immense of human science rise?<sup>9</sup>

Beyond marking his allegiance to the principles of philosophical empiricism, Darwin makes a strong case for regarding physiology, the science of the sentient individual, as a field dedicated to establishing the basis not solely of healthy physical organization, but of harmonious social and political life as well. This is an understanding clearly reflected in Darwin’s claim to locate in sensation the origins of our “loves, and tastes, and sympathies.” Like Wordsworth’s more famous (if more equivocal) claim to find in “nature and the language of the sense” the anchor of his moral and intellectual being, such assertions were invoked throughout the 1790s by English Jacobins and conservatives alike in the context of articulating a political system, and theory of consciousness, adequate to a revolutionary age.

Though the publication of *Zoonomia, or, the Laws of Organic Life* in 1794–6 had made him one of the most eminent medical theorists of his

generation, Darwin was hardly alone in defending the profound social importance of the medical sciences. In a notebook entry of 1799–1800, the chemist and poet Humphry Davy similarly declared that “Physiology is the most important of the Sciences,” lamenting at the same time that “we are as yet ignorant of it and we have not yet discovered even the modes in which the investigation must be pursued.”<sup>10</sup> This is a point still more energetically argued by Davy’s partner and employer at the Pneumatic Institution of Bristol, the physician Thomas Beddoes, who in 1799 introduced an anthology of medical scholarship by his associates in Bristol with a declaration of “the stake which society has in medicine”:

The science of human nature is altogether incapable of division into independent branches. Books may profess to treat separate of the rules of conduct, of the mental faculties and the personal condition. But the moralist and the metaphysician will each to a certain point encroach upon the province of the physiologist . . . Physiology therefore – or more strictly *biology* – by which I mean *the doctrine of the living system in all its states*, appears to be the foundation of ethics and pneumatology.<sup>11</sup>

As professionals primarily concerned, in Beddoes’s phrase, with determining “the laws that regulate feeling,” and having for their end “the well-being of individuals,” physiologists were seen to occupy a position more immediately congenial to political theory and practice than did their peers in moral philosophy and “pneumatology,” or the field that we would today call psychology, the study of the nature and functions of the mind.<sup>12</sup> Beddoes therefore attributes to these professionals a role as unacknowledged legislators that Percy Shelley more famously attributes to poets some two decades later. If, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge summarized Beddoes’s oft-repeated claim, “a Physician is peculiarly well-qualified for political research,” this privileged position was seen mainly to owe to the physician’s ability to coordinate the laws of the sentient body with those of the pre- or post-revolutionary nation.<sup>13</sup> Though comparatively in its infancy, as Davy perceived, the science of physiology was well suited to engage individuals – “these new doctors of the rights of men,” as Edmund Burke contemptuously called them<sup>14</sup> – who wished to apply the principles of medicine to the theory and practice of political reform. Capitalizing on the growing prestige of physiological research, a number of contemporary social and political philosophies, from William Godwin’s scheme for “the prolongation of human life” to Jeremy Bentham’s felicific calculus of pleasures and pains, derived their conceptual or methodological foundations from the medical sciences.<sup>15</sup>

What I have described as a Romantic poetry of sensation thus emerges in the context of a similarly comprehensive effort to locate literary aesthetics – “the science of sensation, of feeling” – at the heart of human-scientific knowledge, and as a key contribution to its ethico-political project. Like the science of physiology in relation to which it was defined, aesthetics emerges in this period as an inquiry concerned with the conditions of sensuous cognition; it emerges, no less significantly, as a discourse preoccupied with the conditions for transforming the sensorium itself – its aim, as Wordsworth variously insisted, to widen the sphere of sensibility, produce “new compositions of feeling,” create the taste by which the writer is to be enjoyed.<sup>16</sup> The poets of this period understood the aesthetic as a topic of scientific inquiry as well as an important subject of moral and political investigation; these purposes were not separate but rather closely linked in discussion of the imagination and its effects. Romantic poets thereby develop an understanding of sensation as a crucial resource of cultural representation and a vital conduit for imagining models of political consciousness, communicative ethics, and social change. When John Keats famously insists, in *The Fall of Hyperion*, that “a poet is a sage; / A humanist, physician to all men,” he reminds us how fully the knowledge of the medical practitioner furnished a language for expressing the enormous social ambitions of the poet’s art (JK, 1.189–90). Our effort to trace a politics of the aesthetic in this period must therefore address a tendency of Romantic poets to define the categories of art experience, and to articulate the social purposes of aesthetic form, in relation to the emergent human sciences with which the science of literary aesthetics was both contemporary and conceptually allied.

To read Romanticism’s commitment to the embodied character of aesthetic response in relation to the social ambitions of the human sciences is, I maintain, to understand the practice of inwardness as avowedly social in its orientation, though self-consciously ambivalent in its exercise. Coleridge, who better than most understood this ambivalence, once memorably described Wordsworth as “a brooder over his painful hypochondriacal sensations,” and recognized a tendency to what he named “Self-involution in Wordsworth” as both a symptomatic element of the poet’s character and as a probable source of his poetry’s enduring interest and power (CL, 2:1010, 1013). In a letter of the same period to William Sharp, Coleridge offered the following remark on the prospect of Wordsworth’s eventually abandoned epic project:

I prophesy immortality to his *Recluse*, as the first and finest philosophical Poem, if only it be (as it undoubtedly will be) a Faithful Transcript of his own most

august and innocent Life, or his own habitual Feelings and Modes of seeing and hearing. (CL 2:1034)

To read between the lines of Coleridge's parenthesis: Wordsworth being the person he is, how could his *Recluse* be anything *but* a "Transcript" of his sensory life? Coleridge's declaration that Wordsworth's greatest literary achievement may consist of little more or less than an autobiographical narrative is in fact a shrewdly prescient characterization of the posthumously-titled *Prelude* to this project on which the poet was then engaged, and of the principal basis upon which Wordsworth's contribution to literary history is still described today.<sup>17</sup> Two centuries since Coleridge's pronouncement, we have come to know Wordsworth as, above all, a chronicler of the inner life; he is our foremost poet of self-consciousness, the poet who first accommodated the elevated subject matter of the epic to the comparatively more local dimensions of lyric subjectivity. Through its rhetoric of embodied aesthetic experience, however, Wordsworth's poetry describes and models a form of inwardness firmly grounded in a regime of the bodily senses; this mindset does not represent a condition of hermetic isolation from the world, but a state of consciousness in continual interaction with it. Though we are long used to reading Romanticism as embodying a poetry of self-consciousness, to read this literature as vitally rooted in the senses as well as in sublime reflection is to shift considerably the ground on which our understanding of Romantic self-consciousness generally rests. By reassessing the cultural and political meanings that inwardness could assume in this period, I hope to return with a fresh eye to those habits of "Self-involution" that have often (and not without reason) drawn charges of egotism, even solipsism, or political retrenchment and reaction. In reconsidering a practice of inwardness that has come to be identified with the "interiority" of this period's literature, however, my aim is not to rethronize this tendency of Romantic poets so much as to establish contexts for understanding it as always-already social.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time that I have portrayed Romanticism's "language of the sense" as a key expression of a shared human-scientific project, it has not been my ambition to counter charges of aesthetic autonomy by dissolving Romantic literature in the crucible of social or intellectual context. On the contrary, while historicizing the language of *aisthesis* in Romantic poetry this book aims to contextualize without altogether repudiating the specificity of the aesthetic as such. As a contribution to a recent boom in interdisciplinary scholarship in Romantic studies, I hope that this endeavor will be understood as an effort to extend the basis upon which

literature might be construed in this period as a form of scientific practice.<sup>19</sup> One of the most boldly paradoxical, though generally unstated, premises of Romantic poetry is the claim to have found in the human sciences a key to what makes literature distinct from science in the first place. Consequently, my aim is not to resolve the question of aesthetic autonomy so much as to highlight it as a live issue with which the writers of this period consciously contended. Nor, as will be apparent, does the present study presume to offer an exhaustive account of Romanticism's engagement with the sciences of sensation, offering instead a selective study of some significant thematic convergences between the literary and scientific domains: the concept of mental suggestion in late eighteenth-century epistemology and literary aesthetics; the practice of scientific self-experimentation and the self-described poetic "experiments" of 1798; the notion of the poet as physician or healer of society; the theory of the divided nerve as a model for Keats's understanding of the divided, at once sensuous and abstract character of poetic form. Darwin's "human science" was a capacious intellectual field from which poets freely adapted in this period, and to which they just as importantly contributed. My interdisciplinary method is not intended to be systematic, therefore, so much as imitative of the intellectual breadth of those poets whose work I explore.

Though Romanticism's preoccupation with the somato-sensory dimensions of aesthetic experience might be examined in relation to any number of authors, this book focuses on Wordsworth's conception of embodied aesthetic response as a paradigmatic, though by no means the first or only, effort to define the cultural, ethical, and political work of "feeling" in early Romantic literary culture. As much as any poet of the early Romantic period, and with certainly the most extensive influence on the British literary aesthetics of the nineteenth century, Wordsworth sought to systematize a model of individual poetic consciousness closely if ambivalently tied to bodily feeling; this is true both in ways that readers have long acknowledged – in a long-standing commitment to reading Wordsworth as a poet of psychological introspection, for instance, or as a writer whose central themes are derived from Hartleyan associationism – and in ways that we have just begun to recognize, as in recent accounts of Wordsworth's partially materialist orientation towards questions of human thought and feeling. Wordsworth's "language of the sense" – a language that could seem at times paradoxically to involve the overcoming if not outright abnegation of the physical senses – served as a lightning-rod throughout much of the nineteenth century for debates about the



relationship of the poetic sensibility to its historical environment, the status of the aesthetic as a model for communal consciousness or social organization, and the politics of readerly pleasure. With few exceptions, then, I have confined my analysis to a loosely defined literary tradition in which Wordsworth, through his programmatic writings of the late 1790s and early 1800s, is acknowledged to have had a founding role.<sup>20</sup> I have attended as centrally in these pages to how, for better or worse, the poet's work has continued to set the agenda for the professional discipline of Romantic studies today. Recognizing the considerable debt that my own or any analysis of Wordsworth owes to the critical labors of the past, I am reminded that my approach to the poetry cannot be separated from a critical history of Wordsworthian scholarship, and have attempted, as far as possible, to keep both perspectives in view. Consequently, this book will be found to be about Wordsworth in his status as both an historical figure and as one of English literature's most durable "monuments of culture," as Kenneth Johnston has referred to the poet's legacy – a monument that has been variously reared, revered, and reviled over the course of two centuries.<sup>21</sup> As a study of Wordsworth as well as of the mixed legacies of the "Wordsworthian," then, this book focuses on a figure both narrowly situated in time, read mainly in relation to the poetry of the "great decade" of 1798–1807, and more generally associated with a modern aesthetic lineage to which the poet is a major contributor.

The partiality that defines the interdisciplinarity of the present study thus clearly extends to its selection of authors and texts as well. A book that promises to treat the topic of sensation in Romantic poetry would, for instance, be most readily understood to address the sensuous language of poets such as Keats or Rimbaud, or might otherwise call to mind the most conspicuously sensational elements of this period's literature, from its scandals and *causes célèbres* to the haunted castles and desolate landscapes of the gothic. While this book touches intermittently upon both of these literary phenomena, its principal subject concerns neither the gothic nor aestheticism per se, a fact that might well cause the reader to look skeptically upon the degree of sensuousness inherent to what I call in this study, somewhat idiosyncratically as may seem, a Romantic poetry of sensation. I am aware, to begin with, that my selection of Wordsworth as the central practitioner of a poetry of sensation may strike some readers as a willfully perverse gesture. If on the one hand we are used to regarding Wordsworth as the poet of deep and powerful feeling, an equally common characterization of Wordsworth is as a poet of sublime disembodiment, the figure among British Romantics who most cherishes those moments

“when the light of sense / Goes out” (P, 6.534–5). It is certainly true that when Wordsworth describes poetry as directed by “the eyes and senses of man” (Preface, LB, 259), or as reflecting the continued influence of what Coleridge calls the poet’s “habitual Feelings,” he refers to an experience with origins in the body. (That Coleridge is referring to Wordsworth’s “Feelings” in both familiar senses of that term – that is, as both sentiment or emotion and the physical sense of touch – is plainly indicated by his reference immediately following to the other physical senses for which Wordsworth’s poetry will provide, and will be remembered for having provided, a “Faithful Transcript.”) As an experience at least nominally distinguished from external sense perception, however, sensation is for Wordsworth as much as a category of cognition as of physical response; it is a term he generally uses to describe the activity of the mind under the influence of powerful feeling. Signifying a cooperative relationship between physical affection and reflective mental activity, sensation designates above all a provisional reconciliation of body and mind implicit as well in aesthetic experience. Though Wordsworth is a figure whose poetry and politics alike have long been read in lapsarian terms, I do not find that either his fascination with or powerful skepticism towards the imaginative potential of sensuous literary representation changed substantially in the years that saw the attempted composition and partial publication of his epic project.

In a 1798 manuscript addition to “The Ruined Cottage,” Wordsworth looked forward to the time when “the senses and the intellect / Shall each to each supply a mutual aid,” and thence to the eventual cultivation of “[t]he [ ] habit by which sense is made / Subservient still to moral purposes.”<sup>22</sup> Whether Wordsworth’s own poetry effected the “compleat and constant synthesis of Thought and Feeling” that the poet anticipated and that Coleridge predicted for it, however, was a question that occupied Wordsworth’s readers, with wide differences of opinion, throughout his career (CL, 2:1034). By a number of critics, Wordsworth was and has continued to be read as an author far-removed from the immediacy of physical sense-experience, despite his own repeated claims to the contrary. In an 1801 letter to the poet, for instance, Charles Lamb identified the debt that Wordsworth owed to the late eighteenth-century literature of sensibility, locating poems such as “The Old Cumberland Beggar” within the tradition of Laurence Sterne and other “novelists and modern poets, who continually put a sign post up to shew you *where you are to feel*.”<sup>23</sup> By thus insisting on the morality of sentiment, Lamb implies,

Wordsworth makes bodily feeling indissociable from, and indeed often “subservient” to, the didactic purposes of the poet’s craft.

If Wordsworth’s vocabulary of feeling owed an obvious debt to the didactic conventions of late eighteenth-century literature, however, it also helped to give shape to a subsequent conception of aesthetic experience, one more familiarly associated with nineteenth-century authors such as Pater, Huysmans, and Wilde, in which poetic feeling was identified not principally with the moral content of art but rather with its formal autonomy. Accustomed, with readers such as Lamb, Arthur Hallam, and Matthew Arnold, to view Wordsworth’s language of feeling primarily within the context of the poet’s moral sensibility, we can forget that the poetry of Wordsworth’s circle could as easily be read as ushering in a new cult of refined hedonism in which poets had all but willfully sacrificed the social relevance they once enjoyed. In “The Four Ages of Poetry,” for example, Thomas Love Peacock brands the Lake School poets as solipsistic versifiers who indulge their middle-class privilege in the rarefied activities of “going up and down hill, receiving poetical impressions, and communicating them in immortal verse to admiring generations.”<sup>24</sup> Through its critical assessment of these mandarin pursuits, Peacock’s wittily acerbic essay identifies a pivotal transformation in literature whereby poets, in asserting a separate sphere for aesthetic response, further divorce their art from the moral and pedagogical aims attached to literature within the so-called “culture of sensibility.”<sup>25</sup> Keats’s famous call for “a life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts” is a strong but by no means atypical appeal in this period for a more exclusively “aesthetic” form of understanding; equally characteristic is Keats’s insistence on the necessity of separating aesthetic response from existing notions of utility or morality (“the Genius of Poetry cannot be matured by law and precept, but by sensation and watchfulness in itself” [JKL, 1:185; 1:374]). If these are positions that grow out of a critical engagement with Wordsworthian aesthetics, as literary historians have long recognized, they also suggest the terms in which Wordsworth’s own poetry was and has intermittently continued to be read.

As a symptom, in Peacock’s view, of the poet’s obstinate refusal to recognize the march of history, Wordsworth’s conflicted aestheticism has a more or less direct relationship to the historical realities from which Peacock claimed the poet had turned away. The poet’s vocabulary of poetic feeling is plainly defined, for instance, against the background of traumatic historical events, such as Wordsworth records in *The Prelude* of

his experience in Paris in Autumn 1792, that present both a limit-case of and a threat to aesthetic cognition. Conceived as a rebuke and an alternative to what Chris Jones has called the “radical sensibility” of British intellectuals in this period, Wordsworth’s poetry is just as clearly intended to present a corrective to a condition of “epicurean selfishness” that Coleridge identified as a symptom plaguing the former supporters of the Revolution, and against which he famously urged Wordsworth to apply his powers in *The Recluse*.<sup>26</sup> In its resistance to a perceived hedonism of modern taste, moreover, Wordsworth’s conception of aesthetic response claims a further distinction from the sensationalism of popular literary genres – of gothic fiction and Della Cruscan poetry, for instance – against and in relation to which he defined his literary practice.<sup>27</sup> Yoking, by an improbable conjunction, a population of disenfranchised radicals and a popular reading public, Wordsworth’s language of poetic experience appeals to the senses even while distancing itself from the radical political and cultural movements with which this language was associated.

Indeed, Wordsworth’s understanding of embodiment and abstraction as qualities mutually defined and equally essential to the poetic imagination is a conception widely representative, though by no means uncontested, within an aesthetic tradition in which the poet has a central role. In the aesthetic criticism of the eighteenth century, the pleasures of the imagination are routinely located between the operation of the senses and of the intellect – “not so gross as those of sense, nor so refined as those of the understanding,” as Joseph Addison wrote in the first of his influential essays on the subject.<sup>28</sup> For the poets whose work I discuss here, aesthetic experience is a profoundly dialectical category that cuts across and destabilizes without altogether overcoming traditional dichotomies of sense and understanding, body and mind, the empirically verifiable and the phenomenally pure. No longer principally conceived in relation to visual perception, the pleasures of the imagination are thus for Wordsworth at once more and less material than in Addison’s Lockean account, associated both with the “lowest,” most immediately embodied sense of touch, and with the most exalted operations of the mind. At the heart of such dialectical claims for poetry is the paradoxical premise that only through the comparatively abstract media of language and of print can poets make possible an improved sensuous experience. For Wordsworth no less than for Friedrich Kittler, that is, poetry’s “language of the sense” represents a device for mediating sense-experience *in* language, and establishes a link to the senses not despite but rather through the abstraction of its form.<sup>29</sup>

A central claim of this study is that Romanticism's language of embodied aesthetic experience presents a crucial basis for observing the political ambivalence of the aesthetic in its status as a self-consciously dialectical domain: an experiential vocabulary conceived at once as a substitute for political activity and as an effort to derive a new basis for political engagement; a literary practice in which the object-world is submerged in order to be remediated in it; a language that articulates a practical relationship to the empirical world, and between the mind and the world, through its claim to derive a higher source of utility from art itself. Though Wordsworth's poetry regularly evinces (and seeks to promote) a healthy skepticism towards sense and outward things, the capacity of imaginative literature to evoke and elicit powerful feelings is a central concern throughout his and other work on which this study is focused. While skeptical of the immediacy of sensation and its radical political and cultural implications, then, even this sometimes strongly idealist poet never loses sight of the material ends – neither necessarily nor exclusively aesthetic – that aesthetic forms might ultimately serve.

The distrust of aesthetic experience as a useful category of critical analysis has been a prominent theme at least since Fredric Jameson's insistence, in the first chapter of *The Political Unconscious*, that the traditional subjects of philosophical aesthetics – “the specificity of poetic language and of the aesthetic experience,” among other topics – “need to be radically historicized, and can be expected to be transformed beyond recognition in the process.”<sup>30</sup> More recently, efforts among literary critics to defend and preserve the specificity of this affective dimension have responded to the challenge of historicist criticism by returning our attention to the processes of body and mind that are depicted in, and made possible by, literary and especially poetic language. This “return to” – even “revenge of” – the aesthetic has by some critics been conceptualized as an antidote to the excesses of politically oriented criticism, its adherents positing “aesthetic” strategies of reading as an alternative to analyses that reduce the literary text to a mere network of historical contexts, political commitments, and ideological content. For these critics, the central categories of aesthetics manage to elude the radical transformation that Jameson and others have prescribed for them only by being preemptively withdrawn from their social and political contexts.<sup>31</sup> Less polemically, other critics have rightfully insisted on the necessity of cultivating a more extensive vocabulary for describing this unique form of experience.<sup>32</sup> While Peter de Bolla is certainly correct to observe that “the lexicon of emotion or feeling” has been badly “underused in most academic discussions of art,”

however, it is still more evident that not enough attention has been given to the historical contexts that inform and are reflected in the language used to describe this form of experience.<sup>33</sup>

Within a suggestive strain of formalist literary scholarship, critics have challenged characterizations of Romantic poetry as representing either a flight from socio-historical reality or the simple reflex of political reaction. Though characterized less in opposition to than as an extension of historicist criticism, this scholarship has been most significantly distinguished by a tendency to find within the categories of Romantic aesthetics, and especially within its conceptions of aesthetic form, a greater degree of historical consciousness than was generally recognized by the new historicism; as we have just begun to see, many of the categories of cultural historicism have their origin in the Romantic period itself.<sup>34</sup> In an effort to further the critical project of this historically sensitive formalist practice, the present study seeks to promote, as scholars such as Kevis Goodman have begun to do, a similarly wide-ranging investigation into the historicity of Romanticism's central categories of embodied aesthetic response.<sup>35</sup> The narrative that I offer here represents a chapter in the history of the aesthetic's emergence as, in theory, an autonomous affective and cognitive domain. Within that shift towards aesthetic autonomy, however, the language of embodied aesthetic experience marks a path back into "history" through the articulation of its sensuous content. Romantic poetry thus discloses through the empiricist rhetoric of its inward turn a close, if at times deeply conflicted, relation to empirical reality.

While sharing with an emergent body of criticism its enthusiasm for theorizing the categories of aesthetic experience, then, the present study effects a return to the aesthetic neither as a flight from historicist reading nor solely as an effort to defend the role of art as a voice for timeless human values. On the contrary, I read the experiential vocabulary of Romantic poetry as a site for the self-conscious negotiation of competing ideological claims and cultural practices, and as a language which, in refusing the hasty reconciliation or conflation of sense and idea, presents an invitation and not an alternative to critique. At once straddling and self-consciously registering a division between, in Kant's terms, determinant cognition and reflective aesthetic response, the experiential idiom of Romantic poetry represents a site of self-difference that inhabits the fault-lines between the general and radically singular, public utterance and private feeling. That "sense," in Wordsworth's phrase, ever fails to be made fully "[s]ubservient . . . to moral purposes" – from an opposite perspective, that Keatsian abstraction is consistently described as leaving

behind a material remainder of loss in which the imminent renewal of sensation is held forth in promise – signifies the extent to which Romantic poetry suspends without resolving the contradiction between these terms, frustrating and at times forcefully refusing the imposition of a unified identity on the categories of aesthetic experience. This book therefore reads in the experiential vocabulary of Romantic poetry a self-conscious ambivalence that presents in our own historical moment the opportunity for a more extensive critical engagement with it.

In this endeavor, I have found in the work of Theodor Adorno a compelling model for a critical practice that operates from a vantage point at once within and outside the traditional categories of aesthetic thought. Resisting the platitudes of a naive humanism as well as the anti-aesthetic prejudices of a materialist *Ideologiekritik*, Adorno conceived this immanent perspective as essential to a critical approach to the work of art which, as he writes in an essay on Paul Valéry, “neither hides behind naivete nor hastily dissolves its concrete characteristics in a general concept.”<sup>36</sup> On the one hand, Adorno clearly derives from Kant an understanding of art as resisting the demand to provide a source of sensuous enjoyment as compensation for the privations of the real. In sharp contrast to a tradition of Kantian aesthetics, however, “sensation” is elsewhere the name that Adorno gives to the internal resistance of thought to its own totalizing impulse. In what Adorno calls “the somatic moment” of thought – the “not purely cognitive part of cognition” – the heterogeneous or nonidentical workings of mind “show up as matter, or as inseparably fused with material things.”<sup>37</sup> Far from promoting the confinement of the artist or critic to the topics of philosophical aesthetics, then, Adorno maintained a negatively critical stance in which the literary work of art offers neither a utopian resolution of conflict nor any immediate claim to practical morality, but rather expresses “that which consciousness does not exhaust” and so exposes the flawed social conditions in which both thought and art alike have their origin.<sup>38</sup>

Adorno’s dialectical assessment of autonomous art suggests a theoretical standpoint both relevant to Romantic literary aesthetics and – as Robert Kaufman has lately demonstrated – informed by it.<sup>39</sup> Whether, as Adorno speculates in the same sentence from the essay on Valéry, “[t]he ability to see works of art from the inside . . . is probably the only form in which aesthetics is still possible” is an issue that this study does not pretend to settle past doubt.<sup>40</sup> In showing “the language of the sense” to have been a basis for purposeful and not infrequently critical reflection on the historical situation of the poet and the cultural work of poetry,

however, I contend that historicist scholarship has only to gain by paying closer attention to issues considered more narrowly “aesthetic.” The present study thus seeks to offer a more fully grounded history of aesthetic experience that begins by recognizing the self-conscious situatedness of aesthetic experience in history, and from thence makes a case for the relevance of this language to our own critical endeavors to historicize it.

Focusing largely on Wordsworth’s conception of aesthetic response and on a few of its literary and critical legacies, this book will do no more than gesture in passing to figures whose work both anticipates and presents a salutary challenge to the poet’s privileged, generally normative conception of refined aesthetic feeling. In an impressive body of recent scholarship on female as well as “minor” male poets (Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Robert Merry, and John Clare, to name only a few such figures), literary historians have demonstrated a strong tendency to foreground the irreducible particularity of individual thoughts and feelings, and have found in these conceptions a powerful resistance to the universalizing tendencies of their canonical male peers. Though these authors continue to present rich possibilities for the re-mapping of Romantic literature, my aim has been principally to show how the normative claims often associated with canonical Romantic poetry – that of isolated, elevated selfhood, for instance, or the homogenizing vision of social consensus – are both asserted and destabilized in Romanticism’s “language of the sense.” If such alternative horizons are disclosed by reading against the grain, I believe that these counter-histories may just as plausibly reflect, on the part of Romantic poets, an open-ended engagement with the ideological problems to which their work gives expression. Though to speak of a critical potential to Wordsworth’s poetry may raise more than a few eyebrows these days, my aim is to reveal how the ideological claims of the aesthetic in this period are frequently questioned or resisted by Wordsworth’s critics as well as, in sometimes surprising ways, by Wordsworth himself. For the poets of this study, in other words, the language of sensation represents neither a simple instantiation of ideology nor the universal triumph over it; we can understand it neither exclusively as the effect of middle-class retrenchment nor solely as a liberatory critical narrative. Cutting between and across these possibilities, this language rather emerges as a figure for the mutual interaction of the self and the social, mind and world, art and society.

While remaining vigilant, therefore, in the face of a Romantic tendency to conflate aesthetics and politics, this study equally resists a tendency to reject claims for the critical potential of the aesthetic as hopeless naiveté.<sup>41</sup>



For why must we grant to ideation alone the capacity to “make” history, and to the senses – indeed, even to their conceptualization – the necessity of registering it? Against such misconceptions, we would do well to recall Marx’s well-known critique, from the “Theses on Feuerbach,” of a similarly misguided materialism. In several of the theses, Marx contends that sensation must be understood not as an object of contemplation so much as a basis for and expression of “practical, human-sensuous activity”: this experiential dimension represents neither merely a bedrock of historical fact nor a passive index of social determination, but rather a crucial means for realizing the transitive dimension of meaning-making, a key process in the making of history itself.<sup>42</sup> It is this vision of sensation as social praxis, after all, which serves as the basis for Marx’s well-known dictum that “[t]he cultivation of the five senses is the work of all previous history.”<sup>43</sup> Marx’s words from the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844 are often read as signaling the first “genuinely historical sense of the formation of the senses,” as well as marking the first understanding of the aesthetic, in the broadest possible sense of that term, as a potentially liberatory force.<sup>44</sup> My purpose in these pages is to ask how far Romanticism’s “language of the sense” – or what Marx’s contemporary John Stuart Mill, referring to Wordsworth’s poetry, still more appositely called “the culture of the feelings” – can be read in similar terms as the “work” of history: both its material instantiation, that is, and its ongoing project.<sup>45</sup> What follows can be read as both a pre-history of Marx’s claim and as an effort to recover that critique for a history of the present.

In each of the three sections of this study, and in the pair of chapters within each section, I spotlight one broad claim for the political work of aesthetic culture, and consider the questions that Romanticism’s language of poetic sensibility has raised (or might raise) for our critical approaches to the literature of this period. Addressing topics in Romantic criticism associated with the larger issue of the so-called aesthetic ideology – topics including the historicity of the poetic sensibility; self and society in the modern lyric; sensation and the politics of literary value – each section begins as well to sketch a critical history for these debates in Romantic scholarship. Thus, I read the efforts of Romantic poets to determine the historical situation, ethical function, or critical potential of art experience in relation to a similar range of critical attempts to define the ideological premises of aesthetic culture – such claims, as have been variously attributed to Romantic literary aesthetics, to “make” or to escape history, to build or impose a basis for human community, to cultivate or to confine the pleasures of the senses. Moreover, in observing how the rhetoric of

embodied aesthetic experience frequently presents a critical basis for challenging the ideological narratives often justly associated with Romantic poetry, each section attends to how this language continues, in some unexpected ways, to inform and challenge our own critical practices.

In Part One, I examine Romanticism's language of aesthetic experience as a vehicle for articulating the engagement of poetry and the poet with empirical reality. Focusing upon this period's conception of "History" as a phenomenological category, both chapters examine claims for the poet as the figure most fully capable of "sensing" history as well as of embodying it in aesthetic form. Chapters 1 and 2 thus explore the language of sensation as representing one concrete instantiation of Shelley's famous claim that the poet is both the creation and creator of the age. Though these initial chapters are rather intended to sketch a context for the historicity of early Romanticism's "language of the sense" than to offer extended readings of individual poems, this more general task is largely focused through a consideration of Wordsworth's two great poems of retrospection, "Tintern Abbey" and *The Prelude*, both works exemplifying the uniquely elusive though central character of sensation as an experience which, though often muted or inaccessible in its original state, continues to enrich and sustain the speaker through his more contemplative moods. Both chapters address as well the seminal impact of the French Revolution, especially as that event inaugurates an effort to reimagine the role of *aisthesis* in literary writing. In chapter 1, I read Romanticism's language of mental suggestion, or the process by which one makes inferences on the basis of sensation, as a practice of embodied inwardness that despite many claims to this effect resists easy identification with positions of political conservatism, quietism, or retreat. Examining this period's foundational understanding of the sensorium as a historically mutable object, chapter 2 next considers how Wordsworth sought to narrate and give shape to the history of the poetic sensibility. In a conclusion to this chapter I turn briefly to Blake, whose efforts to narrate the origins of the human sensibility share with *The Prelude* a keen understanding of the senses as historical from their inception.

In chapters 3 and 4, I examine, through readings of Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight" and Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence," respectively, two complementary perspectives on the socio-political logic of poetic feeling. Each chapter approaches this topic from either side of a dialectical opposition: while chapter 3 explores the ethical uses of self-examination in Coleridge, chapter 4 attends to the larger political aims implicit in Romanticism's rhetoric of feeling, examining an overtly social

role for the poet (and the attribution of this role to Wordsworth in particular) as a physician to or healer of society. In addition, chapters 3 and 4 examine two distinct though complementary roles for the “science of feelings” in this period, each closely defined in relation to contemporary scientific theory or practice: chapter 3 examines the status of the Romantic lyric as an experimental medium, a vehicle for modeling forms of embodied self-examination, and chapter 4 attends to its nineteenth-century construction as a reparatory domain in which psychological and social conflicts are healed through the agency of sensation or “feeling.” While focusing in both cases on the process by which Romantic poets seek to enact or make possible the construction of human community, however, in neither case do I read these poems as achieving a vision of social consensus by projecting the imperial self onto a larger group or by abstracting individuals out of their sensuous particularity. Rather, by reconceiving the aesthetic as the basis for mediating between the self and the social sphere in relation to which it is defined, these poets gesture, at times indeed despite themselves, towards a self-reflexive, critical function for their art that surpasses or exceeds the roles typically ascribed to it.

If chapters 3 and 4 indicate a potentially critical role for the greater Romantic lyric, the concluding section of this book explores the practical critique of this genre in work that responds to its programmatic account of “high” aesthetic experience. Foregrounding the dual status of aesthetics as both a discourse of perception and a discourse of value, chapters 5 and 6 trace the coordination of these two elements in the context of work that responds critically to Wordsworthian poetics. These concluding chapters explore in some depth the nineteenth-century formation of what Bourdieu called the “aesthetic disposition,” most saliently characterized by the espousal of a normative model of aesthetic enjoyment that restricts if not altogether denies the pleasures of physical sensation. This apparent conflict between *aisthesis* and aesthetic value, and its negotiation in the Romantic period and beyond, is the subject of the last two chapters; as the poet most frequently associated with the origins of this conflict, Wordsworth provides a background to both. Chapter 5, on John Keats, re-opens the case of this most famously sensuous of English poets by examining the literary and scientific contexts for that author’s persistent opposition of sensation and thought. Exposing a conflictual relationship of embodiment and abstraction in literary production and in aesthetic experience more generally, Keats develops a negative critique of Wordsworthian aesthetics that draws self-consciously on the “new anatomy”

of Charles Bell, to which the poet was introduced as a medical student at Guy's Hospital. Finally, chapter 6 assesses Wordsworth's role in the formation of the nineteenth-century divide between popular and elite literary culture. Attending to two contemporaneous Victorian responses to the "high" literary aesthetics of the previous generation, I sketch a dual legacy for Wordsworthian aesthetics, one that leads not only to Walter Pater and the aestheticist movement, but unexpectedly as well to a central episode of Wilkie Collins's "sensation novel" *The Moonstone*. Collins's re-fashioning of the high Romantic argument as a model of popular literary entertainment marks a limit-case of and fitting conclusion to this study by suggesting a use for Wordsworthian aesthetics that deviates significantly from canonical Victorian appreciations of the poet such as Arnold's.

PART I

*Senses of history: between the mind  
and the world*



*Powers of suggestion: sensation, revolution,  
and Romantic aesthetics*

No single issue appears to arrive more quickly at the heart of recent debates about Romantic poetry than that concerning the nature of the Romanticist's attachment to it. For several decades now, literary scholars have considered whether Romantic scholarship might be better served by an oppositional relationship to its object of study than by an approach that assumes a standpoint of appreciative familiarity with the forms and pleasures of canonical Romantic aesthetics. Only rarely, however, have critics observed how these debates were anticipated by the Romantics themselves. In no other period of literary history, after all, have poets so carefully balanced their craft between the poles of tradition and experiment; no period before or since has appeared so paradoxically divided between the avowedly social ambitions of art and the intensely subjective form of its transmission. To read that inaugural document of canonical Romanticism, the *Lyrical Ballads*, is to confront a poetry that purports to unite its readership not in the first instance through communities of shared interest but rather through those "feelings of strangeness and awkwardness" of which Wordsworth warned the reader in the 1798 "Advertisement" – a poetry whose lofty ambition to "bind[] together . . . the vast empire of human society" is to be achieved, if at all, at an insistent personal level (LB 7, 259). Does our affective engagement with this literature blunt the discriminating faculties of the mind, threatening to lay asleep the powers of critique? Or does our critical resistance to Romanticism merely accord at a deeper level with Romanticism's insistent self-conception as an art of estrangement and defamiliarization?<sup>1</sup> For if, on the one hand, to estrange ourselves from high Romantic poetry is to obtain a necessary degree of critical distance from it, to do so is on the other hand to undergo an experience that the Romantics themselves promise to deliver in and through their work. Romanticists are thus forced to confront the daunting possibility that to refuse Romanticism is at some level to fulfill it.

If it was ever true, however, as critics began to assert some twenty years ago, that Romantic scholarship suffered from too much familiarity with its object, this claim could hardly be put in the same terms today. Romantic criticism has since heeded Jerome McGann's call for a "differential" reading of the period, delivering a salutary and powerful challenge to canonical Romantic poetry in terms suggested by historical-materialist, Foucauldian, feminist, and post-colonial criticism, among other analytics.<sup>2</sup> The overall effect of this work has been to focus attention on the historical and political contexts informing Romanticism's most cherished themes, and perhaps especially its privileged conception of the poetic imagination. Nor, certainly, have such "differential" readings failed to cast a cold eye on a generally normative conception of poetic sensibility that emerges in the eighteenth century for describing the author's relative freedom from the external sense-impressions to which lesser minds are supposedly thrall. It is true that in the last decade a wide variety of experiences falling under the broad heading of "feeling" – from affect to sentiment, anger to enthusiasm, and so forth – have emerged as subjects for close and incisive critical attention among literary historians of this period.<sup>3</sup> Yet this critical scholarship has so far not widely been extended to a reconsideration of aesthetic experience as both a cognitive and a vitally experiential category of Romantic literature. More specifically, the question of what might constitute a form of historical or critical consciousness immanent to *aisthesis* or aesthetic feeling has neither been extensively examined in reference to the literature of Romanticism nor explicitly in reference to the nature and manner of our own critical approaches to it.

At a more general level, the debates passing implicitly in Romantic scholarship over questions of the cognitive or affective standpoint adequate to an historical understanding of this period's literature would seem to have their source in a limitation of terms for thinking historically about a phenomenon as seemingly resistant to historicization as that of aesthetic experience. Within a tradition of sociologically oriented literary scholarship – one epitomized, perhaps, by the work of Pierre Bourdieu – it would hardly be an exaggeration to state that the effort to historicize the discourse of aesthetic experience has been marked by a strongly skeptical approach to its object of analysis. At numerous points throughout his career, Bourdieu called for a sociological theory of art perception that would take into account the social and historical conditions of this experience.<sup>4</sup> As a corrective against a tendency of high art to naturalize the historical conditions of its production, and of critics to ratify this



flawed conception, Bourdieu proposed a “double historicization” of aesthetic experience that would trace the history of the object as well as of the critical lens through which it is viewed.<sup>5</sup> Far from locating the seeds for this project from within the lived experience of the work itself, however, Bourdieu insisted upon a rigorous defamiliarization of those categories from the perspective of sociological analysis. This critical project, as Bourdieu describes it in *The Rules of Art*, thus consists in “mobilizing all the resources of the social sciences” with the ultimate goal of “reappropriating, by historical anamnesis, the historical forms and categories of artistic experience.”<sup>6</sup>

In light of Bourdieu’s critique, it would be woefully inadequate to suppose that we could begin to comprehend the language of imaginative experience without taking into consideration its social and political contexts. By the same token, literary scholars have an obvious need to move beyond a limiting and ultimately misleading distinction between, on the one hand, the demystifying function of historicist scholarship and, on the other, an account of art experience that consists, as Bourdieu asserts, in “the active forgetting of the history which has produced it.”<sup>7</sup> Just as troubling to any effort to reconstruct the historical categories of artistic experience is a tendency among sociological readers of the aesthetic to define these categories as essentially ideological in their inception and structure. While historians of aesthetic thought have long recognized, for instance, that the founding categories of aesthetics (tact, gusto, *ingenio*, etc.) referred from their inception to principles or rules of social conduct, critics have further traced the macropolitical origin of these categories in British aesthetics to a period of transition from an absolutist government to an idealized image of civil society as a body relatively autonomous from the state. In the legitimation crisis resulting from this transformation in models of state power, the categories of aesthetic experience are called into the service of an effort to mediate between the body of the people and the apparatus of civil government – to reconcile, however imperfectly or equivocally, sense with idea, passion and reason, freedom and necessity, the subject and the social whole.<sup>8</sup> By these critics, then, the terms to describe the faculty and exercise of taste are widely understood to have offered solutions to a problem of social order, affording a theoretical reconciliation by which, in the words of Howard Caygill, “the freedom and autonomy of the individual at the level of sense is reconciled with the lawlike characteristics of universality and necessity at the level of idea.”<sup>9</sup>

That these are, of course, reconciliations achieved in theory only is a fact often pointed out by commentators on aesthetic thought, notably

so by Terry Eagleton, whose *Ideology of the Aesthetic* identified a liberatory potential latent within the aesthetic's appeal to the sensuous life of individuals, though one whose full dimensions are realized only in the nineteenth century with Marx.<sup>10</sup> While shedding valuable light on the dialectical character and even radical political potential of aesthetic form, however, such speculations have so far not prompted a more thorough reconsideration of how canonical Romantic authors might purposefully articulate these tensions in and through the language of *aisthesis* or embodied aesthetic feeling.<sup>11</sup> The ideological ambivalence of early Romantic aesthetics may be best reflected, that is to say, in the work of writers whose reflections on the poet's capacity to feel or to make us feel are defined in an implied or explicit relationship to the conflicted political tendencies at work in this period of revolutionary upheaval – authors, in other words, who in establishing a relationship between the forms of aesthetic and historical experience present an incipiently “sociological” consciousness active within the very categories of aesthetic response.

In an effort to define more specifically the terms in which Romanticism's vocabulary of “high” aesthetic experience emerges from and gives expression to the ideological warfare and cultural ferment of the 1790s, this chapter will begin to trace a genealogy for a Romantic language of aesthetic perception that situates its emergence within the context of the late eighteenth-century sciences of mind and in relation to the political writing of that turbulent decade. My focus is on the mental activity known in this period as “suggestion,” a concept crucial to subsequent conceptions of the poet's embodied consciousness of history. A term of considerable importance in the empiricist psychology of the eighteenth century, suggestion principally signified the process by which one makes inferences on the basis of sensation. Like “association,” a term whose significance to Romantic aesthetics is well documented, and to which it was sometimes compared, suggestion was a concept that traded freely in this century across the borders of psychology, physiology, and aesthetics. As invoked by Wordsworth, among others, the activity of suggestion becomes a central feature of the Romantic psychology of imagination, accounting not only for the capacity of the poet to receive and to represent experiences of lively sensation but to communicate (or “suggest”) sensations to others. Such conceptions, of course, are readily associated with the notion of the creative imagination, and thus with a long tradition of scholarship that finds a basis for eighteenth-century and Romantic aesthetics in the response to Lockean epistemology. While rooted in a broadly associationist context, however, Romanticism's poetics of suggestion emerges

as a language not only for expressing the capacity of the writer to receive, revive, and communicate powerful sensations in writing. Rather, as a term for the process by which the mind receives and orders the experiences of the senses, suggestion furnishes a model for the capacity of the individual mind or of the artwork to register, give form to, and modify the sensible impressions of history. Nor did poets of the late 1790s and beyond need to share Wordsworth's cultural and political conservatism in order to share his pronounced interest in the poet's capacity for suggestive verbal representation. Within a subsequent tradition of aesthetic thought, accounts of literary suggestion are explicitly invoked in defense of the critical, politically dissenting character of aesthetic form. In the rhetoric of suggestion, then, we find a basis for understanding the language of aesthetic perception as a self-consciously, if ambivalently, politicized idiom – at once self-absorbed and socially engaged, both for-itself and for-others, and capable of a number of competing political constructions by Romantic authors as well as by their modern readers.

I begin by revisiting Irving Babbitt's modernist critique of modern poetry as a "suggestive" art, defined primarily by the representation and appeal to sensation, and follow by tracing a genealogy for this concept that extends to the emergence of Romanticism itself. Thus offering one genealogy for Romanticism's "language of the sense" and a critical history for our interpretation of it, this chapter attempts a "double historicization" of the period which, while drawing conclusions that clearly differ from those of Bourdieu, seeks at the same time to preserve the form and underlying purpose of that critical project. While Babbitt excoriates Romantic suggestiveness as an evasion of ethical and political responsibility – a judgment surprisingly echoed in Marjorie Levinson's new historicist reading of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" – Romantic accounts of suggestion indicate a very different understanding of this activity as the processing of sense experience in a revolutionary age. In fact, the conception of the writer as an agent of suggestion was just as central to writings on and inspired by the example of the French Revolution. In the response of British authors to this event, issues of the mind's response to external stimuli or of the capacity of the writer to elicit vivid sensory experiences were explicitly raised in the context of political debate on the ability of the individual mind to speak for and to exert influence over the feelings of the wider public. Emerging coevally with a reconfiguration of political writing as a medium for representing and communicating sensations in print, Romanticism's rhetoric of suggestion represents a language of historical engagement that finds expression in the greater

Romantic lyric as well as in more overtly topical poetry such as that of Wordsworth's acquaintance and fellow former radical John Thelwall.

#### SUGGESTIVENESS AND ROMANTIC CRITICISM

For the clearest existing statement of what is entailed by a "suggestive" Romantic poetics, we can turn to a largely forgotten text from the new humanist movement in Anglo-American criticism, Irving Babbitt's *The New Laokoon* of 1910. When, like many modernists, Babbitt delivered a strong critique of Romantic literature, he did so by disparaging one of its most resilient features. This feature Babbitt named "suggestiveness," a term he used to evoke Romanticism's mystifications, its neglect of neo-classical ideals of decorum and rationality, and its refusal to respect traditional boundaries between the arts – hence the obvious allusion in his title to G. E. Lessing's eighteenth-century treatise on the relationship between visual and verbal representation. Yet Babbitt reserves his harshest criticism for the most pronounced feature of Romantic suggestiveness, its substitution of sensuous for rational depiction. In Babbitt's definition, suggestiveness refers at once to the artist's ability to "have" or to be affected by vivid sensations, the literary representation of sensory-perceptual activity, and the alleged power of communicating those sensations to a reader.<sup>12</sup>

Though Babbitt does not attend at any length to the history of the term, he is quick to point to the late eighteenth century for the origins of suggestiveness as an aesthetic ideal: in the longest chapter of the book, "Suggestiveness in Romantic Art," Babbitt attributes the emergence of this concept to a diverse group of eighteenth-century authors including Herder, Diderot, and Rousseau, and its codification as an aesthetic principle to a later generation of British Romantics. A protracted assault on the poetic representation and appeal to the senses, *The New Laokoon* is thus a vigorous polemic against the period in which this ideal of literary representation first becomes a familiar property of the writer's craft. Babbitt's treatise traces the lineage of *l'art pour l'art* to that first phase of the eclipse of reason; as he tartly observes, modern literature since the Romantic period has moved decisively toward "a hypertrophy of sensation and an atrophy of ideas, toward a constantly expanding sensorium and a diminishing intellect." As Babbitt argues, the suggestiveness of late eighteenth-century literature not only paves the way for the sentimental excesses of Victorian poetry, but prepares the ground for a still more degraded literary sensuousness in the form of art-for-art's-sake, "when words are turned to purely voluptuary uses and divorced from rational purpose."<sup>13</sup>

Babbitt's is not, of course, the only modernist complaint that the literature of the eighteenth century upsets a traditional hierarchy of sensation and thought – though one may, with Babbitt's pupil T. S. Eliot, wish to trace a “dissociation of sensibility” to an earlier date.<sup>14</sup> Nor, certainly, is he the last critic to see the late eighteenth-century rhetoric of aesthetic experience as marking the death of art as a socially productive endeavor, either the last stirrings of a moribund culture of sensibility or the first bloom of a rarefied aestheticism that would come to full flower later in the nineteenth century. In fact, Babbitt's new humanist critique ensured that suggestiveness did not want for critical attention through much of the twentieth century, though the unintended consequence of his assault on literary suggestion was to rouse numerous scholars to its defense. Though Walter Jackson Bate was arguably the first to offer an extended defense of this category of Romantic aesthetics in his 1945 Lowell lectures at Harvard (later published as the volume *From Classic to Romantic*), M. H. Abrams offered the best-known of such defenses in justly influential books including *The Mirror and the Lamp* and, perhaps still more appositely, *Natural Supernaturalism*.<sup>15</sup> While the central argument of that book is that Romanticism emerges as a “displaced and reconstituted theology,” an important ancillary argument is that this theology gets expressed in large part through strategies of sensory revivification and moments of what Abrams provocatively names “perceptual miraculism.”<sup>16</sup> That a consideration of Romantic suggestion should thus put us in mind of Bate's and Abrams's foundational work on the intellectual origins of Romantic poetry should not be surprising, for both are texts written in explicit response to Babbitt's strong critique of suggestiveness as entailing an assertion of aesthetic autonomy, a flight into solipsism, and an attendant retreat from the demands and responsibilities of a rational civilization. When Abrams alludes, with obvious irony, to Babbitt's critique of a “general synesthetic abandon” in post-Romantic aesthetics, or titles the concluding section of *The Mirror and the Lamp* “The Use of Romantic Poetry,” it is clear that his intention is to reassess this vilified quality of nineteenth-century literature.<sup>17</sup> Contesting Babbitt's understanding of Romantic suggestiveness as principally characterized by a “carelessness of rationality,”<sup>18</sup> Abrams rescued this category from critical opprobrium by affiliating it with the seriousness and moral purpose of eschatological narrative. As Abrams's account makes clear, however, the general thrust of this criticism was towards the formation of a moral sense largely divorced from somato-sensory experience. This tendency to de-corporealize the Romantic imagination may suggest why, despite the

efforts of several scholars to rescue suggestiveness on epistemological, aesthetic, and (however tenuously) ethical grounds from Babbitt's critique, such lines of inquiry were supplanted generally by the analysis of Romantic consciousness, and the dominant paradigm of Romantic internalization was subsequently supplied not by Lockean or Hartleyan psychology but rather by psychoanalysis.<sup>19</sup>

I have offered this brief and highly schematic tour through some paradigmatic assessments of Romanticism in order to demonstrate the profound influence that Babbitt's critique of suggestiveness had on subsequent debates about the social uses of Romantic aesthetics. As the lament of a man who saw in much modern art symptoms of civilization's decline, Babbitt's treatise (ironically Wordsworthian in this one respect) may be of limited use today – of greatest interest, perhaps, as the polemical expression of an outmoded critical paradigm. As a provocation to some of the most influential works of twentieth-century Romantic scholarship, however, Babbitt's argument might with good reason continue to warrant our attention. Indeed, Babbitt's account of Romantic suggestiveness remains relevant to more recent discussion of the history and politics of Romantic poetry, even where this criticism most obviously resists the humanist and rationalist terms of Babbitt's analysis. It is true that historical-materialist critics have reevaluated the language of sensation in proportion to which it appears to offer a line of resistance to what is, rightly or not, considered Romanticism's idealist orientation. Yet while on the one hand this criticism has significantly redefined the property of literary suggestiveness, its tendency on the other hand to symptomatize the discourse of imaginative experience as enacting a flight from the social betrays a deep, if unwitting, continuity with Babbitt's critique. Whereas the work of the new historicism has thus found itself in tacit agreement with new humanist scholarship in regarding suggestiveness as the mystificatory content of Romantic poetry, I mean to show how Romanticism's own dramatization of this mental power might represent instead a more consciously situated relation to the social environment from which both critical movements see the poet as turning away.

For one such historicist approach to Romanticism's "language of the sense," let us revisit Marjorie Levinson's brilliantly polemical essay on the poem from which that line is taken. In her paradigmatic critique of "Tintern Abbey," Levinson interprets Wordsworth's celebrated tribute to the power of memory to redeem and enrich present experience as a covert allegory for the process by which the imperial mind suppresses or effaces historical reality. In Levinson's reading, the contexts most glaringly

suppressed by the poet include the newly industrialized landscape of the Wye Valley and the increasing presence of dispossessed poor in the surrounding region, though these omissions are thrown into greater relief by the shift in Wordsworth's political opinions that takes place in the interim between his first and second visits to the Abbey in 1793 and 1798. Falling beneath the gaze of the poet who revisits the Wye, these material contexts represent a "sensuous concrete reality" that the poem evades or suppresses through its "transformational grammar": as Levinson argues, "Wordsworth's anxiety about sensory and particularly visual tyranny seems a displacement of the greater terror, the tyranny of fact."<sup>20</sup> In displacing the tyranny of the senses, then, "Tintern Abbey" at once displaces "the tyranny of fact" and implicitly allegorizes that act of displacement.

Levinson is certainly right to observe in Wordsworth's poem a pronounced distrust of bodily sensation unaided by thought. It is primarily on this basis that Levinson builds a case for reading the poem as an effort to displace or suppress "sensuous concrete reality" through the idealizing operations of the imagination. It is clear, however, that Levinson's argument presumes not one but two acts of displacement in relation to Wordsworth's poem. If the most conspicuous of these acts is that in which the poet's imperial mind subsumes the impressions of the senses, Levinson herself presumes a further displacement in conceiving Wordsworth's depiction of sensory-perceptual activity as a mere figure for "sensuous concrete reality" in the first place. In a slippage that persists throughout her reading of "Tintern Abbey," Levinson construes the lyric subject of the poem – its abstract, meditative "I" – as a figure for the mechanisms of displacement and disavowal that constitute the poet's historical consciousness, but reads the poem's "language of the sense" – its record of the perceiving "eye," or of the mental activity that constitutes the poem's subject, in both senses of that term – as evidence of a "sensuous concrete reality" that the poem suppresses or evades. Though at several points her essay invokes and invites comparison to Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach," an assumption implicit in Levinson's argument is that "the language of the sense" – a language in which she claims to find a covert political meaning – is *already* an aestheticized displacement of "sensuous concrete reality." To this extent, and echoing Marx's critique of Feuerbachian materialism, we can say that Levinson conceives Wordsworth's language of sense-experience as an object of contemplation but not as embodying a form of social praxis in its own right.

In her account of Wordsworthian inwardness as a displacement of political activity, Levinson follows both Abrams and McGann in reading



Romantic literature as an internalized response to the failure of the French Revolution: the substitution of Revolutionary activity with Blake's "Mental Fight," or of Revolutionary hope with vague Wordsworthian promises of "something evermore about to be."<sup>21</sup> Levinson regards this displacement of historical context as most clearly and egregiously enacted through what she calls the poem's "Cartesian epistemology," and especially through its privileging of abstract over sensuous cognition. As Levinson argues, the sublime meditations of "Tintern Abbey" effectively occlude the sensory and historical foundations that support these lofty imaginings: through the course of the poem, she writes, "the unthinkable, ideology-refusing suggestiveness of the world is expunged unconsciously, leaving the individual's confidence in the disinterested holism of his knowledge intact."<sup>22</sup>

In Levinson's identification of "suggestiveness" as the constitutive outside to Wordsworth's sublime meditation, we might catch the faintest echo of Babbitt's critique – a polemic that more obviously shares with Levinson's a conscious refusal of "facile sympathy" with the forms of the Romantic imagination in preference for an "enabling, alienated purchase" on its major works.<sup>23</sup> Of course, Levinson's historicist demystification of "Tintern Abbey" powerfully alters the terms of Babbitt's polemic, especially as it relocates suggestiveness from an intrinsic property of the Romantic poem to its unspoken and actively suppressed or denied material ground, or that which is "expunged" through the course of the speaker's sublime meditation. Whereas Babbitt laments the voluptuary excesses of Romantic poetry, Levinson obviously inverts that argument, offering a critique of Wordsworthian abstraction in which the poet's claim to have obtained a measure of distance from the immediacy of bodily senses represents his evasion of "sensuous concrete reality." Despite these differences, however, Levinson's critique remains continuous with Babbitt's inasmuch as she too conceives Wordsworth's rendering of sensory-perceptual activity – that is, the "suggestiveness" of the poem itself – as an abdication of purposeful social engagement. By characterizing the psychological process depicted in that poem as a mere cover for empirical reality, Levinson fails to consider whether the half-creating, half-perceiving character of perceptual suggestion may itself present a model for the explicitly social engagements of aesthetic form. Though Levinson purports to defend the sensuous register of aesthetic representation, Wordsworth's vocabulary of sense-perception is only marginally more privileged in her reading than is the sublime language of its cancellation. For Levinson, in other words, the "transformational grammar" through which Wordsworth



occludes historical reality is embodied by none other than “the language of the sense.”

#### THE POETICS OF SUGGESTION

Of course, one line of argument against Levinson’s essay might well begin with the question of how far we can characterize the poet’s epistemology as “Cartesian” in the first place. As critics have long observed, Wordsworth’s epistemology can at best be described as equivocal and at worst purposefully obfuscating, suspended between a monist or even materialist understanding of the mind as dependent upon external impressions and an idealist conception of the mind as capable of creating the objects that it perceives. The poet himself furnishes an image of this mutually reciprocating, simultaneously active and passive, model of perceptual activity in his famous praise – adapted, as he tells us in a note to the poem, from Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts* – for “the mighty world / Of eye and ear, both what they half-create, / And what perceive” (LB, 106–8). As a poem that celebrates the maturation of elevated thoughts out of earlier experiences of powerful feeling, and which conceives meditation as reflecting the continued influence of those past experiences, “Tintern Abbey” might itself be read as an exposition of the half-perceiving, half-creating character of consciousness that Wordsworth identifies in his paraphrase from Young. But to say as much is already to complicate Levinson’s account of “Tintern Abbey” as enacting, through the rhetoric of sublime meditation, the wholesale displacement of “sensuous concrete reality.” Indeed, Wordsworth’s lyric can as plausibly be described in Babbitt’s terms as a poem that seeks to lay bare the workings of perceptual suggestion, or the nature of the mind’s response, both in 1793 and in 1798, to the objects of sense with which it is presented. Though Levinson claims that the poet suppresses or denies “the ideology-refusing suggestiveness of the world,” it is thus precisely through what Babbitt would call the suggestiveness of the poem itself that she is led to make this claim.

In revisiting the well-worn topic of Wordsworth’s epistemology, and in returning our attention to the perceptual economy of “Tintern Abbey” in particular, it will be clear that I am not principally concerned, as is Levinson, to identify the unspoken material referent of Wordsworth’s poem. Indeed, far from regarding this poem’s obvious preoccupation with the work of perception and memory as narrowly epistemological concerns, I want to show how the *topos* of suggestion – as a thematic focus

of Romantic poetry in Babbitt's terms, and a property of modern aesthetic form – might reveal a more purposeful manner of engagement with the historical background that Levinson and many other critics have skillfully traced in relation to Wordsworth's lyric.<sup>24</sup> By tracing the language of suggestion back to its early uses in English poetry and in the late eighteenth-century philosophy and sciences of the mind, we can identify the contours of a politicized aesthetic with origins in this period.

As Babbitt surely knew, suggestiveness was a term with roots in nineteenth-century aesthetic criticism, where it described a mode of literary expression calculated to imply more than was directly stated. In his essay on Andrew Marvell, for instance, T.S. Eliot supplies an impressionistic definition of the term when he describes Marvell's "suggestiveness" as "the aura around a bright clear centre," in contrast to the poetry of the nineteenth century (his example is William Morris), which all too frequently conveys "the aura alone."<sup>25</sup> Indeed, all critical accounts of literary suggestiveness, even those that don't cite Babbitt explicitly, readily name Romanticism as the seedbed of a suggestive ideal; one critic goes so far as to assert that suggestiveness is itself "generally a Romantic method."<sup>26</sup> As an ideal of aesthetic writing, the term "suggestiveness" somewhat post-dates the Romantic period, emerging in the middle of the nineteenth century in the work of John Ruskin and Edgar Allan Poe, among others. The *OED* credits Ruskin's *Modern Painters* with the first use of the term, though scholars have attributed the most significant early use to Poe, whose essay "The Philosophy of Composition" describes suggestiveness – "some under-current, however indefinite, of meaning" – as one of the principal desiderata of imaginative writing.<sup>27</sup>

Long before these writers defined suggestiveness as an ideal of literary representation, in fact, "suggestion" signified the insinuation of a belief into the mind. More particularly, it often represented an incitement or nefarious prompting to evil. When Orsino, in Shelley's *The Cenci* (II.ii.155–7), refers to the power of "some unbeheld divinity" to "stir up men's minds / To black suggestions" (SPP, 163), he offers a use of the term largely lost in our own time, though familiar to Romantic authors through the Renaissance works they most admired. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries especially, "suggestion" is regularly associated with nefarious or incendiary activity – a distant source, perhaps, for Babbitt's understanding of suggestion as a dangerously anarchic quality of modern literature. In *Paradise Lost*, for instance, Milton writes of Satan's minions that they "by their own suggestion fell, / Self-tempted, self-depraved," and elsewhere records how a morally frail humankind is "by [Mammon's]

suggestion taught” to ransack the center of the earth for gold.<sup>28</sup> On the basis of this foreshadowing, it would not be too far-fetched to characterize the Fall itself as the most significant outcome of Satanic “suggestion”; indeed, in the climactic ninth book of *Paradise Lost*, Milton describes how Satan assumes the form of a serpent so as to hide from sight his “dark suggestions.”<sup>29</sup>

As Milton’s uses indicate, “suggestion” and its cognates could be used to describe one of two actions: either a prompting, incitement, or temptation, or the action of thus inciting another. Then as now, ideas “suggested” to the mind may either be self-generated or communicated into another mind by external means. The activity of “suggestion” (as in the phrase, “I have a suggestion”) is at once passive and active, both produced by and imposed on or generated within you. Shakespeare captures perfectly the ambivalence of the term in a line from *The Tempest* where Antonio speculates upon the ease with which Alonso’s company will fall into line after Sebastian’s usurpation: “They’ll take suggestion as a cat laps milk.”<sup>30</sup> Shakespeare’s invocation of the term deftly exploits its underlying ambiguity, as Antonio imagines a form of coercion so thorough as to appear to its victims wholly consensual. Such accounts of suggestion as something at once passively undergone and actively imposed anticipate a similar use of this term in the nineteenth-century science of hypnotism, a context upon which Babbitt explicitly draws in his unflattering portrait of modern literature as deriving its power from a kind of “attenuated hypnosis.”<sup>31</sup>

The concept of suggestion inherits these modern psychological associations from the British empiricist writing of the eighteenth century, where it signified the process by which ideas are connected in the mind. George Berkeley was one philosopher to claim that ideas are associated, or “suggest” each other, because they are connected in experience.<sup>32</sup> The activity of the mind attributed to “suggestion” here appears virtually indistinguishable from that of association, or the process by which one idea is connected to another in a seemingly natural sequence. In his medical treatise *Zoonomia* (1794–6), Erasmus Darwin used these terms almost interchangeably, defining “associate ideas,” or ideas of suggestion, as “those, which are preceded by other ideas or muscular motions, as when we think over or repeat the alphabet by rote in its usual order” (Z, 1:132). Later, in the posthumously published poem *The Temple of Nature; or, The Origin of Society* (1803), Darwin similarly (if more fancifully) describes “Suggestion’s mystic power” as the principle responsible for arranging the “trains or tribes” of ideas in an orderly succession.<sup>33</sup>

If suggestion was at times defined in terms that rendered it roughly synonymous with association, however, eighteenth-century writers just as often reserved a distinct place for suggestion as an elementary power of the mind to respond to and to order information from the senses.<sup>34</sup> For Thomas Reid, the most influential early proponent of the Scottish “common sense” philosophy, suggestion signified the process by which an idea or belief is introduced into the mind through the agency of sensation. As Reid defined the term in his *Inquiry into the Human Mind* (1764), suggestion designates the seemingly automatic connection that the mind makes between the impressions we receive from external objects and the ideas that enter the mind on the basis of those impressions; as Reid offers in an introductory example, “A certain kind of sound suggests immediately to the mind, a coach passing on the street; and not only produces the imagination, but the belief, that a coach is passing.” Suggestion thus derives, in Reid’s argument, from the power of the mind to produce “many of our simple notions which are neither impressions nor ideas, as well as many original principles of belief.”<sup>35</sup> Reid’s use of “suggestion” may best be understood in relation to his seminal distinction between sensation and perception, the difference being that the latter implies a belief in the existence of an external object while the former has no object except the feeling itself. As a mediating activity of the mind, “suggestion” in Reid’s work signifies the power that allows us, at an instant, to draw inferences from our sensations, the unconscious mental principle that converts immediate and often indistinct sense-impressions into conscious perception and thought.

Reid’s influential account of suggestion as an active, organic property of the mind was adopted and refined by a later generation of authors within the philosophy and science of mind, who defined this as the principle by which the mind develops ideas on the basis of its interaction with the external world. The philosopher Thomas Brown, a pupil of Reid’s disciple Dugald Stewart and his successor as professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, offered one prominent expansion of Reid’s account in his philosophical lectures, posthumously published as the *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (1820). In his writings on the mind, Brown – whose first book, a lengthy critique of Darwin’s *Zoonomia*, was published when the author was just twenty years old – strenuously rejected the mechanistic implications of Darwin’s idea that mental association implied “some mysterious process of union as necessary before the suggestion itself.”<sup>36</sup> Whereas Darwin defined ideas of

suggestion as notions connected *a priori* and recalled “by rote,” Brown emphasized the active character of suggestion, which both renders sensations present to consciousness and connects these perceptions with ideas in the mind.<sup>37</sup> Though technically not among those elementary mental capacities that Reid referred to as the “intellectual powers of man,” the power that Brown called “the suggesting principle” was nevertheless understood to be the backbone to and foundation of these powers, vital at once to the most rudimentary mental processes and to the most highly developed operations of the mind.<sup>38</sup> Himself a poet, Brown characterizes imagination as an advanced species of mental suggestion, active to some degree in all humans though existing in a highly refined form in the artist.<sup>39</sup>

Brown is not in fact the only nineteenth-century author to identify the work of poetry or song with the activity of perceptual suggestion. While Darwin in *Zoonomia*, for instance, defines association and suggestion as virtual synonyms, *The Temple of Nature* indicates a significantly more Reidian role for the latter term, in which ideas are “suggested” to the mind by the harp’s music. Darwin returns to the depiction of this mental activity, and to the image of “the dulcet harp,” in the fourth canto of the poem, where he describes how “[b]right scenes of bliss in trains suggested move” to the sound of the instrument (4.333–5). Years later, Hartley Coleridge will fortify an understanding of the poet’s song as a suggestive medium in a sonnet that refers to the “thought-suggesting lyres” of the ancient poets.<sup>40</sup> From Reid, then, and from his disciples in the philosophy and science of the mind, imaginative writers of this period had ample warrant for describing the mind as an active processor of experience, one that works with and upon the objects it perceives. This was a concept of particular interest to authors who came of age within the culture of sensibility, many of whose efforts to define what is unique about individuals often involve reference to the subject’s privileged sensory organization. The activity of suggestion becomes on the same basis a central feature of the psychology of imagination and of the suggestive poetics that Babbitt later criticizes as a faulty aesthetic ideal. With the redefinition of suggestion in the philosophy and science of mind, moreover, poetry is itself newly conceived as a suggestive medium equivalent to that of the harp or lyre.

Of course, one could dismiss such philosophical and scientific uses of the word as largely incidental to the claim that suggestion emerges as a central category of Romantic aesthetics were it not for the fact that this

term features prominently in some of the period's most programmatic accounts of the aesthetic imagination. Consider, for instance, the following passage from the concluding book of *The Prelude*, in which Wordsworth describes the process by which the poet interacts with and imposes an imaginative vision on the external world. Presenting the vision of Snowdon as the "perfect image of a mighty mind," Wordsworth further analogizes between elementary and advanced mental faculties:

The power . . .  
 . . . which Nature thus  
 Thrusts forth upon the senses, is the express  
 Resemblance, in the fullness of its strength  
 Made visible, a genuine counterpart  
 And brother of the glorious faculty  
 Which higher minds bear with them as their own . . .  
 Them the enduring and the transient both  
 Serve to exalt; they build up greatest things  
 From least suggestions, ever on the watch,  
 Willing to work and to be wrought upon. (P, 13.84–100)

As the power to "build up greatest things / From least suggestions," imagination represents both the "counterpart" and the consummation of simple sense-perception. The poet's aim, as Wordsworth insists, should not be to simulate faithfully or to equal in intensity "that which the real passion itself suggests," for the simple reason that no form of imaginative representation can ever achieve the effect of reality (1802 Preface, LB, 257). While emphasizing an essential gap between real and recreated passion, however, Wordsworth describes the poet's language as expressing the core truth of passion or powerful feeling. Though analogous to the workings of the senses, as the poet observes, the suggestive imagination is a power just as clearly distinct from this elementary faculty. The poet therefore describes the mental power to "build up greatest things / From least suggestions" as both a receptive and a creative agency, significantly characterizing it as a willingness on the part of imaginative minds "to work and to be wrought upon."

One reader of Wordsworth strongly sympathetic to such claims for the suggestive imagination is the poet routinely regarded as the most "sensuous" of British Romantics, namely Keats. Like many of Keats's early poems, the verse-epistle "To My Brother George" addresses the privileged status of poetic perception, a privilege made all the more evident in light of the speaker's own anxieties about his fitness to be a poet. Still a medical student at the time of writing, Keats describes, on the

authority of Spenser (as related to him by Leigh Hunt), the poet's perceptual acuity:

. . . what we, ignorantly, sheet-lightning call,  
 Is the swift opening of their wide portal,  
 When the bright warder blows his trumpet clear,  
 Whose tones reach nought on earth but Poet's ear.  
 When these enchanted portals open wide,  
 And through the light the horsemen swiftly glide,  
 The poet's eye can reach those golden halls,  
 And view the glory of their festivals . . .  
 These wonders strange he sees, and many more,  
 Whose head is pregnant with poetic lore. (JK, 27–8)

Keats's passage turns on a characteristically Wordsworthian confusion of external and especially natural phenomena – here, “sheet-lightning” – with the internal workings of the mind, the landscape without and the landscape within. As in many of Wordsworth's visionary passages, not least his account of the landscape above Tintern Abbey, Keats equivocates on the issue of whether the object presented is available as such to the senses or is rather more actively created through the suggestive imagination of the poet. Indeed, Keats asserts that the poet's lively senses will largely determine what “we” as mere spectators to the poet's vision see: in a striking illustration of the half-creating, half-perceiving imaginative faculty, Keats indicates that the poet's sensory receptivity – the opening of the “enchanted portals” of sense – actually *produces* the observable natural effect of sheet-lightning. Keats's account bears a strong resemblance to the passage from Book 13 of *The Prelude* – though one that the younger poet would not of course have read – in which Wordsworth hails the power of imagination not only to “build up” from the elementary data of sensation, but to convey these intensified experiences to a wider public. In lines preceding those quoted above, Wordsworth describes this faculty as the power which,

by abrupt and unhabitual influence  
 Doth make one object so impress itself  
 Upon all others, and pervades them so,  
 That even the grossest minds must see and hear,  
 And cannot chuse but feel. (P, 13.77–84)

As Keats will later do in the verse-epistle to his brother, Wordsworth emphasizes the capacity of the imaginative mind at once to register the powerful impressions that are “thrust” upon it, and to transmit vivid sensory experiences in turn. As Wordsworth describes the transformational medium

of the imagination, poetry entails neither the faithful mimetic representation of the world nor its idealist cancellation. Rather, Wordsworth identifies the suggestiveness of poetry with a spirit of formal innovation that at once registers and, in the logic of its form, transmutes the imprint of empirical reality.<sup>41</sup>

It is only in a later stage of his career that Wordsworth's poems routinely acknowledge the role of "suggestion" as a prompt to poetic composition. This is a practice largely reflecting the popularization of this psychological concept through the first half of the nineteenth century, as well as an obvious outgrowth of the poet's classificatory system – "a scheme of mental physiology," as Matthew Arnold disparagingly referred to it – in which, in editions of the collected works from 1815 onward, the poems are organized according to the faculty or habit of mind (imagination, fancy, sentiment and reflection) that was uppermost in the poet's mind when he wrote it.<sup>42</sup> Even prior to his cultivation of this habit, however, Wordsworth's sanctification of the imagination as "the faculty which produces impressive effects out of simple elements" was (as Geoffrey Hartman memorably observed in his chapter on Wordsworthian "surmise") an object of close and often critical scrutiny by early readers of his work (Note to "The Thorn," LB, 288). In his acerbic review of Wordsworth's *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807), for instance, Francis Jeffrey ridiculed the poet's tendency to attach powerful feelings to common individuals, objects, and incidents, ascribing this habit either to madness or to an intolerable affectation on the poet's part. "It is possible enough," Jeffrey writes, "that the sight of a friend's garden-spade, or a sparrow's nest, or a man gathering leeches, might really have suggested to such a mind a train of powerful impressions and interesting reflections; but it is certain, that, to most minds, such associations will always appear forced, strained, and unnatural."<sup>43</sup>

Though Jeffrey expresses plainly his contempt for Wordsworth's unorthodox habits of association, his objection to the poet's suggestibility is somewhat ironic in light of how centrally suggestion features in Jeffrey's own subsequent critical writings on the aesthetic judgment. In his 1811 essay on beauty (expanded and published as the entry on "Beauty" in the 1824 and 1841 editions of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*), Jeffrey offered a strongly subjectivist account of beauty in which the agreeableness of external objects is revealed to be nothing more than a reflection of the individual's thoughts and feelings; as Jeffrey writes, "our sense of beauty depends entirely on our previous experience of simpler pleasures and emotions, and consists in the *suggestion* of agreeable or interesting sensations



with which we had formerly been made familiar by the direct and intelligible agency of our common sensibilities.”<sup>44</sup> First published as a critical assessment of Archibald Alison’s *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1790), Jeffrey’s essay adapts Alison’s associationist theory of taste to focus almost exclusively on the vital role of suggestion in aesthetic experience – for “it is this suggestion,” Jeffrey asserts, “that constitutes [art’s] essence, and gives a common character to the whole class of feelings it produces.”<sup>45</sup> While in his review of 1807 Jeffrey is willing to admit that Wordsworth’s suggestibility may reflect “the self-illusion of a mind of extraordinary sensibility, habituated to solitary meditation,” his implication is that this is far more likely to be an affectation calculated to advance the principles of Wordsworth’s iconoclastic system.<sup>46</sup> Consequently, it is easy to believe that Jeffrey has Wordsworth principally in mind when, in the final pages of the 1811 essay on beauty, he criticizes the “spirit of *proselytism* and arrogance, in those who mistake their own casual associations for natural and universal relations.”<sup>47</sup>

Central to Wordsworth’s and (in more qualified terms) to Keats’s accounts of the poetic imagination, as well as to Jeffrey’s scornful review of the elder author, is a pointed contrast between the poet’s refined sensibility and the stunted or undiscerning perceptive capacities of the public. When given to defining the qualities that distinguish the poet from other individuals, Wordsworth routinely refers to his standing as a man of “more than usual organic sensibility” – as one of a class of men who “have each for his peculiar dower a sense / By which he is enabled to perceive / Something unseen before” (P, 12.303–5).<sup>48</sup> Though famously defining the poet as “a man speaking to men,” Wordsworth’s subsequent emphasis upon the “more lively sensibility” of the poet rather differently emphasizes the fineness of the poet’s sensorium as at least potentially an obstacle to the poet’s aim to communicate with the “men” of and to whom he speaks (LB, 255). Similarly, when Coleridge insists, in an often-quoted letter to William Sotheby, that the “great Poet” must have a sensory acuity far in excess of his peers – “must have the *ear* of a wild Arab listening in the silent Desert, the eye of a North American Indian tracing the footsteps of an Enemy upon the Leaves that strew the Forest –; the *Touch* of a Blind Man feeling the face of a darling Child” (CL, 2:810) – his account of the poet’s exquisite sensibility is weighed against an understanding of that individual as removed by reasons either of nature or culture from a direct engagement in the common pursuits and sympathies of civil society.

If moral philosophers, then, frequently hailed sensibility as the principle of sociability, and as the best aid to social cohesion, these authors

arrestingly complicate that assessment, suggesting that the poet's sensory acuity might just as plausibly jeopardize the communicative function of poetry itself. This often-repeated claim on the part of Romantic authors has attracted a good deal of attention by sociological readers of so-called bourgeois aesthetics, paradigmatically so by Bourdieu, who examined the mechanisms of social distinction from their theoretical origins in late eighteenth-century aesthetics to contemporary habits of cultural consumption among the French middle classes.<sup>49</sup> For Bourdieu, such claims for the refined sensibility necessary to "true" aesthetic enjoyment can be traced to the professionalization of the man of letters, and to an attendant consolidation of cultural authority in the hands of a middle-class educated elite.

Considered from the perspective of sociological analysis and critique, such accounts of the suggestive imagination may indeed present not much more than the spectacle of "high" art naturalizing its own normative claims through a self-aggrandizing "spirit of *proselytism* and arrogance," thereby helping to keep invidious social distinctions in place. Yet these critics are in error to assume that a suggestive poetics could be counted on to perform the regulatory function that is often attributed to it. I already speculated in passing that we might better understand the terms of Babbitt's critique by recalling the original sense of suggestion as identified with treachery and subterfuge – a residual definition of the term that co-existed, albeit uneasily, with an emergently psychologized definition in the philosophical and scientific writing of the late eighteenth century.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, in keeping with suggestion's origins as an illicit and possibly dangerous activity, this mental phenomenon could be described either as the operation of benign necessity or as a form of spontaneous overflow with a potentially disastrous outcome. In Mary Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), for instance, a novel supremely ambivalent about the wisdom of thinking and acting in accordance to one's feelings, the rationalist Mr. Francis cautions the heroine against "the importunate suggestions of your sensibility"; later, the heroine herself records having "stifled the impetuous suggestions of my feelings, in exerting myself to fulfil the duties of humanity."<sup>51</sup> Hays's repeated use of the term reflects a traditional association of the term with immoral or illicit activity as well as a new, relatively specialized understanding of suggestion as developed within the eighteenth-century philosophy and science of perception. Her keen identification of suggestion with the potential excesses of "feeling" additionally shows how this concept became involved in heated debates over the cultural and political stakes of sensibility in the years of the French Revolution.

I situated Wordsworth's portrait of the poetic imagination in relation to contemporary accounts of suggestion in literature and psychology in order to demonstrate that the revolutionary context central to Hays's "Jacobin" novel and to the French books of *The Prelude* informs as well the poet's claim to "build up greatest things / From least suggestions" in the concluding book of that poem. As in Hays's novel, Wordsworth's programmatic account of the imagination acknowledges the risks inherent to a suggestive literary practice. Wordsworth's remark that the poet's mind remains "ever on the watch" might simply be read as asserting the active consciousness of the poetic imagination, in contrast to Reid's account of the generally unconscious activity of perceptual suggestion, whose operations, as Reid notes in terms suggesting Keats, are "quick as lightning."<sup>52</sup> In view of continuing associations of suggestion with intrigue, treachery, and deceit (or self-deceit), however, Wordsworth's pointed insistence that the poet's mind remains, above all, vigilant – "on the watch" for or against what exactly? – suggests a wish on the poet's part to keep traces of his radical youth in abeyance, and a self-conscious effort, such as we see as well in a poem like "Tintern Abbey," to revisit even while asserting his distance from the revolutionary past.

In fact, we do not need to look far to find the sort of vigilance that Wordsworth describes for the poet as closely connected in another context to the disposition of the mind in a Revolutionary era. "Watchfulness" is after all the quality that Coleridge designated as most essential to the cause of political freedom: the periodical that he edited in partnership with Thomas Edwards was titled, of course, *The Watchman*, a role to which Coleridge often alludes in the journal's brief run. If the image of a mind "ever on the watch" could suggest the flush of Revolutionary hopes and the watchword of English radicalism, however, it could as easily suggest Burke's insistence on the necessity of "circumspection and caution" to ward against the threat of Revolutionary violence.<sup>53</sup> Wordsworth's passage suggests the wakefulness that the poet records having experienced as a young man in Paris in the wake of the September massacres. In well-known lines from Book 10 of *The Prelude*, culminating with his allusion to *Macbeth*, Wordsworth offers one concrete illustration of the poet's vigilance as a consequence of his tendency "to work and to be wrought upon": having "wrought upon myself," Wordsworth writes, "I seemed to hear a voice that cried to the whole city, 'Sleep no more!'" (P, 10.75–7). Much as Hays's references to suggestion mark the politically ambivalent status of sensibility in the age of Revolution, then, Wordsworth's eulogy to the suggestive powers of the imagination is itself suggestive of the

revolutionary history that *The Prelude* endeavors to trace, to frame in retrospect, and to situate at a safe distance. Such conceptions of the writer as an agent of suggestion are informed and sustained by the responses of these authors to the events of the French Revolution. In the political writing of the 1790s, we find further notes towards a genealogy of Romantic writing as a suggestive art.

#### THE WRITER AS PHYSICIAN OF STATE

The opening year of the nineteenth century found Wordsworth and several of his peers hard at work on theories of the sensuous basis of language and language use. It is in 1800, of course, that Wordsworth first commits to print the program for his experiments in fitting to verse “the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation,” thereby aligning his theory of poetry with contemporary scientific work on the psycho-physiological grounds of consciousness, cognition, and language (LB, 241). This is also the year in which Coleridge begins to develop plans to undertake in his newly-chosen medium of prose a similarly wide-ranging “Investigation of the Laws, by which our Feelings form affinities with each other, with Ideas, and with words” (CL, 1:369). Coleridge offers this prospectus to his friend John Thelwall, to whom I will turn shortly. Another regular contributor to such discussions is Coleridge’s friend Humphry Davy, who in 1799–1800 was busily engaged in similar projects of his own. Though much of this work centered on Davy’s experimental research on the effects of nitrous oxide (his *Researches, Chemical and Philosophical; Chiefly Concerning Nitrous Oxide* appeared in print in 1800, including first-hand testimonies from Coleridge and Robert Southey, among others), Davy’s unpublished notebooks from this period express a powerful ambition to restore to language its primary connection to the senses. In entries containing various literary and scientific reflections on sensation, perception, and altered states of consciousness, Davy’s notebooks reveal a young scientist intensely concerned with the “connection between our sensations and words,” and more particularly with the necessity of turning language to practical purpose by connecting it “with some sensation or idea [of] pleasure or pain.”<sup>54</sup> In the same year, then, in which Wordsworth lamented the “deficiencies of language” that plague the poet’s effort “to communicate impassioned feeling” (Note to “The Thorn,” LB, 289), Davy similarly insisted upon the vital need of language to retain or restore its close ties to physical sensation. As Davy pronounces in an idiom strongly suggestive of Wordsworth and Coleridge, and in

terms that surely would have found favor with them, "Our language ought to be the language of sense."<sup>55</sup>

Far from having their origin in a commitment to exploiting the "purely voluptuary uses" of words, as Babbitt supposed, such investigations into the suggestive possibilities of language use grew directly out of what might be referred to as the aestheticization of political discourse in the period of the French Revolution. In the British response to that event, there emerges an explicitly political language that both shares with and inspires in the imaginative writing of the day a strong emphasis on the nature, immediate causes, and consequences of sensation. Within this context, the capacity of the writer to receive, process, and communicate sensation was hardly considered an isolated preoccupation of a few imaginative writers, but was rather more generally understood as referring to the individual's ability, through the medium of a sensuous language, to exert a profound influence on the public mind.<sup>56</sup> From the ferment of the Revolution, then, Romantic poets had a precedent for imagining writing as a process of stimulation (and reading as a mode of receiving stimulation) quite distinct from the culturally-sanctioned modes of reading and writing within the late eighteenth-century culture of sensibility.

Even before the advent of the Revolution, significant events such as the infamous malady of King George III had infused a strongly medicalized language into late Georgian political discourse. After the King's second and most publicized attack in 1788, the fear that England's fortunes might falter with the King's health was a popular theme: when Frances Burney, for instance, records in her journal the "threat of a total breaking up of the constitution" on account of the King's illness, her anxiety over the possible dissolution of the social body is vividly expressed.<sup>57</sup> In light of these anxieties, the events of 1789 were perhaps fated to be characterized as a psycho-physiological occurrence on the largest possible scale. One particularly telling effect of the Revolution was to instill new urgency into a number of jointly political and psycho-physiological terms – among them "constitution," "organization," and "state" – that had traditionally authorized analogies between the King's two bodies. To British onlookers both sympathetic and hostile to the revolutionaries, the event was conceived as a moment of massive alteration in the *sensorium commune* – "a general movement of the popular mind," as James Mackintosh described the event in his *Vindicae Gallicae* or, less charitably, a "distemper of the public mind," as Edmund Burke put it in the *Letter to a Noble Lord*.<sup>58</sup> Thomas Paine was not the only political commentator to claim that the Revolution "provoked men to think, by making them feel";<sup>59</sup>

the very title of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* suggests an understanding of "reflection" as both a reflexive response to what Mackintosh calls "the shock of a Revolution," and as a stay against the violence of further revolutionary activity.<sup>60</sup> Faced with the extremity of the event, Burke declares, "we are alarmed into reflection" (71).

For conservatives like Burke, the Revolution not only represented a crisis in Europe's constitution, but a profound threat to the English social body. In a critique reminiscent of Rousseau's assault on the medical profession in *Émile*, Burke blamed the illness plaguing European society upon the very doctors who were claiming to remedy it. Burke's fear of the spread of this political "distemper" informs his strong critique of political theorists on both sides of the Channel – "these new doctors of the rights of men" – who meddle into the affairs of state: "Men who undertake considerable things, even in a regular way, ought to give us ground to presume ability. But the physician of the state who, not satisfied with the cure of distempers, undertakes to regenerate constitutions ought to show uncommon powers" (150). Both operating as they do upon the constitution of the state, the physician and the political theorist are frequently compared in the *Reflections*, from Burke's jabs at the number of physicians in the newly-constituted National Assembly to his frequent cautions against the consequences of either taking or administering "unnecessary physic" in affairs of state (38, 78).

Not only was it possible, then, among opponents of the Revolution, to describe mob activity in France or England as a kind of mass contagion and therefore a pathological expression of sensibility; from an opposite direction, one might accuse the revolutionaries – and the discourse of the "rights of man" generally – of having diseased the very individuals they sought to cure. When Burke alludes to the enormous social changes that the revolutionaries were capable of producing from out of their own roaming "fancies," for instance, he offers a vision of a volatile consciousness made the guiding principle of government: "By this unprincipled facility of changing the state as often, and as much, and in as many ways as there are floating fancies or fashions, the whole chain and continuity of the commonwealth would be broken" (83). Burke here echoes David Hume's famous figure for self-consciousness as a stage upon which various passions appear and enjoy a brief dominion, to be supplanted in a moment by others.<sup>61</sup> Imagining a relay between a state of consciousness and the English state, Burke inveighs against those who would sacrifice the second to the "floating fancies" of the first.

In the rhetoric of writers on both sides of the Revolutionary debate, revolutionary sentiment is frequently described as a swift, unseen, and extremely potent force that acts upon the senses of individuals and unites them in common cause. The dangers inherent to this form of action at a distance were for Burke epitomized in the ability of the print public sphere to “make a kind of electric communication every where.”<sup>62</sup> This was more than a merely accidental metaphor in an era in which the political careers of natural philosophers such as Benjamin Franklin and Joseph Priestley were helping to fortify a popular association of electrical science (and natural philosophy generally) with radical politics.<sup>63</sup> In a poem from 1771, Anna Barbauld drew an explicit relationship – one directly informed by the political and scientific exploits of her friend Priestley – between contemporary experimental research on electricity and reformist political writing. Barbauld’s modestly titled “Inventory of the Furniture in Dr. Priestley’s Study” is in fact a marvellously forward-looking piece – not only, indeed, in the playful virtuosity of her rhymes, which anticipate Byron’s, but in her conception of the writing of rational dissent as a potent electrical force, as indicated in the following items from her “inventory”:

A shelf of bottles, jar and phial,  
By which the rogues he can defy all, –  
All filled with lightning keen and genuine  
And many a little imp he’ll pen you in.<sup>64</sup>

Playing upon an emergent association of revolutionary writing with electrical energy, Barbauld compares bottles of ink to scientific equipment such as the Leyden jar, the apparatus used to accumulate an electrical charge for use in experiment. Anticipating a similar pun in Blake’s “Introduction” to the *Songs of Innocence*, Barbauld plays on the word “pen” to signify both the instrument of writing and the formal space produced by writing, a “pen” that contains and confounds Priestley’s political adversaries.

Regardless of the metaphors on which they drew, Jacobin authors of the 1790s routinely characterized radical discourse in terms of its capacity for stimulating the senses of its readers or auditors; many radicals were thus led to declare, with Christopher Wyvill, that “nothing but strong cordials, and the most powerful stimulants, can awaken the people to any thing energetic.”<sup>65</sup> In the second volume of *The Rights of Man* (1792), Thomas Paine expands upon this sentiment in a memorable passage:

There is existing in men, a mass of sense lying in a dormant state, and which, unless something excites it to action, will descend with him, in that condition, to



the grave. As it is to the advantage of society that the whole of its faculties should be employed, the construction of government ought to be such as to bring forward . . . all that extent of capacity which never fails to appear in revolutions.<sup>66</sup>

Imagining the body politic as “a mass of sense” awaiting vivification, Paine writes in defense of a kind of biosocial *Bildung* in which faculties are developed through personal liberty, commerce, and – should it prove necessary – revolutionary activity. Revolution is therefore not so much an aberration for Paine as it is the consummation or potential outcome of a developmental process. As Paine makes clear, however, this process of benign self-cultivation “cannot take place in the insipid state of hereditary government, not only because it prevents, but because it operates to benumb,” suffocating “the sensations that urge the detection.”<sup>67</sup> Paine here identifies sensation as a spur to revolution, and – as he had earlier done in his famous treatise of 1776 – revolution itself as the simple urging of “common sense.”

Paine responds in such passages, of course, to his adversary Burke, who attempted to counteract the violent agitation of revolutionary activity with an ethos of professionalist care. In marked contrast to Paine, Burke conceives sensibility as a protection against rather than a catalyst of revolutionary activity. In a well-known passage from the *Reflections*, Burke explains why “the true lawgiver ought to have a heart full of sensibility”:

If circumspection and caution are a part of wisdom when we work only upon inanimate matter, surely they become a part of our duty too, when the subject of our demolition and construction is not brick and timber but sentient beings, by the sudden alteration of whose state, condition, and habits multitudes may be rendered miserable. (148)

Burke’s basis for making such claims lay within the culture of sensibility, whose rhetoric he modified for a vastly transformed political reality.<sup>68</sup> In a period of revolution, Burke insists, the qualities of “circumspection and caution” appear nearly as vital to the statesman as that of a keen sensibility. (Wordsworth clearly borrows from Burke a similar emphasis on the necessity of vigilance in his portrait of a poetic sensibility “ever on the watch.”) It would be wrong, in the face of such evidence, to identify sensation exclusively with incendiary politics, or to associate reflection solely with the postures of political conservatism, though at some level these associations were inevitable. Reflecting on the events of the Revolution, Coleridge strikes an unmistakably Burkean note when he describes the period of most intense conflict as marked by an “excess of stimulation,” and compares the unfolding of Revolutionary events to the action of



electricity (BL, 1:189, 199). Conversely, Percy Shelley revisits a Paineite language of political stimulation in his declaration from the *Defence of Poetry* that “the end of social corruption is to destroy all sensibility to pleasure . . . until all become a torpid mass in which sense hardly survives” (SPP, 522). While inviting strong dichotomization, however, both conservative and reformist writers share an emphasis on the broadly “aesthetic” character of political rhetoric. Both conceive the writer as an instrument for receiving and communicating experiences of powerful feeling, and as a figure at once informed by and exerting influence over the sentiments of the public mind. Both, in sum, register a new conception of political writing in this period as a suggestive practice.<sup>69</sup>

#### SENTENCES, SENTIENCE, SENTIMENT: THELWALL’S MEDIA

I have so far sought to show that the incipient ideal of a suggestive literary practice served vital political ends in this period, the precise orientation of which was far from determined in advance. Attending to the concept of suggestion as an emergent category of aesthetic experience that draws its power from the revolutionary debates of this decade, I have further argued that an understanding of writing as a medium of suggestion is reflected equally, if less explicitly, in Romantic accounts of the poetic imagination as it is in the political writing of the 1790s. The politically indeterminate status of this concept is best indicated by the ambivalence of the term itself, which could represent either the shock of sensation or the mediating power of the mind required to protect against such shocks – both the transmuted form of radical politics, that is, and its unassimilable remainder. It is in this sense that Wordsworth’s claim to “build up greatest things / From least suggestions” looks backward to the politicization of sensation in the Revolutionary debates of the 1790s even as it establishes a new program for the poet capable of experiencing powerful feeling without the aid of “gross and violent stimulants” (LB, 248). It is in a similarly retrospective spirit that Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” reflects, from a standpoint of relative tranquillity, on the vivid sensations of the speaker’s youth while paying tribute to the vital act of revisiting those past experiences in memory in order to enrich and ennoble the shape of the present. As a poem that enacts a break with the turbulent scenes of the past – “all its aching joys are now no more, / And all its dizzy raptures” (LB, 85–6) – “Tintern Abbey” presents a purposeful meditation on the poet’s political activities while a young man in London and France, attempting to account for how he has profited even while

distancing himself from these scenes of his youth. If the mature mind of the poet must remain “ever on the watch,” however, such vigilance would appear to have its source and meaning in the memory of recent revolutionary violence.<sup>70</sup>

The uniquely politicized form of inwardness that emerges in the literature of early Romanticism, and which is reflected in Wordsworth’s accounts of the suggestive imagination, has been ably discussed in reference to a wide transformation taking place in the public function of literary culture in this period. Jon Klancher has described a shift from a model of literary “circulation” to a practice of textual “dissemination,” in which the relationships between writer and reader were dramatically reorganized in the political and imaginative writing of the 1790s. While in the eighteenth-century conception of the public sphere writer and reader are imagined to be united in communities of shared interest, in the divisive political climate of the 1790s these conceptions are generally supplanted by an alternative model for organizing audiences not according to their presumed universality but rather in accordance to their social and ideological differences.<sup>71</sup> In this emergent print politics of “dissemination,” writing is no longer understood as an appeal to a pre-existing community of readers, but rather as an effort to constitute a readership which, having no *a priori* existence, has to be brought into being through writing itself. As Klancher describes it, this new form of literary publicity inaugurates a dialectically-related model of authorial privacy: for while “the style of circulation conflates the distance between reader and writer,” he writes, the style of dissemination “accentuates it.”<sup>72</sup> Whereas writers tended formerly to emphasize their proximity to the reading public, in other words, British authors in an age of Revolution are more prone to emphasize their distance from the public to and for whom they aim to speak.

For a better understanding of how the “inward turn” in the British literary culture of the late 1790s marks a moment or phase in a larger project of engagement in public life, and how this transformation in turn bears upon the emergence of a suggestive writing practice, we can consult the work of an author who fully embodies an emergently disseminative authorial ideal, namely the poet and radical John Thelwall. One of the most prominent figures of 1790s radicalism, and a man with a close if ambivalent relationship to Coleridge and Wordsworth in the latter half of that decade, Thelwall gives explicit support to Klancher’s argument that the print public sphere was newly constituted in this period as a disseminative medium. In *The Rights of Nature* (1796), an influential text of mid-1790s radical culture, Thelwall offers impassioned words of praise for “that

prompt conductor and disseminator of intellect, the press.”<sup>73</sup> Extending Burke’s metaphor of the print public sphere as an electrical conductor, Thelwall celebrates the power of the press not only to communicate through networks of “electrick communication” any threats to the social body, but to deliver shocks that will serve as a catalyst to social change.

Thelwall was certainly no stranger in his own life to such exercises of political agitation. It is as a self-identified agent of political stimulation that Thelwall begins *The Rights of Nature* with a distinctly Paineite appeal to a “sluggish and insensate people” whose “drowsy stupor, creeping over the frozen nerve of misery,” threatens to subject the social body to continued oppression.<sup>74</sup> A powerful orator both famed and notorious for his ability to fire the passions of his listeners, Thelwall’s political activities were marked by a strong commitment to awakening the people from their “sluggish and insensate” torpor. Reporting on the reception of his 1795 lectures, for instance, Thelwall boasted that “[t]wo lectures in particular . . . have shaken the pillars of corruption till every stone of the rotten edifice trembled. Every sentence darted from breast to breast with electric contagion.”<sup>75</sup> As in Burke and Barbauld’s accounts of national circulation through the print public sphere, electricity is described as the force inherent within language that awakens the passions and stirs the senses of the listener. While Thelwall compares himself to Samson shaking the pillars of corruption, then, he also analogizes the public reception of his sentences to the electric communication of sentiment through the nerves and hearts of his auditors.

In the epic fragment *The Hope of Albion; or, Edwin of Northumbria*, an important though often neglected work from his *Poems, Chiefly Written in Retirement* (1801), Thelwall returns to the metaphor of public opinion as a source of physical stimulation. Borrowing its subject matter from Hume’s *History of England*, to which text Thelwall directs the reader, the poem narrates the career of Edwin, the exiled prince of Deiria, whom Hume describes as “the greatest prince of the Heptarchy in that age.”<sup>76</sup> His ambitious work opens on the scene of an imminent battle between King Adelfrid of Northumberland, who had exiled Edwin, and East Anglia’s King Redowald, the hero’s protector; were it completed, the poem was to end, triumphantly, with “the emancipation of Northumbria by Edwin . . . and consequent establishment of English liberty, and the Christian faith” (PWR, 177). Turning to an imagined past as a way of evaluating the present order, *The Hope of Albion* performs a similar kind of political work as did Thelwall’s lectures on classical history following the banning of political assembly in 1795.

Whereas Thelwall's lectures disseminated radical ideas through an account of Roman history, however, his *Poems, Chiefly Written in Retirement* is, as its title indicates, a volume composed in the years that followed the author's suspension of most outward signs of his political radicalism. The cessation of Thelwall's openly radical activity is made fully explicit in the "Prefatory Memoir" appended to the *Poems*, a lengthy document written with the explicit aims of exculpating its author from further charges of sedition and of freeing him from continued persecution by a vengeful British public. In that narrative, Thelwall records in the third person how, "tho unchanged in his opinions, [he] renounced all connection with public affairs," and had since the time of that renunciation sought, largely without success, to cultivate a quiet life in the British provinces (PWR, xxxiv). Not surprisingly, this shift in Thelwall's political career strongly colors his poetical endeavor; as in "Tintern Abbey," a poem composed in a period (July and August 1798) that saw Wordsworth and Coleridge pay a visit to their friend's retreat in Llyswen, Wales, Thelwall's lyrical contributions to the 1801 volume look compulsively backwards to the period of his political activism – although significantly without Wordsworth's will or ability to approach the relationship of his present to his past in a calmly philosophical frame of mind.<sup>77</sup>

As a document of that crucial period of transition from which literary Romanticism emerges, the *Poems, Chiefly Written in Retirement* is a volume often associated with a change of political course comparable to – though neither as swift, decisive, or arguably self-deluding as – that of his better-known friends.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, Thelwall's volume appears profoundly concerned to advertise the author's withdrawal from open political engagement of any kind. As Thelwall declares in the "Prefatory Memoir," the book is the work of an author who wishes to be known "only as a candidate for poetical and moral reputation," being "desirous that the politician should be forgotten" (PWR, ii). Thelwall's yearning for a life free of "storms and persecutions" is still more feelingly described in his best-known poem, the significantly titled "Lines, written at Bridgewater, in Somersetshire, on the 27th of July, 1797; during a long excursion, in quest of a peaceful retreat," in which the poet confesses, "my soul / Is sick of public turmoil" (PWR, 127, 129).

Numerous textual echoes between *The Hope of Albion* and more explicitly personal poems in Thelwall's collection suggest that he conceived his epic hero Edwin as at least partly an autobiographical figure representative of his own tumultuous existence in the late 1790s. For if

Edwin's defining characteristic is his status as an ardent patriot, the man who "haply wrought / A nation's bliss," he is just as surely a political outcast, "his youth / Doom'd to disastrous exile" (1.10–11, 8–9). In the lyric "To the Infant Hampden," Thelwall similarly describes himself as a man who, "in his native land, / Wanders an exile; and, of all that land, / Can find no spot his home"; like his infant's namesake, "The Patriot" John Hampden, Thelwall has known "a patriot's sorrows."<sup>79</sup> In keeping with Thelwall's quest for a reprieve from "public turmoil," moreover, *The Hope of Albion* expresses a strongly critical attitude towards the agents of political unrest, and a pronounced skepticism towards collective political activity. In the fragment that we are given for the longer projected work, the scene is set for Edwin's battle against spirits of chaos and faction both natural (the East Anglian courtiers to King Redowald) and supernatural (the Saxon deity Meribah, Angel of Discord). Both forces conspire to act upon the mind of the unstable Redowald to convince him of the necessity of war, and likewise upon the "popular mind," in whom they seek "to rouse / The sullen passions . . . moulding the infatuate herd . . . to the pernicious views / Of crafty politicians" (PWR, 2:333–9). Not only does Thelwall's image of political agitation echo Burke's famous sentiment that the revolutionaries "have nothing of politics but the passions they excite" (94); his mention of the "infatuate herd" plainly and without apparent irony invokes Burke's reference to the "swinish multitude" in the *Reflections*, one of the most notorious – and, by radical writers, parodically reappropriated – phrases of English political writing from that decade.

Thelwall had earlier invoked such scenes of political agitation in the context of depicting himself as a modern-day Samson, a figure regularly associated in this period with dissenting principles and patriotic (if obviously also self-destructive) deeds. In *The Hope of Albion*, however, Thelwall offers a considerably more ambivalent depiction of political discourse as a medium of physical stimulation. In an extended metaphor from the second book of his epic fragment, Thelwall describes the spread of warlike sentiment "from breast to breast with electric contagion," and finally discharging itself into the hand of an otherwise unseen experimenter:

The fierce throng  
Kindle with martial rage. All join the peal,  
And swift, from man to man, contagious wrath  
Spreads, direful: as, from group to group, expands  
The electric fire, when to the crystal jar,

Or sphere excited, the hermetic hand  
 Applies the tried conductor, and relieves  
 The imprisoned element, whose subtle flames  
 Dart thro' the languid nerves, the fibres brace,  
 And with encreas'd pulsation urge the heart. (PWR, 2.384–393)

Revisiting familiar figures of speech from the Revolution debates, Thelwall compares the dissemination of “martial” sentiment to the electrical stimulation of the nerves. The distant precedent for such analogies, of course, is the epic metaphor, a device closely associated in English poetry with Milton, who serves as an obvious inspiration to Thelwall’s text. Like many of the extended metaphors from *Paradise Lost* – the comparison of Satan’s bands to a fleet of ships outfitted for foreign trade, for instance<sup>80</sup> – Thelwall compares biblical or ancient events to contemporary phenomena – here, the gathering of “martial rage” to the generation and discharge of electrical energy.

As in earlier references to the electrical workings of the press through the nervous systems of its audience, Thelwall’s analogy between the “contagious wrath” of the populace and the transmission of electrical energy draws on contemporary scientific accounts of the relationship between nervous energy and the substance commonly referred to in this period as the “electric fluid.” While physiologists and natural philosophers had long conjectured that the activity of the nervous system was closely allied with the operation of electricity, late eighteenth-century anatomists such as Luigi Galvani in Italy and John Hunter in England provided experimental evidence to support the notion of an “animal electricity” that flowed from the nerves to the muscles, thereby determining the movement of the body.<sup>81</sup> As an active member of the Physical Society at Guy’s Hospital in London from 1791–4, Thelwall had ample medical authority for presuming the legitimacy of this analogy. In the *Essay, Towards a Definition of Animal Vitality* (1793), delivered as a lecture to the Physical Society when the author was just nineteen years old, Thelwall took up these notions in speculating that the “vivifying principle” of living organisms was none other than electricity itself. Opposing the dualist implications of Hunter’s “vital principle,” Thelwall’s *Essay* asserts a fundamental analogy – and speculates on the possibility of a still closer relationship – between the electrical fluid and the “powerful and extremely subtile” stimulus required to give life to matter.<sup>82</sup> Thelwall’s essay on the electrical origins of life was a fitting topic for the precocious youth who would, only a short time after its publication, emerge as one of the figureheads of 1790s radicalism. Discussed over the course of several

evening meetings of the Physical Society, Thelwall's essay was by all accounts a great success, and earned its author a formal letter of thanks from the Society's President and Secretary, a fact recorded in the public minutes of the Physical Society as well in the "Prefatory Memoir" to Thelwall's *Poems*.<sup>83</sup> If Thelwall's first lecture to the Physical Society touched on sensitive ground in hinting at a materialist understanding of life, his second paper "On the Origin of Sensation," delivered later that same year, still more boldly offered an explanation for "the phenomena of the mind . . . upon principles *purely Physical*" (PWR, xxiii).<sup>84</sup> Thelwall's paper generated a heated discussion that took place over three successive nights of discussion within the operating theater of Guy's Hospital. Finally, after what is recorded in the private minutes of the group as a "long and tumultuous Debate" on the third day of discussion, Thelwall's paper was rejected and its author (along with a few members sympathetic to Thelwall's political and scientific views) withdrew in protest from the Society.<sup>85</sup>

Like his account of the "electric contagion" that he reports having produced in his 1795 lectures, Thelwall's depiction of the process by which "martial rage" spreads through the East Anglian kingdom presents a similar model of national circulation as in Burke's metaphor of a network of "electrick communication" that rouses and unites readers of similar interests and situations. Whereas Burke conceives the print public sphere as most powerful in what Wordsworth will later call its "rapid communication of intelligence" (Preface, LB, 249), however, Thelwall's metaphor depicts a very different form of public engagement in which the individual receives and gives expression to the collected force of popular sentiment. Indeed, Thelwall depicts a process not of excitation so much as of *incitation*; his simile presents opinion as an electrical force moving in ever-larger circuits, "from man to man" as "from group to group" of circuits on the experimental apparatus, and finally discharging itself into the "hermetic hand" of the experimenter. While offering a figure for the circulation of public opinion, then, Thelwall supplements this figure of speech by positing the presence of an individual who receives and relieves the collected charge of warlike sentiment. To frame this transition in the terms presented by Klander, Thelwall's metaphor at once depicts and enacts a transformation from the circulation of "martial rage" to its interiorization and dissemination "thro' the languid nerves" of the experimenter.

If Thelwall's metaphor suggests a transition from circulation to dissemination of public sentiment, it depicts a similar development in the



medium of its transmission as well. Passing from “the peal” of politically incendiary speech to its release into and through the “the hermetic hand,” Thelwall’s figure for the gathering and release of the “electric fire” is allegorically rendered as a shift from orality as the medium of public circulation to the comparatively more private medium of writing and print. In place of sentences darting “from breast to breast with electric contagion,” that is, Thelwall presents a model of incendiary language as transmitted most effectively through “that prompt conductor and disseminator of intellect, the press.” As in Barbauld’s poem on Priestley, the instruments of writing and publication are analogized to the electrical fluid as media for the swift and ostensibly more secretive (or “hermetic”) dissemination of dangerous political ideas. Depicting the process by which collected public sentiment finds its outlet and relief in the solitary figure, Thelwall describes a model of political activity – one metaphorically defined by the implements and practice of writing – that claims its greatest efficacy not in the communication so much as in the internalization of the electric charge.

Whose, then, is the “hermetic hand” into which the collected charge of the popular mind releases itself? The suggestible King Redowald is one obvious possibility, or the “Angel of Discord” Meribah, though Thelwall’s metaphor is left tantalizingly open. Nor, in the fragment that we are given, does Thelwall describe a redistribution of “contagious wrath” back into the populace that generated it. Thelwall’s description of the hand as “hermetic” refers to a method of conducting experiments with electricity on an ungrounded surface so as to protect the experimenter from powerful and potentially fatal shocks. A reference to the “hermetic hand” would thereby suggest any number of images from scientific texts in this period in which the disembodied hand illustrates the manual operations necessary to perform experiments on the scientific apparatus; in his *Commentary on the Effects of Electricity on Muscular Motion*, Galvani includes among his text several such illustrations of his experimental practice (figure 1.1). While Thelwall’s image focuses on the gathering of that power into a single agent, however, the collected charge of public opinion appears to lose none of its potency by being so absorbed – indeed, Thelwall indicates that the probable effect of this activity is to bring the “fierce throng” one step closer to erupting into violent conflict. The “hermetic hand” in Thelwall’s text thus obviously belongs to the figure who can receive and either contain or redistribute the collected charge of public opinion.

As an openly topical reflection on the embattled hero’s engagement in a time of war, *The Hope of Albion* is a work that draws explicitly on a



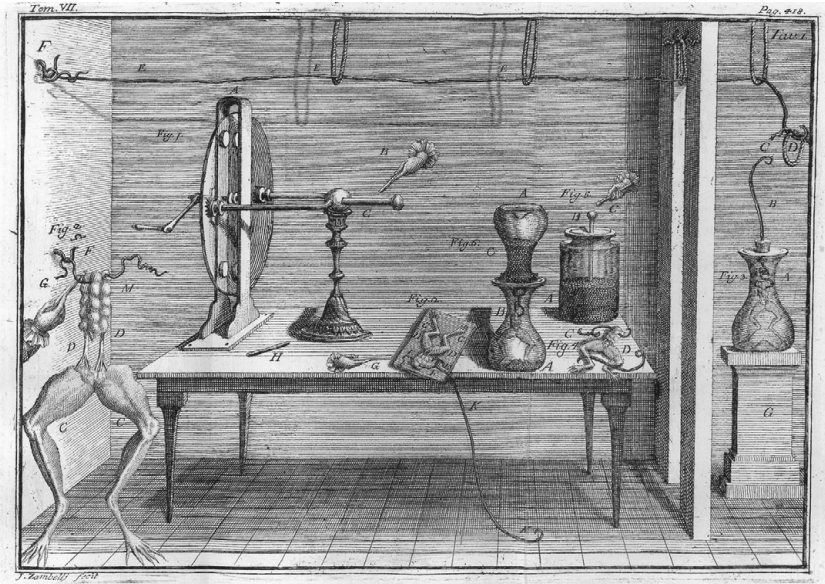


Figure 1.1 Luigi Galvani, *Commentary on the Effects of Electricity on Muscular Motion* (1791), plate 1.

radical vocabulary put into service in the British response to the Revolution. Thelwall's epic fragment is in this respect a far cry from a lyric such as "Tintern Abbey," in which the speaker's meditation is offered without explicit reference to this revolutionary context. Despite obvious differences, however, both Wordsworth's lyric and Thelwall's epic locate a significant social role in the individual's mediation of powerful sense-experience; more purposefully than in "Tintern Abbey," Thelwall's poem speaks as well to the ambivalent political status of suggestion in this period as representing either a cessation of radical sentiment or its continuation by other, more furtive means. Surely it is no more than a coincidence that in describing the hand as "hermetic" – literally impervious to external influence – Thelwall adopts the term most often used in our own time to describe the literary author's recondite detachment from socio-historical reality. Nor would I want to go so far as to claim that Thelwall offers a figure for literary and especially lyric production as a political force, though indeed we have good reason to look skeptically upon the degree of political "retirement" advertised in the title of the 1801 *Poems*. What is clear is that Thelwall describes a kind of political engagement characterized both by the communication or transmission of

public sentiment, and by an internalization of this social energy by the solitary individual. Sketching a vital if politically ambivalent use for the inward turn, Thelwall gestures towards a new understanding of the writer's role as a herald of social change.

“UNCOMMUNICATED LIGHTNING”: SENSATION,  
AUTONOMY, AND AESTHETIC FORM

Thelwall's depiction of incendiary political sentiment as a vivifying electrical force will call readily to mind those two most famous children of 1790s radical culture, Percy and Mary Shelley. The notion of writing as a medium of electrical stimulation is an idea most closely associated, of course, with Percy Shelley, who often compares the animating spirit of poetry to the workings of electricity. In the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, for instance, Shelley describes the spirit of poetic genius as the “uncommunicated lightning” of the poet's mind (SPP, 207); likewise, in a sentence from *A Philosophical View of Reform* (subsequently incorporated into the famous final paragraph of the *Defence of Poetry*), he writes of “the electric life” that burns within the words of the greatest living poets (SPP, 535). Like Keats's “To My Brother George”, which similarly associates the poet's perceptual powers with the action and effects of electricity, Shelley identifies in the potency of poetic language, and in the speed of its dissemination, a powerful stimulus to the cause of political reform.

That poetic form could itself be construed as a medium of “electric life” is made explicit in an early poem of Shelley's, the “Sonnet, To a balloon, laden with *Knowledge*” from the Esdaile Notebook of 1811–13. Shelley's poem is addressed to a “[b]right ball of flame” that moves through the heavens, and whose light, though soon extinguished, is propagated by an indomitable spirit that will, as the poet vows, soon reveal the conditions for transforming the world (SPP, 6). The “balloon” of Shelley's sonnet is a figure for the poem as an agent of enlightenment in a strikingly literal sense, at once taking its impetus from the “unquencheable” fires that urge reform – “A watch light by the patriot's lonely tomb” – and condensing these within itself to bear the promise of political renovation (SPP, 6). In a rhetorical figure that Shelley will employ to greater effect in later poems such as the “Ode to the West Wind,” the poetic object is troped as a vehicle for bearing such portents of change to the wider public.<sup>86</sup> Though “To a Balloon” obviously suggests the ballooning craze of the late eighteenth century and a mode of aerial

dissemination for the poem itself – its light that of a surrogate sun which will illuminate the darkness visible of the contemporary political situation – the “balloon” could also refer in this period to the glass sphere of the scientific apparatus that was used to generate an electrical charge. As in Barbauld’s poem on Priestley, then, Shelley’s poem trades on a popular conception of both radical writing and natural philosophy as threats to the established political order. Offering, in the spirit of these earlier works, an analogy between the material instantiation of the poem and its animating spirit, Shelley’s *envoi* explores the political work that is potentially achieved when the energies of the public mind are “penned” in literary form.

If Shelley’s poem maintains the status of art as a herald of social transformation, however, it also frankly acknowledges the failure to achieve these political ends solely through the agency of the aesthetic object, which, on the poet’s own admission, “soon shalt . . . / Fade like a meteor in surrounding gloom” (SPP, 6). While on the one hand Shelley’s poem sounds a battle-cry for political reform equal in its directness and intensity to his contemporaneous literary production *Queen Mab*, the sonnet is presented on the other hand as an intransigently aesthetic artifact, a “little song” (as suggested by its etymology) with little if any claim to effect social change. Shelley thus presents the poem as a self-consuming artifact, at once a transient object of sublime futility and – in the resistance that it presents to the actually-existing political order – an augury of profound social renewal.<sup>87</sup>

This paradoxical conception of the aesthetic and its capacity for meaningful political engagement is a central feature of Arthur Henry Hallam’s well-known account of a poetry of sensation in his 1831 review-essay of Tennyson’s *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830). Hallam’s essay “On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry” had a significant role in defining a literary tradition to which Keats, Shelley, and Hallam’s friend Tennyson would be recognized as major contributors; as a later generation recognized, his was among the first to locate the Romantic poets of sensation within a genealogy traceable not only to Tennyson, but also to Pater, the aestheticists, and the *l’art pour l’art* movement of early modernism.<sup>88</sup> Like Babbitt, Hallam conceives a richness of “suggestion” and an inherent difficulty as vital characteristics of this modern poetry; indeed, Hallam notes with approval how the poetry of sensation presents a “host of suggestions” for the reader to unravel.<sup>89</sup> Yet Hallam’s positive appraisal of this poetry is balanced against his pessimistic assessment of its potential to enjoy any real social influence in the world. As poets such as Keats,

Shelley and Tennyson divorce their art from the pragmatic and communicative functions of language, Hallam argues, they are increasingly led to seek refuge in the expressive, more private sphere of “sensation.” In turning away from a compromised ideal of public rationality and communal purpose, art surrenders its strongest claim to social utility; as Hallam epigrammatically observes, “modern poetry, in proportion to its depth and truth, is likely to have little immediate authority over public opinion.”<sup>90</sup> With its separation from mere rhetoric, Hallam asserts, poetry gains in critical authority what it loses in actual influence; consequently, the poetry of sensation marks both the birth of “pure” art and the end of literature as a socially effective force.

If Hallam’s literary history thus implicitly supplied the terms for a modern critique of Romantic aesthetics, however, his argument just as clearly complicates a characterization of Romanticism as the founding moment in a genealogy that ends with the cult of the autonomous artwork. To begin with, Hallam does not claim that the poetry of sensation was any less politically engaged than the work of their peers; on the contrary, his intention is simply to demonstrate that in divorcing poetry from its origin in and dependence upon public opinion, these poets enjoy less popular appeal. More significantly, Hallam insists that in asserting its autonomy from the sphere of public opinion art assumes at least a partially oppositional relationship to society, and thus becomes political in its very structure.<sup>91</sup> For Hallam, that is to say, no less than for Lukács in the following century, modern poetry is “suggestion with the help of form”; the historical conditions of its production “cannot diminish the effect of something which has been written with real suggestive power,” though “it can – and always does – modify it.”<sup>92</sup> This “aesthetic” strain of poetry represents a dialectical counterpart to the self-conscious political avant-gardism also prominent in the poetry of the second-generation Romantics. Far from representing fully discrete alternatives, however, both aesthetic modalities are evident in the work of a single poet such as Shelley – evident, indeed, in single works of this author – and both are legacies of a suggestive aesthetic ideal.

The notion of art and the aesthetic as vitally political notwithstanding their seeming rejection of the social receives a significant modern formulation in Theodor Adorno’s claim, in the posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory* and throughout his work, that the artwork at once negates, immanently expresses, and dynamically transforms the categories imposed on it by the empirical world. Of central importance in Adorno’s account

is the capacity of the aesthetic, in providing an experiential basis for the critique of reason, to exceed and extend its bounds, whereby art reveals conditions for constituting new models of social and political arrangement. Hallam's characterization of "the spirit of modern poetry" – "the return of the mind upon itself, and the habit of seeking relief in idiosyncrasies rather than community of interest" – is thus described by Adorno as involving a dialectic of subject and object that places the radical subjectivism of the poet in a dynamic relationship to the informing social contexts from which the poet ostensibly turns away.<sup>93</sup> If Adorno insists that "[a]ll aesthetic categories must be defined both in terms of their relation to the world and in terms of art's repudiation of that world," this critical necessity would seem to derive from the double-sidedness of art, which bears within itself the empirical determinations of a world that it would otherwise appear to reject. Shelley's dialectical account of poetry as shaped by the very forces it would transform finds its modern equivalent in Adorno's insistence that "[t]here is nothing in art, not even in the most sublime, that does not derive from the world, nothing that remains untransformed."<sup>94</sup>

The poetry of Shelley and Keats has been read in several recent works of scholarship as espousing aesthetic principles consonant in crucial particulars with Adorno's, and these claims have on occasion been presented in explicit contrast to the first-generation Romanticism of Wordsworth and Coleridge.<sup>95</sup> It is indeed only with the second generation of Romantic authors that "suggestion" appears explicitly as a category of historical as well as of aesthetic experience, and becomes central on this basis to the articulation of a critical aesthetic practice. Though having read no more than stray passages of Wordsworth's autobiographical poem, for instance, Shelley offers an explicitly historicized account of Wordsworth's conception of the poetic imagination in an oft-cited sentence from the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*: "Poets," he writes, "not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors and musicians, are in one sense the creators and in another the creations of their age" (SPP, 208). Shelley's sentence, which translates into openly political terms Wordsworth's model of the half-creating, half-perceiving mind, has been read as expressing the very essence of Romantic historicism, most saliently characterized here by an understanding of the mutually constitutive relationship of historical context and psyche or cultural form. What is often overlooked in recitations of this sentence, though, is how explicitly Shelley's historicist sentiment is, like Wordsworth's earlier portrait of the poetic imagination, offered

up within the context of an account of mental suggestion. As Shelley's sentence is often quoted in isolation, let us consider the sentences leading up to the poet's famed pronouncement:

A Poet, is the combined product of such internal powers as modify the nature of others, and of such external influences as excite and sustain these powers; he is not one, but both. Every man's mind is in this respect modified by all the objects of nature and art, by every word and every suggestion which he ever admitted to act upon his consciousness; it is the mirror upon which all forms are reflected, and in which they compose one form. (SPP, 280)

The principle that Wordsworth describes as the half-creating, half-perceiving character of poetic perception, and that Thelwall depicts as the revolutionary cooperation between the public mind and the "hermetic hand," emerges in Shelley's Preface as a figure for historical understanding. It is therefore no accident that in the following year Shelley describes his "lyrical drama" *Hellas* as having been "written at the suggestion of the events of the moment" – namely the violent struggle of the Greeks for their independence from Turkish rule (SPP, 430). In so drawing on this psychological vocabulary, Shelley refers to the process by which the events of world history suggest themselves to the poet's consciousness and are recomposed in lyric form. This is the capacity that Shelley will later identify as the "power of communicating and receiving impassioned conceptions respecting man and nature," and to which he will assign a pivotal role in the process of awakening "a great people" to the cause of social reform (*Defence of Poetry*, SPP, 535).

Within a subsequent tradition of nineteenth-century literary aesthetics, in fact, the critical or even utopian character of aesthetic form is often explicitly identified as a function of its suggestiveness. Such an understanding appears centrally, for instance, in William Hazlitt's essay "On Poetry in General," which associates the suggestiveness of poetry with the essentially transformative capacity of the aesthetic imagination; and, later still, in Oscar Wilde's great manifesto of late nineteenth-century aestheticism, "The Critic as Artist," where Wilde's spokesman Gilbert underscores the utopian premise of suggestiveness in declaring his preference for "works that possess the subtle quality of suggestion, and seem to tell one that even from them there is an escape into a wider world."<sup>96</sup> Wilde's understanding of the essential amorality of art – its resistance to the sphere of production – and of the uniquely suggestive character of the poetic mind is refracted not only through Milton's conception of suggestion as a kind of demonic artifice, but reflects as well a more modern,

fundamentally Romantic conception of suggestion as a constructive perceptual exercise. As testimonies to the oppositional character of aesthetic form, these accounts further reveal an explicitly political context for such apparently apolitical reflections upon the sensibility of the poet or on the capacity of the poetic mind, through the medium of suggestion, “to work and to be wrought upon.” It is with a belief that the examination of these motifs may take us considerably farther in understanding the historicity and the conflicted political orientation of Romantic poetry that I have attempted to locate in Romanticism’s language of suggestion the conditions of possibility for a historically self-reflexive encounter with that work today.



## CHAPTER 2

### *The “sense of history” and the history of the senses: periodizing perception in Wordsworth and Blake*

No doubt, on the level of appearances, modernity begins when the human being begins to exist within his organism, inside the shell of his head . . . and in the whole structure of his physiology.

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

States that are not, but ah! Seem to be

William Blake, *Milton*

Few genres of historical research have been quite so productive these days as that genre known as affective history, and the sub-genre that often goes by the name of the history of the senses.<sup>1</sup> The remarks of a historian who has accomplished more than many in this territory, Alain Corbin, offer a typical assessment of the genre at the present time. Readers of Corbin’s work, particularly his history of smell in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France, could not have been surprised when the historian dedicated himself to a prolegomena towards – as his title indicates – “a history and anthropology of the senses.” What is surprising from a historian whose work has made significant inroads into the practical realization of such a project is the ambivalence that Corbin bears towards it. In his article, Corbin explains how revisiting a task proposed some 50 years ago by the *Annales* co-founder Lucien Febvre remains “a project – or rather a gamble – which is risky but fascinating.”<sup>2</sup> That such a project remains fascinating seems plain from the sheer number of projects to have appeared in the last two decades – a body of work of which Corbin’s survey of recent histories of the senses does no more than scratch the surface. Why and to what extent this task is risky, however, we learn from Corbin’s own survey of the numerous pitfalls involved in the most fundamental approach to a history of the senses. His essay enumerates numerous problems with such a project: the transience of the evidence, the risk of mistaking stated for actual sensibilities, and the sheer impossibility



of ever reconstructing the sensations of the past with any accuracy on the basis of verbal or visual evidence alone.

Far from having seen a waning of interest as a result of these interrogations, however, the “history of sensibilities” (as Febvre named it more than a half century ago) seems rather more vital than ever.<sup>3</sup> Corbin’s own work on the history of the senses is joined by a considerable body of work to emerge in the last two decades, including fine studies by Jean Starobinski, Barbara Stafford, and Jonathan Crary, among many others.<sup>4</sup> This scholarship has been marked by an impressive diversity of interpretive framework (neo-Marxist, phenomenological, liberal-humanist, Foucauldian, feminist), disciplinary provenance (history, anthropology, art history, and literary studies), and historical object of analysis (literary and political discourse, the visual arts, optical, acoustical, and industrial technologies); consequently, perhaps only one general characteristic can be drawn from the history of the senses as a whole, so obvious as to escape much critical attention. It would, I think, be hard to deny that the overwhelming tendency of such work has been to explain transformations of literary or historical sensibilities by examination of the historical object or objects in question. In many recent instances of perceptual history, historical object X – be it a poem, a painting, a stereoscope, or a spinning-jenny – is seen as illustrative of Y transformations in the organization or exercise of the senses. At the most general level, then, the history of the senses is characterized by its investment in accounting for how modes of perception change over time, and thus are subject to historical periodization in the first place.

In its foundational premise – a tacit assumption, really – that structures of perception undergo transformations over time, it is not difficult to see how much the contemporary history of the senses owes to the work of Michel Foucault, even in cases (such as Corbin’s) in which the principal debt lies elsewhere. More than that of any other modern historian, Foucault’s work has served as the catalyst for rigorous inquiry into the history of the body and of the regime of the senses in particular. Many of Foucault’s works, especially those concerning the various disciplines of human-scientific knowledge, narrate the epistemic, discursive, and institutional conditions of perception – his “archaeology of medical perception,” as *The Birth of the Clinic* is subtitled, seems only one such example of Foucault’s investment in producing an account, both within and across the rationalities of specific disciplines, of how we have come to perceive and know in the way we do.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps even more enabling to this genre of historical research is Foucault’s argument – repeated throughout his work

but most memorably in *The Order of Things* – that the formation of the category of “Man” is the most salient feature of an emergent Western modernity. Foucault’s account of the mutation from a taxonomic to a developmental *episteme* in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is directly related to his larger argument that the category of the human remains intelligible only under the paradigm of development over time.<sup>6</sup> His claim that “modernity begins when the human being begins to exist within his organism” and “in the whole structure of his physiology” has therefore drawn attention to this emergence as key to any account of perceptual change. If the contours of Foucault’s argument have found general favor among historians of the senses, moreover, his dating of this *coupure épistémologique* has proven equally influential; citing Foucault’s work as an important influence, many recent histories of perception date cataclysmic changes in the sensorium to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the period in which the disciplines of human-scientific knowledge, and “Man” as both a subject and an object of that knowledge, assume their modern form.<sup>7</sup>

Beyond lending a sense of urgency and salience to the project of a history of perception, however, Foucault’s claim that modern history begins with the human being’s emergence as a physiological entity might just as significantly be understood to problematize that project in ways so far barely acknowledged by literary and cultural historians. For while the first and most fundamental assumption of a history of senses is that perception is historically mutable, and thus subject to periodization, Foucault’s central claim is rather that the very category of “Man” would be unintelligible were not such an understanding already in place. For the human sciences themselves to have emerged, that is, the *episteme* or conditions that make such knowledge possible must already have taken shape around the concept of development over time. One sees how this epistemic circularity raises a chicken-and-egg question that, I will argue, might make us reconsider the basis upon which a history of the senses for this period could be practiced. Though it is now more or less a commonplace of historical scholarship to say that the senses have a history, what have we to learn about the *historicity* of perception? If we can say, for instance, that historical periods have modes of perception attributable to them, in what sense can we also say that models of perception bear the imprint of a periodizing cultural logic? What are the modes in which such an understanding could be represented? And how was this inquiry pursued in the period we deem so important to our own histories of perception?<sup>8</sup>

This chapter attempts to trace an emerging historical understanding of the body and its organs of sense in early Romantic literary culture. Taking as my point of departure Foucault's insistence that the history of modernity begins with a conception of the human being as a mutable physiological entity, I want to ask in what ways the poets of this period registered that coeval emergence. How and to what effect did Romantic poets imagine the mind and world "fitted" to one another, to invoke Wordsworth's celebrated "Prospectus" to *The Recluse*, and how, to invoke Blake's strong rejection of that doctrine, do they, and do we, resist such "fitting and fitted"?<sup>9</sup> It is hardly a surprise to note how often the literature of the Romantic period is identified with the origins of a modern cultural sensibility; when Don Gifford, for instance, chooses the *annus mirabilis* of 1798 as the opening year of his "natural history of perception," he indicates how fully the literary experiments of the *Lyrical Ballads* are identified with this historical and cultural emergence.<sup>10</sup> While focusing on this seminal moment in the history of the senses, however, I will suggest that early Romantic poetry does not so much reflect as actively produce a history of perception, thereby complicating our own efforts to do the same. Romantic narratives of the body, and particularly of the formation and cultivation of the poetic sensibility, work between and across the borders of two complementary fields of inquiry that Foucault regards as jointly central to the project of the emergent human sciences: one, a "transcendental aesthetic" attentive to the physiological conditions of knowledge; the other, a "transcendental dialectic" concerned with knowledge's "historical, social, or economic conditions."<sup>11</sup> Because Foucault sees these analytics as remaining separate throughout the early history of the human sciences, his work on the disciplines of scientific knowledge does not for the most part ask whether the discourse-object of these sciences, the physiological entity "Man," might be conscious of its own historicity – an omission perhaps derived from his controversial early assumption that those who inhabit a given *episteme* remain ignorant of the conditions of their own knowledge. In productions as diverse as Wordsworth's attempt to narrate the history of infantile perception and in Blake's histories of the formation of the finite body, however, Romantic poets suspend a distinction between these two major strains of human-scientific discourse – one subjectivist and phenomenological, the other collectivist and historical – that Foucault describes as remaining separate throughout the moment of "Man's" emergence. In mediating these two analytics, Romantic authors produce a conception of poetry as, precisely, an aestheticized medium of historical representation – a "history or

science of feelings,” as Wordsworth puts it in his note to “The Thorn.” The Romantic period therefore represents more than a critical moment in the history of the senses (though it is certainly that), but marks a watershed in the concept of their historicity as well. The present chapter will accordingly attend to an emergent language of perception whose foundational premise, like that of our own sensorial histories, is that of the historical character of perception itself.

Over the course of the last decade, literary and cultural historians have demonstrated the considerable influence of Scottish enlightenment thought on Romantic and subsequent conceptions of social and political development and on its conception of a national culture.<sup>12</sup> Seeking at once to build on this scholarship and to demonstrate an equally compelling way in which the literature of the Scottish enlightenment informs the work of British Romanticism, the present chapter reveals a close relationship between, to use Foucault’s terms, eighteenth-century Scotland’s “dialectical” science of conjectural history and its “aesthetic” sciences of the human body. Reading Wordsworth’s “history of a Poet’s mind” in relation to the work of a prominent late eighteenth-century medical theorist, the Scottish physician William Cullen, I will examine how some central lines of scientific investigation in late eighteenth-century physiology and psychological aesthetics are taken up in an early Romantic literary practice that we can call “perceptual periodization,” a practice characterized, I will suggest, by an understanding of “feeling” as both subject to historical change and as a central element of historical narrative (P, 13.408). Through its engagement in these jointly physiological and historiographical investigations, Romantic poetry offers a vitally aesthetic basis for representing the historical situation or “case” of the present, as James Chandler has characterized the practice of Romantic historicism.<sup>13</sup> By embodying the historical situation as both a subject of physical experience and an object of psycho-physiological inquiry – a “case” in a more than accidentally medical sense – both Wordsworth and Blake locate a privileged role for poetry as a medium well suited to narrate the history of human sensibility.

#### HISTORIES OF PERCEPTION, PAST AND PRESENT

I have already noted that Corbin affiliates his own history of the senses with the foundational work of Lucien Febvre, particularly with that historian’s influential call in the 1930s and 1940s for a historical account attentive to the transformations of sensibilities over time. Indeed, Corbin’s

historiographical essay can be read as a critique and eventual reaffirmation of what he calls the *Annales* historian’s “positivist” project of a history of the senses: a project designed, as he writes, “to trace the evolution of the sensory environment; or, to put it another way, to draw up an inventory of the sensations which were present at a given moment in each social milieu.”<sup>14</sup> The context for Corbin’s description of this project becomes more clear when we realize that, consciously or not, he is repeating the program recommended by Febvre, who in his essay “History and Psychology” called for “a detailed inventory of the mental equipment of the men of the time” in order to “reconstitute the whole physical, intellectual and moral universe of each preceding generation.”<sup>15</sup> As obvious as it is that Corbin seeks to distance himself from the more openly “positivist” dimensions of Febvre’s program, it is equally clear that he does, *mutatis mutandis*, want to make good on its “fascinating” possibilities, and hence retains deep sympathies with the work of *Annales* history.

Of course, Corbin’s is not the only conceivable lineage for the project of a history of the senses, nor even one that contemporary histories of perception tend most often to acknowledge. In the French context, for instance, Jean-Paul Sartre provides one powerful model for conceptualizing the individual’s lived experience of history – one to which, in quarrels with Sartre, Foucault contrasts the work of the *Annales* historians.<sup>16</sup> In a German tradition of materialist scholarship, one can trace an alternative genealogy for the history of the senses from the work of authors including Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin,<sup>17</sup> or – to name two later, contemporaneous developments in Anglo-American criticism – from Raymond Williams’s account of historical “structures of feeling” or Frederick Pottle’s efforts to trace the mutations of “historic sensibilities” in literature.<sup>18</sup> When Theodor Adorno speculates that the history of modernity might be narrated from the perspective of a history of “sensation” in the development of that term from Locke to Baudelaire and beyond, his remarks owe an obvious debt to Benjamin, whom he credits as the first to tackle the sort of project he describes.<sup>19</sup> Yet Adorno’s program for narrating the history of perception might just as well be considered in relation to the work of thinkers such as Sartre and (later) Williams, both of whom also found in the mutable character of the sensorium a unique basis for reconstructing the history of Western modernity.

As indicated by Adorno’s prospectus for a history of sensation, these various projects in tracing transformations of the senses over time have their ultimate foundation in an empiricist tradition that takes shape in late seventeenth-century British philosophy. That sensations could be

characterized as “historical” in the broad sense, after all, was the leading premise of Locke’s *Essay*, which in proposing to analyze the mind by means of the “historical, plain method” signaled a departure from Cartesian metaphysics.<sup>20</sup> As the principal inroad to knowledge, sensation was understood to be the first and most important building-block in the history of human understanding; this view was amply confirmed, for instance, in a number of prominent French-language contributions to the sensationalist psychology of the eighteenth century, including Étienne Bonnot de Condillac’s *Treatise on the Sensations*, Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Émile*, and Claude-Adrien Helvétius’s *Treatise on Man*. In the terms of Foucault’s epistemic history, these works are genetic but not historical, and therefore could not, properly speaking, be considered histories of perception in the sense in which Corbin defines that form of historical investigation.<sup>21</sup> To trace the remote ancestry of Febvre’s project, however, we could do worse than to situate Febvre’s “positivist task” within the context of what Keith Baker has called the “pre-positivist” sciences of the enlightenment.<sup>22</sup>

If one will allow that the sensationalist psychology of the eighteenth century established the basic conditions for Febvre’s “positivist task,” one will have little trouble also recognizing Wordsworth as one of England’s most formidable critics of this endeavor. In at least one passage from his “history of a Poet’s mind,” Wordsworth explicitly raises the question of how to trace the history of human sensibility. I refer to a well-known passage from Book 2 of *The Prelude*, in which Wordsworth discusses at some length the sensationalist paradigm against which he defines his own psychological method. The rhetorical questions that he poses here fall in an important moment of transition in which the speaker at once distinguishes between phases of his mental development and criticizes the impulse to make such distinctions:

. . . who shall parcel out  
 His intellect by geometric rules,  
 Split like a province into round and square?  
 Who knows the individual hour in which  
 His habits were first sown as a seed,  
 Who that shall point, as with a wand, and say,  
 ‘This portion of the river of my mind  
 Came from yon fountain?’

(P, 2.208–215)

Wordsworth’s scornful account, here and in lines following, of those who would “class the cabinet / Of their sensations” is directed primarily against the “pre-positivist” philosophers of the enlightenment and their

taxonomical ordering of sensations in time (P, 2.228–9). Just as pointedly, Wordsworth criticizes the bloodless abstractions that would make such taxonomies possible. In the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, a text heavily indebted to Helvétius and the *philosophes*, Godwin defined the rudimentary mechanisms of abstraction in a passage of the sort that surely inspired Wordsworth's response in lines above: "Comparison immediately leads to imperfect abstraction. The sensation of today is classed, if similar, with the sensation of yesterday, and an inference is made respecting the conduct to be adopted."<sup>23</sup> In Wordsworth's assault upon an impoverished rationalist philosophy, the "geometric rules" of the Cartesian analytic and the genetic project of sensationalist psychology are conflated and exposed to the same complaint. Assaulting both the taxonomical method of ordering sensations and the understanding of mental abstraction on which this system is founded, the poet distinguishes his own history from that of a hypothetical being, such as Condillac's statue-man or Rousseau's imaginary pupil, whose mental, emotional, and moral progress may be charted in an orderly but highly artificial series of discrete stages. Wordsworth's rejection, then, of this "pre-positivist" endeavor – which anticipates by some two centuries the terms of Corbin's critique – is based on his understanding of both the reductiveness and the fictionalizing that is involved in that task.

As decisively as Wordsworth appears to reject the sensationalist psychology of the late eighteenth century, however, a further look at Book 2 reveals how far the poet equivocates over what method to install in its place. Indeed, in a striking move, the poet repudiates a sensationalist epistemology only to appear to subscribe to many of its protocols. We'll recall that Wordsworth's principal objection to classing the cabinet of sensations is that "each most obvious and particular thought," far from being traceable to one coherent source, "hath no beginning" (P, 2.233–36). At moments such as these, Wordsworth's epistemology seems designed precisely to resist the so-called "analytic of finitude" which, in Foucault's argument, made possible the very category of "Man" in the first place. So much, indeed, we might expect from the poet who would make his home with infinitude and only there. Yet how then do we explain the famous passage immediately following – I mean that of the "infant babe" who, by "intercourse of touch" with its mother, receives the urgings of imaginative strength that the poet associates with the "first / Poetic spirit of human life" (P, 2.237–303)? Why would Wordsworth ridicule the possibility of periodizing perception even when, by his own admission, he would attempt that very task? What has Wordsworth denying the existence of

perceptual origins that his “history of a Poet’s mind” would itself seek, and even claim to find?

SENSATION, SELF, AND WORLD: WORDSWORTH’S  
“INFANT BABE”

By way of approach to these questions, let us review Wordsworth’s celebrated account of the infant babe. In that passage, Wordsworth records how, “day by day / Subjected to the discipline of love, / His organs and recipient faculties / Are quickened,” and the “infant sensibility” is given a nurturing environment in which to develop (P, 2.250–3; 285). As the poet declares, this first prolonged period of sensuous “intercourse” establishes a crucial ground from which higher thoughts will grow:

In that most apprehensive habitude  
And those sensations which have been derived  
From this beloved presence – there exists  
A virtue which irradiates and exalts  
All objects through all intercourse of sense. (P, 2.256–60)

Readers have often observed in this passage an expression of the faith, characteristic of the poet’s modified associationism, that experiences of powerful sensation can guide the poetic mind to truths unavailable to sensuous apprehension. Wordsworth’s passage from the two-part *Prelude* of 1799 has on this basis been compared to similar lines from “Tintern Abbey,” in which the speaker claims, in having overcome his previous dependence on the senses, to “see into the life of things” (LB, 50).<sup>24</sup> Such “seeing into” is also, as Blake attests, a seeing “*Thro* the Eye”: a substitution of vision for the visionary, and an exercise of bodily sense that leads at least in part beyond the senses themselves.<sup>25</sup> As the articulation of an epistemological program defined explicitly against the current of sensationist psychology, such statements have been read as uniquely characteristic of Wordsworth’s philosophy of the senses, and especially of the associationist poetics of the poet’s great decade.

I will return shortly to the premise of sensory development “through” the senses. To begin, though, I want to note how pointedly Wordsworth’s passage on the infant babe returns to and repeats the enlightenment program that the poet had so forcefully criticized in Book 2. We may observe, for instance, that Wordsworth’s critique of the presumption to specify “the individual hour in which / His habits were first sown” is closely followed by the poet’s declaration that the infant’s close physical



contact with its mother fosters, "in the *first* trial of its powers," "the *first* / Poetic spirit of our human life" (P, 2.246, 275–6; my emphasis). Even within his critique of enlightenment method, moreover, Wordsworth openly calls to his aid perhaps the signature cognitive disposition of the enlightenment, namely rational skepticism. When Wordsworth confidently appeals to Coleridge to "doubt with me" (a transitive verb significantly deprived of its object), or claims to speak "in the words of reason deeply weighed" (P, 2.227, 2.235), it is clear that he is self-consciously applying the tools of enlightenment thought against the *philosophes* themselves. While disavowing the capacity to know with certainty the origins of this or that sentiment, idea, or conviction, the poet thereby claims for his own narrative a similar authority. (Wordsworth would appear to acknowledge the paradox of this position when, in a parenthetical aside, he implicitly renounces any claim to absolute certainty, declaring instead his intention to trace "with my best conjectures . . . [t]he progress of our being" [P, 2.238–9].)

In light of the poet's simultaneous criticism and reappropriation of sensationalist psychology, we might ask what in fact distinguishes Wordsworth's understanding of mental development from the Frenchified method that he derides. Wordsworth's understanding of habit as the ultimate ground of moral feeling has been described as deriving most significantly from Humean, and more specifically Burkean, reflections on how custom affects the way we feel, think, and behave as moral agents, that is in Burke's terms as living bearers of the traditionary relations of the past.<sup>26</sup> As the illustration of this principle, Wordsworth's account of the infant babe represents both a continuation of and a practical companion to the methodological critique that immediately precedes it. The poet's evident purpose in providing this account following his critique of sensationalist psychology is to supplant the abstract system of French thought with an account more richly sensitive to the influences of habit and feeling. Wordsworth's praise for the "apprehensive habitude" of childhood thus recalls, in a densely psychologized vein, Burke's more openly political appeal to the "feelings and habitudes, which are the support of the moral world."<sup>27</sup> Contrasting these principles to the abstract and artificial methods of French sensationalist psychology, Wordsworth at once enacts and nationalizes a shift in representations of the self that one historian has described as a late eighteenth-century transformation "from *homme machine* to *homme sensible*."<sup>28</sup>

Through its references to French experiments in narrating the history of the self, and to a Burkean traditionalism meant to offer a corrective to

these endeavors, Wordsworth's passage looks implicitly backward to a period of the poet's life (and forward to a later, as yet unwritten chapter in his autobiography) in which abstract reason *did* temporarily gain an ascendancy over the steadying influence of habit founded in deep and powerful feeling. Marking a transition from a corrupt French psychology to a sturdily English philosophy built on the bedrock of habit, Book 2 anticipates the poet's experience of deepest estrangement from his feelings in the French books of *The Prelude* and in the subsequent narrative of how the young poet's imagination was "impaired and restored." By preceding his account of the infant babe with a critique of abstract rational analysis, Wordsworth suggests that these are habits of analysis which in some ways threaten the infant – "No outcast he, bewildered and depressed" (2.261) – as indeed they will return to threaten the youth who later falls under the sway of "the Philosophy / That promised to abstract the hopes of man / Out of his feelings" (P, 10.806–8). Wordsworth thus describes the threat of this lapse as present even at the very origins of the "infant sensibility."<sup>29</sup>

To read Wordsworth's account of the infant babe as both a rejoinder and a more complicated return to a degraded French rationalism is obviously to complicate a familiar understanding of this passage as a portrait of an unsullied natural state prior to the subject's fall into history.<sup>30</sup> In Book 1, Wordsworth describes the infant's sensuous interaction with its mother as chief among those "first-born affinities that fit / Our new existence to existing things" (P, 1.582–3). While suggesting Wordsworth's better-known claim to have perceived a harmonious "fit" between "the individual Mind" and "the external World," this episode of *The Prelude* rather foregrounds the status of the self as having its origins in history, shaped by a past that cannot, in conventional terms, be considered part of its own experience. Wordsworth's history of the infant babe has in this respect a strong resemblance to an early passage in Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*. Reviewing the various contexts of her autobiography, Hays's protagonist concludes that the history of the self must account for more than simply the sensations and ideas of that particular individual: for "in many cases," she writes, "it may be in all, a foundation is laid for the operation of our minds, years, nay ages – previous to our birth."<sup>31</sup> By narrating the origins of the "infant sensibility" against the specter of its desecration, Wordsworth demonstrates in terms similar to Hays how, in the poet's punning phrase, our "existence" derives from and accommodates itself within an "existing" context that precedes and shapes it.<sup>32</sup> While on the one hand Wordsworth intimates that the "intercourse of

sense" between mother and child precedes and shapes the bond "that connect[s] him with the world" (P, 2.260–4), the manner in which the passage both engages with an earlier paradigm for narrating the history of the self and locates both models of early childhood development in relation to the violent history of the French Revolution suggests that the directionality from self to world is just as fully reversible. Far from describing a moment prior to the individual's fall into history, in other words, Wordsworth's narrative of the infant babe reflects an understanding of the self as historical from its inception.

PERCEPTION, REPETITION, PERIODIZATION: CONJECTURAL  
PHYSIOLOGY AND THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF FEELING

In his critique of an enlightenment psychology that would inhibit such recourse to the saving virtues of habit and feeling, Wordsworth declares himself to be profoundly skeptical of the "false secondary power" of scientific reason (P, 2.221). It might be more accurate, however, to say that the poet's critique of one scientific paradigm is a position articulated from the standpoint of another. Wordsworth's inquiry into the task of determining the periods of human perception is an investigation carried out against the background of a comprehensive late eighteenth-century effort to determine the mutability of the body and its organs of sense. More particularly, Wordsworth's reflections on how habit shapes (and mis-shapes) our feelings have significant points of overlap with the forms of theoretical physiology being undertaken within the late eighteenth-century Scottish medical establishment.<sup>33</sup> The northerner Wordsworth came of age in a period in which the University of Edinburgh was far and away the most prestigious center of medical education in Great Britain, a position that this institution enjoyed well into the nineteenth century. Authors trained in the medical schools of Edinburgh and Glasgow frequently engaged in a similar kind of speculative historical practice as was being carried out in other branches of the Scottish universities at this time. In popular medical treatises such as George Cheyne's *The English Malady* (1733), the genres of sociological observation and clinical case history were hybridized in a type of scientific writing that examined the transformations of the body and of specific diseases throughout the course of human history, paying closest attention – as did Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith, John Millar, and others – to those "diseases of civilization" that arose with the progress of political, economic, and military development.<sup>34</sup> In a medical tome entitled *Observations on the Prevailing Diseases*

in *Great Britain*, first published in 1770 and republished in 1798 to address the situation of the war against France, the Edinburgh-trained physician John Millar (of no known relation to the John Millar who wrote *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*) proposed as his considerable task “to describe the reigning popular diseases in Great Britain” and “to compare these of the present times with the accounts that have been transmitted to us by practical writers in former periods, and in other countries.”<sup>35</sup> As a complement to the work of contemporary conjectural history, Millar’s book represented part of a larger endeavor at once to compare distinct ages or states of society and to determine the characteristics that make the current age distinct.

Wordsworth’s indebtedness to Scottish medical writing is not primarily evident in the explicitly sociological dimension of that work, however, but in the way in which its investigation into the nature of human sense-perception provides a model for the formal arrangement of the poet’s reflections on those very subjects.<sup>36</sup> Wordsworth’s understanding of the habitual basis of feeling thus bears a closer resemblance to contemporary writing in physiology and the science of mind in which sensations were associated with the deduction of temporal states of the mind or body. David Hume’s account of perception as an intrinsically temporal phenomenon – the source for the very notion of temporality, as Locke had argued – informed a number of efforts in the medical literature of this period to define the work of sensation as the marking of time.<sup>37</sup> As the late eighteenth-century medical student would have learned in lectures at Edinburgh, sensation was principally characterized as involving the individual’s consciousness of change, defined by one medical lecturer, for instance, the physician William Cullen, as “the Mind’s being conscious of any changes in the State of the body, or more nearly of the nervous system.”<sup>38</sup> For the encyclopedist Alexander Rees, who published in 1819 his revised edition of Ephraim Chambers’s monumental *Cyclopaedia*, sensation was further generalizable to the point of signifying “the consciousness of a new mode of existence, the modification which the sentient being experiences.”<sup>39</sup> If, as Foucault once claimed, modern historical thought can be seen as having emerged with the posing of the question, “What difference does today introduce with respect to yesterday?” it is evident that a similar (if more localized) inquiry into the relation between the “then” and the “now” was described as integral to sense-experience in this period.<sup>40</sup>

For one sustained meditation on the power of habit to determine and modify the organs of perception – one that anticipates and complements

Wordsworth’s account – we can turn to an important document in manuscript entitled “An Essay on Custom” by William Cullen. A professor of Medicine at the University of Glasgow and (from 1755) of Chemistry and the theory and practice of Physic at the University of Edinburgh, and a man well known to contemporaries such as Hume, Smith, and Kames, Cullen was one of the most influential figures in the medical orthodoxy of his time. Cullen’s *First Lines on the Practice of Physic* (1777–84) became a standard textbook for a generation or more of British and American medical students, and he numbered among his pupils such prominent medical practitioners as the chemist and physician Joseph Black and the American physician Benjamin Rush. Cullen devoted much of his life’s work to the study of the nervous system, and is generally remembered today for his influential nosology or classification of diseases, including his introduction of a class of illness called “neuroses,” the first of many uses of this term in medicine and psychology; in his Preface to the second volume of *Zoonomia*, Darwin acknowledges Cullen’s rank as the foremost nosological theorist in Britain (Z, 2:v–vi).<sup>41</sup>

In the longest extant version of the “Essay on Custom,” Cullen describes his essay as a project to define “[t]he power of Custom in variously affecting the human body,” and more particularly to shed light upon “the effects of such repetitions whereby the State of the body . . . is more or less dispos’d than it otherwise would have been to bear certain applications or to perform certain actions or in short where the body in performing its various functions is subjected to certain laws which without such custom would not have obtain’d.”<sup>42</sup> The essay is divided into sections such as “The Effects of Custom on the Organs of Sensation,” which explains how strong sensations wane and pleasant sensations become insipid over time, and “The Effects of Custom on the Nervous Power,” which explains how impressions frequently repeated etch grooves into the nervous system that the percipient will come to expect in sequence. Like Darwin, who will explore a similar range of topics in connection to what he calls ideas of “suggestion,” Cullen presents a closely described physiological language – one anchored on a firmer basis in medical fact than Hartley’s conjectural account of nervous vibratiuncles – for describing the associationist process of how we come to have and connect ideas in the way we do.<sup>43</sup>

In a paragraph that appears to have been intended as the conclusion to his essay, Cullen posits a potential use for such conjectures on how the body is “subjected to certain laws” by force of custom. To know better how repetition affects the body, Cullen suggests, may yield predictive

insights that would in turn make this subject the lynchpin of the healing art:

I can't help observing that whoever attends to the mechanism of the body . . . will not only observe the motions in diseases [and] observe certain periods but will likewise be able to discern the source of such periods in general and particular to foresee thereby the times of diseases & to find out the proper application of the rules of Hippocrates.<sup>44</sup>

The relevance of Cullen's passage becomes more clear if we recall that "period," in addition to denoting a span or extent of time generally, was and remains a term more specifically used to designate the time in which a disease runs its course; in his *Observations on the Prevailing Diseases in Great Britain*, for instance, Millar defines the period as "the time between the access of one fit or paroxysm of a disease, and that of the next."<sup>45</sup> Percy Shelley captures both the historical and medical connotations of this term in a striking exchange from *Prometheus Unbound* (Act I, lines 412–14):

MERCURY           Thou knowest not the period of Jove's power?  
 PROMETHEUS       I know but this, that it must come.  
 MERCURY            Alas!  
                           Thou canst not count thy years to come of pain? (SPP, 222)<sup>46</sup>

In an exchange that attests to Shelley's extensive and well-documented interest in the contemporary sciences of life,<sup>47</sup> Prometheus and Mercury dispute the necessity of predicting a "period" of tyrannical power that inscribes itself most legibly on the bodies of those who are subject to it. It is Mercury, of course, whose recommendation for determining "the period of Jove's power" most closely resembles the physician's counsel: for by getting the analyst closer to "the source of such periods," Cullen speculates, the study of how custom affects the body is crucial to the accurate determination of when such "periods" do or even will occur.

In sketching this scientific context for Wordsworth's interest in the customary basis of feeling, I am clearly not suggesting that his account of the infant babe is directly indebted to Cullen's work in conjectural physiology. Nor do I quite wish to identify the "best conjectures" of Wordsworth's account with the practice of conjectural history with which Cullen, in common with other Scottish medical professionals, was closely familiar, and within the context of which his theory of Physic frequently operated.<sup>48</sup> By reading Wordsworth's history of infantile perception in relation to the exploration of similar subjects from within the sciences of sensation, however, I think that we are in a better position to see the

purpose to which Wordsworth connects such densely psychologized passages of *The Prelude* with his explicit critique of sensationalist psychology in the same book. To read Wordsworth's account of the infant babe in relation to the forms of physiological conjecture pioneered by authors of Scottish enlightenment, we may also understand the effect to which Wordsworth's passage returns to and partly reproduces the French enlightenment method he criticizes. For while Wordsworth obviously means to distinguish his history of the mind from that of the sensationalists whose epistemological and political principles he finds so deeply suspect, the poet is fully aware that to do so would be to "parcel out / His intellect" in precisely the same manner. Wordsworth's dilemma, in short, is that to affirm his distance from the *Idéologues* is to become one. In a later book of *The Prelude*, of course, Wordsworth represents such ambitions to divorce the present from the past as deeply symptomatic of his imaginative impairment. The impulse to draw a stark dividing line between the present and the past would thus invariably suggest to the poet's mind an earlier period in which, as he records in the 1805 *Prelude*, "I had hope to see . . . / The man to come parted as by a gulph / From him who had been (P, 11.57–60). In a paradoxical move, then, Wordsworth's critique of enlightenment psychology asserts the affinity of his own method with it. Enacting a conversation between French and Scottish systems of physiological conjecture, the poet registers at once the necessity, and impossibility, of effecting a thorough break from the past – as well the necessity and impossibility of asserting a continuous relationship to it.<sup>49</sup>

It is in this way that Cullen's understanding of how the body, through custom, is "subjected to certain laws" – whose operations the student of these motions can at the same time comprehend, and whose termination, or "period" he can learn to predict – provides an analogue to Wordsworth's methodological critique and subsequent re-enactment of French enlightenment thought. When Wordsworth strongly criticizes but does not altogether abandon the task that French philosophers (and British disciples such as Godwin) had set for the history of perception, this gesture seems designed to illustrate the poet's conviction that present thoughts, and indeed interpretive models for understanding the genesis of those thoughts, continue to reflect the influence of past structures of perception. The issue of how habit gives shape to our moral feelings (the subject of the later passage of Book 2) is thus directly related to the question of how, consciously or not, Wordsworth's own attempt to work through an alternative paradigm for narrating the history of perception reflects the continuing influence of previous attempts to do so (the

question of the prior passage). On this account, the poet's seemingly hermetic portrait of the infant babe might rather be seen as a purposeful reflection on the task of representing the periods of human perception. In terms both historical and historiographical, Wordsworth's account of the blessed babe represents an effort to determine how the mature mind of the poet reflects the structuring conditions of a past that it would otherwise seek to move beyond.

#### VARIETIES OF HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE

I have been arguing that Wordsworth's effort to situate his history of infantile perception in relation to competing systems of enlightenment thought must be seen both as an endeavor to determine a "period" for French thought and as a strong interrogation of the legitimacy of efforts to do so. Through this self-searching investigation, Wordsworth's passage on the infant babe raises some significant – and far from resolved – problems inherent in the attempt to narrate the sensory life of the past. What is the basis upon which we can discern transformations of perception with any accuracy? To what extent is it possible to periodize perception when our senses are so habitually determined by circumstances of time and place? How does the historian represent both differences from and continuities with the past? And how does one determine the *locus standi* for a history in which the historian is himself a subject?

At another level, of course, Wordsworth's depiction of an "apprehensive habitude" that nourishes and controls the mind "through all intercourse of sense" has long been regarded as furnishing an aesthetic principle for *The Prelude*, at least so far as that poem is read as celebrating the persistence of the past in the mind of the adult, whose memories of childhood can be revisited and renewed in the moment of poetic inspiration or composition. In lines preceding his account of the infant babe, Wordsworth confesses to Coleridge his continuing attachment to these early childhood experiences, acknowledging at the same time the potentially unseemly nature of this attachment:

. . . need I dread from thee  
 Harsh judgments if I am so loth to quit  
 Those recollected hours that have the charm  
 Of visionary things, and lovely forms  
 And sweet sensations, that throw back our life  
 And almost make our Infancy itself  
 A visible scene, on which the sun is shining? (P, 1.657–63)



Wordsworth's account of how the past is revived in memory points to a familiar conception of poetry as distinguished from philosophical or historical writing on grounds that it alone is able to embody in sensuous images the things that it records. In "An Apology for Poetry," Philip Sidney famously argued that "the speaking picture of Poesy" enjoyed a natural superiority over abstract philosophical principles and dry historical facts.<sup>50</sup> As a poem that advances similar claims for imaginative representation, *The Prelude* exalts the poet as best equipped for the task of narrating the experiences and events of the individual's past.

If such powers to revive the "sweet sensations" of the past mark the privilege of the poet's work over that of the historian or philosopher, however, Wordsworth is just as quick to acknowledge how the poet's apparently indolent attachment to these early experiences could seem at odds with his commitment to "honorable toil" (P, 1.653). Nor is it difficult to see how these same powers of imaginative recollection might present a problem when the sensations being recalled are not those of blessed infancy, but rather of the violent historical events that Wordsworth's own account of the infant babe anticipates in its response to French psychological thought. Such recollected sensations would most obviously present difficulties to the poet who would, in Blake's terms, see "Thro" these episodes to apprehend what Wordsworth describes as the "renovating virtue" supposedly latent in such experiences (P, 11.259). As readers of *The Prelude* have often observed, Wordsworth's "history of a Poet's mind" is narrated through an escalating series of mental crises in three different environments (Cambridge in Book 3, London in Book 7, and Revolutionary France in Books 9–10), each associated with a moment in which the physical senses appear to dominate over the fledgling imagination. Throughout the French books in particular, Wordsworth explicitly characterizes the period of his involvement in the Revolution as "a transport of the outward sense" (P, 12.187), a period of vivid and even violent sensory activity that represents a temporary impairment of imaginative power.

Observing how Wordsworth equates the vividness of his sensations with his consciousness of the external world, new historicist critics have read the tendency of Wordsworth's poetry to narrate a gradual ascent from sensations to general ideas as a model for its historical displacements. Levinson's reading of "Tintern Abbey" represents one well-known instance in which Wordsworth's claim to have developed sublime ideas out of the elementary data of sensation is read as an allegorical enactment of the poet's erasure of "sensuous concrete reality." Alan Liu, whose

magisterial study of Wordsworth attends to the evasions, effacements, and aporias that constitute the poet's "history," offers a similar perspective on *The Prelude*. In Liu's implicit rendering of an associationist historical logic, "[a] poet first 'senses' context in the form of highly charged and concrete phenomena that are prior to thinkable 'idea, '"; in its emergence as "poetic sensibility," however, the sensuous ground of historical experience is raised by the poet into a general form that at once effaces its contextual origins in history and registers that effacement in the form of contradictions and fissures within the text.<sup>51</sup> As an effort to "carve the 'self' out of history," then, *The Prelude* substitutes Imagination for History only to convert the narrative of imagination into a Hegelian history of Spirit – a "history," as the poet would have it, "Of intellectual power from stage to stage / Advancing" (P, 11.42–4).<sup>52</sup>

If such descriptions of intellectual maturation evoke a Hartleyan trajectory from sensations to ideas, they just as clearly suggest the apotheosis of that trajectory as occurring in those sublime episodes from *The Prelude* where the momentary cancellation of the senses is equated with a surplus of imaginative power. I refer especially to the celebrated Simplon Pass episode of Book 6, a passage enshrined by Geoffrey Hartman as the quintessence of the Romantic sublime, and reinterpreted by Liu, in the important first chapter of his book, as a paradigmatic instance of how Wordsworth's poetry at once denies historical context and unwittingly expresses its occluded material content.<sup>53</sup> At the center of this passage is Wordsworth's famous account of the capacity of imagination to "usurp" the function of the senses, thereby overcoming the subject's unremitting dependence on the external world:

. . . In such strength  
Of usurpation, in such visitings  
Of awful promise, when the light of sense  
Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us  
The invisible world, doth greatness make abode . . . (P, 6.532–6)

Wordsworth's passage espouses a version of Hartley's claim that the process of association leads ultimately to the apprehension of divine truths. To cite another text of obvious importance to *The Prelude*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the poet's apparent intention is to describe how natural beings "by gradual scale sublim'd / To vital spirits aspire," and so from "body up to spirit work, in bounds / Proportion'd to each kind."<sup>54</sup> In his landmark essay "'Sense' in *The Prelude*," however, William Empson questioned the view

that such passages were straightforwardly intended to describe the triumph of the imagination over the bodily senses. In an essay that Liu’s otherwise remarkably comprehensive study fails to cite, Empson called attention to the fundamental ambiguity of this passage, and in the poet’s use of the word “sense” more generally, in which a sudden access of imaginative power at once “destroys normal sense and fulfils it.”<sup>55</sup> As Empson shows, Wordsworth’s “sense” signifies both the act of sensing and “the supreme act of imagination” at once; frequently hailing those experiences that seem to combine elements of both physical sensation and imaginative or intellectual power, the poet defines “sense” as a property that accommodates both elementary and advanced mental faculties.<sup>56</sup>

If Wordsworth’s visionary episode suggests both the gratification and transcendence of the bodily senses, a similar ambiguity pervades those passages from the same book in which Wordsworth describes his engagement in the contemporary political events of his youth. Consider, for instance, one of Wordsworth’s earliest references in *The Prelude* to a Revolution then in its infancy. Following the account of his Alpine revelation, we should not be surprised to find Wordsworth insisting that his experience in 1790 was not that of a “mean pensioner / On outward forms” (P, 6.667–8) – indeed, the poet insists that “whate’er / I saw, or heard, or felt” was capable of yielding some moral or intellectual benefit (P, 6.672–3). In a subsequent passage of Book 6, Wordsworth returns to this phrase in describing the extent of his involvement in the early events of the French Revolution. Though “twas a time when Europe was rejoiced,” the poet explains why at this stage he “needed not that joy” which the Revolution seemed to offer (P, 6.352–354, 701). The passage presents a phenomenology of historical engagement that is at once contrasted to and more surprisingly identified with the famous visionary passage that precedes it:

A stripling, scarcely of the household then  
Of social life, I looked upon these things  
As from a distance – heard, and saw, and felt,  
Was touched but with no intimate concern –  
I seemed to move among them as a bird  
Moves through the air, or as a fish pursues  
Its business in its proper element. (P, 6.694–700)

Wordsworth describes his early consciousness of revolutionary events as that of a child or animal blithely unaware of the “element” in which it moves. To the extent that Wordsworth means to evoke a naturalized

and fully embodied relationship to his surroundings, the passage bears obvious comparison to those lines from “Tintern Abbey” in which the speaker describes the “glad animal movements” of his youth (LB, 75). While clearly suggesting, as Hartman observes, “a state of innocence” prior to his imaginative fall,<sup>57</sup> however, Wordsworth’s passage just as significantly describes a condition of mental detachment – a mind “blest in thoughts / That are their own perfection and reward” – that suggests the earlier account of his experience on Simplon Pass (P, 6.545–6). Wordsworth thus depicts a kind of *locus standi* at once within and beyond the force-field of Revolutionary events.

“SENSATIONS OF THE IMAGINATION”: HISTORY AND  
DOUBLE-CONSCIOUSNESS

For one conceivable explanation as to why Wordsworth simultaneously asserts his sensuous immersion in and pre-reflective distance from Revolutionary events, we can return to Corbin’s essay on the historiography of the senses. While acknowledging the difficulties facing the historian of perception, Corbin grants that this task is easier when focusing on “paroxysmal situations” in history whose tendency to produce polarized opinions and experiences “makes it easier to read sensory behaviour” in its approximate totality.<sup>58</sup> Thus, we should not be surprised that Corbin privileges revolutionary epochs as best suited to the sort of historical reconstruction he describes; nor are we very much surprised to learn that the French Revolution is the historical case that Corbin has particularly in mind. We might even go so far as to compare what Corbin calls the “paroxysmal situations” of history to Wordsworth’s account of revolutionary conflict (specifically in relation to France’s declaration of war with England in 1793) as a “shock / Given to my moral nature” (P, 10.233–4).

On the one hand, Wordsworth’s narrative of his involvement in Revolutionary events presents a sequential movement through a hierarchy of affects, progressing from an emphasis on what Corbin calls the “senses of proximity,” including most importantly touch, to a more detached and “spectatorial attitude” by the end of the period covered in the poem.<sup>59</sup> (Wordsworth offers explicit support for such an interpretation when, in Book 12 of *The Prelude*, he records how in a state of restored political health he “took the intellectual eye / For my instructor, studious more to see / Great truths, than to touch and handle little ones” [P, 12.58–60].) On the other hand, however, Wordsworth describes these states not as stages along a developmental continuum, but as dialectical modes of

perception existing synchronously in the poet's consciousness. The *locus classicus* for this conception, of course, is the famous "two consciousnesses" passage of Book 2:

. . . so wide appears  
 The vacancy between me and those days,  
 Which yet have such self-presence in my mind  
 That, sometimes when I think of them, I seem  
 Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself  
 And of some other Being. (P, 2.27–33)

Wordsworth's conception of the past as both a "vacancy" in the poet's mind and a continued "presence" within it presents a psychological rationale for what I am describing more particularly as an historiographical principle of the poem. As a former enthusiast and latter-day spectator of Revolutionary events, Wordsworth claims to embody both extremes of historical experience so as to emphasize the suitedness of his poem to trace a history of the senses in this period. Corbin's notion that the history of perception is most effectively traced in moments of conflict is thus memorably anticipated by Wordsworth's claim to occupy, at the same time, two seemingly opposed perspectives on the past.

Wordsworth's claim for the sensuous vitality of imaginative narration has an obvious precedent in the aesthetic criticism of the Scottish enlightenment. Moreover, as Mark Salber Phillips has lately shown, such conceptions bore centrally on contemporary historiographical debates as to whether and how far the historian should engage the reader in the sensuous details of the past. In the *Elements of Criticism* (1762), Henry Home, Lord Kames introduced the term "ideal presence" to describe the active status of imaginative images in the mind. Kames distinguishes ideal presence from images of simple memory (or those of "reflective remembrance") on the grounds that these former impressions remain so strong as to appear present to the mind. "[W]hen I recall the event so distinctly as to form a complete image of it," Kames writes, "I perceive it ideally as passing in my presence." Kames further describes the apparent "self-presence" of the past in terms that anticipate Wordsworth's description of the poet's "two consciousnesses":

in a vigorous exertion of memory, ideal presence is extremely distinct. Thus, when a man, entirely occupied with some event that made a deep impression, loses sight of himself, he perceives every thing as passing before him, and hath a consciousness of presence similar to that of a spectator.<sup>60</sup>

For Kames, ideal presence at once simulates and substitutes for physical sense-perception; this literary effect reproduces the potent effects of

sensation without sharing in the limitations that bind it to one body, thereby preventing its communication to others.<sup>61</sup> As an embodied experience wholly independent of external stimuli, ideal presence is in Kames's account the signature effect of powerful imaginative representation.<sup>62</sup> As Phillips shows, this principle was also routinely invoked in defense of an historical writing that engaged the reader's senses in the narration of past events. In its status as "an aesthetic principle whose specific concern is the abbreviation of distance," ideal presence was a concept as central to eighteenth-century historiography as it was to the aesthetic criticism of the same period.<sup>63</sup>

As a principle for rendering the sensuous presence of the past, Kames's "ideal presence," like Darwin's "reveries of sensation," presents a clear context for the poet's ambition to recollect and evoke the vivid sensations of the past. Indeed, critics attentive to the scientific contexts of Wordsworth's aesthetics have demonstrated how persistently the poet employs "lines of inner-body imagery" that may owe directly to Darwin, whose *Zoonomia* we know the poet to have been reading in the year in which he composed and published the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*.<sup>64</sup> It is certainly true that Wordsworth's programmatic writings on the imagination claim an exalted status for this faculty as a medium by the aid of which "even the grossest minds must see and hear, / And cannot chuse but feel." To say as much, however, is to risk overlooking how such experiences of vivid mental imaging, so often identified with moments of mental crisis in *The Prelude*, are just as prominently described as symptoms of the imagination, involving too strong an appeal to the bodily senses to be narrated without the simultaneous benefit (or imposition) of reflective distance. While celebrating the poet's capacity to revive past experiences in the mind (and in the mind of the reader), that is, Wordsworth remains just as fully aware of the potentially disabling effects of ideal presence. Consequently, *The Prelude's* narrative of Revolutionary history can be read as reflecting the poet's effort to strike a safe middle-ground "between cognitive distantiation and affective proximity" – alternatives which, as Phillips observes, structured historiographical debates of the Scottish enlightenment as well as among a later generation of nineteenth-century historians.<sup>65</sup> In giving voice to the double-consciousness of the poet, Wordsworth at once dramatizes the tension between these two alternatives for historical representation and engages purposefully, if equivocally, in this historiographical debate.

To understand better the basis on which ideal presence – as both an aesthetic and historiographical principle – could be understood as either a

privilege or a pathology of the imagination, let us return to the influential work of William Cullen. In his lectures on physiology at the University of Edinburgh, Cullen, a long-time friend of Kames, attempted to account for a type of external stimulation that occurs independently of a determinate physiological cause. As Cullen taught in a course of lectures on physiology dating most likely to the late 1760s or early 1770s, sensation is not exclusively an effect of external impression, but may indeed “arise also from motions first begun in the Sensorium.”<sup>66</sup> On the one hand, Cullen’s distinction between external sense-impressions and “Sensations of the Imagination” – which arise exclusively, as he reports in the *Institutions of Medicine* (1772), from “internal causes, *i.e.*, upon causes acting in the brain”<sup>67</sup> – recalls a straightforwardly Lockean distinction between sensation (either the impression of an external object or its perception by the brain) and reflection (the mind’s attention to its own activity). In Kames’s *Elements*, however, Cullen focuses on the ability of the mind not merely to reflect on the information of the senses, but actively to elicit impressions “upon the sentient extremities.”<sup>68</sup> These “Sensations of the Imagination,” which Darwin will later name “sensitive ideas” (*Z*, 1:132), occupy a central place in Cullen’s neurophysiology, and represent an important contribution to empiricist psychology in this period.<sup>69</sup>

Cullen is not a physician remembered for his facility with literary reference; in contrast to Kames or Darwin, moments of poetic citation or allusion are comparatively rare in his work. In describing how the mind is capable of producing sensations of a force almost equal to those received from external objects, however, Cullen includes in the lecture notes an illustrative passage from *Samson Agonistes* – one that would surely have appealed to Wordsworth as well in connection to the narrative of his involvement in Revolutionary events. Milton’s lines are spoken by the figure of the Messenger on first entering the company of the Israelites; the story he has to tell, of course, is of Samson’s destruction of the temple at Gaza:

O whither shall I run, or which way fly,  
The sight of this so horrid spectacle,  
Which erst my eyes beheld, and yet behold!  
For dire imagination still pursues me.<sup>70</sup>

“Imagination,” in Milton’s use here, is not far distinguished from memory, recalling Thomas Hobbes’s definition of both faculties as species of “decaying sense.”<sup>71</sup> What would appear to be the main point of distinction between the two faculties is the degree of intensity with which the vision is felt: Milton’s “horrid spectacle” is not merely an afterimage

of memory, but an experience that remains as terrifyingly present to the mind as when it was first witnessed.

As in Kames's analysis of ideal presence, Cullen's discussion of "Sensations of the Imagination" (and his accompanying citation of Milton) reflects an widespread interest in this period in the physiological, psychological, and aesthetic forms of sensuous mental imaging. Whereas Kames generally celebrates ideal presence as the most impressive of literary devices, however, Cullen attends almost exclusively to the symptomatic dimension of these "sensitive ideas"; in the lecture notes, he rather unromantically attributes such experiences to topical affections of the brain such as fever. In *Zoonomia*, Darwin similarly associates these experiences with delirium or periods of "mutable madness," a heading under which he includes the account of the Warwickshire farmer that famously inspired Wordsworth's ballad of "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" (Z, 2:356–9). In the aesthetic and scientific writing of the late eighteenth century, Cullen's "Sensations of the Imagination" could thus alternately, or even at once, be described as a sign of privilege or pathology – after the title of a contemporary medical pamphlet, both "a cause and a cure of disorders in the body."<sup>72</sup> If Wordsworth, then, has any particular cause to "dread . . . [h]arsh judgement" on account of his continued attachment to the "sweet sensations" of the past, this may not be due to his awareness of how such attachments could suggest the poet's indolence or self-absorption, but just as plausibly from an apprehension of how closely such experiences resemble a kind of madness.

In *The Prelude*, this symptomatic perspective on ideal presence is most clearly pronounced in reference to scenes of Revolutionary violence to which the speaker – in terms that seem at times lifted from the Messenger of Milton's drama – is compelled to bear witness.<sup>73</sup> In a practice suggestive of contemporary historiographical debates, moreover, Wordsworth frequently represents these forms of vivid historical experience as or in relation to scenes of reading. Consider, for instance, the poet's portrait in Book 9 of the military officer whose "temper was quite mastered by the times" (P, 9.147). In an account as acutely attentive to the symptomatic effects of "sensitive ideas" as anything in Cullen or Darwin, Wordsworth presents a closely described account of imagined historical experience in which the act of reading (or of hearing another read) induces a violent bodily affection and pathological instance of "ideal presence":

At the hour,  
The most important of each day, in which



The public news was read, the fever came,  
 A punctual visitant, to shake this man;  
 Disarmed his voice, and fanned his yellow cheek  
 Into a thousand colors; while he read,  
 Or mused, his sword was haunted by his touch  
 Continually, like an uneasy place  
 In his own body.

(P, 9.156–64)

"Mastered by the *Times*," we might say, the officer's fever is a "punctual visitant" that marks Revolutionary time in periods dictated by the hour of the newspaper's appearance. This is not a failure of imagination so much as an unhealthy application of it – a dark reminder of the sufficiency of "the human imagination . . . to produce such changes even in our physical nature as might almost appear miraculous," as the poet remarks on his adaptation of the tale of Goody Blake and Harry Gill (LB, 267).<sup>74</sup> Wordsworth depicts the man not only as suffering a kind of "mutable madness," in Darwin's terms, but as a fellow-reader of Revolutionary history and a negative example for the poet himself, who must also witness or imagine these scenes without being consumed by them.

As the evocation of a mind "blighted" by the times (P, 9.148), Wordsworth's portrait of the military officer looks forward to a still more prominent record of historical delirium in the poet's famous account of his experience at the Place de Carrousel (Book 10). Wordsworth's passage evokes an intensified mental disorder that substitutes the "mutable madness" of the military officer for a related class of illness that Darwin designates *vigilia* or watchfulness (Z, 2:362–363). This is a diagnosis in connection to which Wordsworth famously alludes to those lines from *Macbeth* ("Sleep no more!" – P, 10.77), and which, as I earlier suggested, is implicit in Wordsworth's account of a poetic mind "ever on the watch" in Book 13. As with the military officer of the previous book, the speaker's disorder is induced in part through reading – "conjured up," as Wordsworth writes, "from tragic fictions, / And mournful calendars of true history" – and just as pointedly evoked through numerous literary allusions (to Shakespeare and Milton especially) in the passage (P, 10.67–8). Liu and others have described Wordsworth's self-conscious allusiveness here as efforts to defend against a violent history that would compromise the poet's faith in a sovereign, autonomous subject.<sup>75</sup> The hopefulness and even hubris implicit in such allusions is, I believe, well described by these critics. But we are mistaken, I think, to regard Wordsworth's ventriloquization of these literary precedents solely as an attempt to buffer against the shocks of historical experience. Wordsworth's allusiveness

might rather be read in the context of the poet's self-conscious endeavor to "conjure up" and render sensuously present the experience of the past without jeopardizing the didactic purpose that such narratives are ultimately meant to serve. In mediating his account through the work of these literary ancestors, Wordsworth projects a model for how the poet might at once provide access to the immediacy of historical events and obtain reflective distance from them.

In his recollections of Wordsworth, published in 1839 in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, Thomas De Quincey recognized and lauded the poet's ambition to balance between the claims of "cognitive distance and affective proximity" in his imaginative record of Revolutionary events. Writing in a period in which, as Phillips demonstrates, an argument over the priority of these disparate stances had moved to the forefront of British historiographical debate (and had indeed tilted still further towards stressing "the need for empathetic absorption in the materials of the past"),<sup>76</sup> De Quincey assessed Wordsworth's history of the Revolutionary era as an account that both captured the lived experience of these years and situated its events within the larger history of France's doomed project of political regeneration through revolutionary violence. Though De Quincey is recalling from upwards of thirty years prior to his early encounter with Wordsworth's poem, his memory is impressively accurate; at one point, he summarizes and quotes from Wordsworth's portrait of the officer in Book 9, offering in the process the following praise for the vividness (if not necessarily the strictest accuracy) of the poet's historical vision: "What a picture does he give of the fury which there possessed the public mind . . . In short, as there has never been so strong a national convulsion diffused so widely with equal truth, it may be asserted that no describer, so powerful, or idealizing so magnificently what he deals with, has ever been a real living spectator of parallel scenes."<sup>77</sup>

That Quincey himself writes from a position of temporal as well as "cognitive distance" is clear, a fact that plays no small part in his commendation of Wordsworth's powers as a Revolutionary historian. For what, in De Quincey's view, makes Wordsworth's narrative so compelling is not merely its imaginative representation of the past, but how, through the artful manipulation of these effects, the poet emphasizes the overwhelming historical "sense" of this episode. For De Quincey, that is to say, the "ideal presence" of Wordsworth's text is most valuable in establishing the place of the Revolution as a moment in the unfolding of a

historical teleology that came to fruition in the suppression of the French and the re-assertion of English hegemony.

It is certainly true that Wordsworth’s account of historical and “national convulsion” presents this episode as a stage in the poem’s larger narrative trajectory of moral and spiritual development. While incorporating this episode into the teleological arc of the poem, however, Wordsworth’s scenes of sensuous historical experience are given, and for the purposes of the narrative positively require, an integrity and affective intensity that resist or at least present in a not yet fully realized form the historical “sense” that De Quincey retroactively applies to them. In what, after De Quincey, we can describe as Wordsworth’s ambivalently “idealizing” historical practice – a practice that in abstracting from the immediacy of sensation attempts at the same time to re-mediate it as “ideal presence” – the poet aims to accommodate both the sensuous particularity of historical experience and the ideational “sense” that may be gleaned from such episodes. *The Prelude’s* sensuous record of the historical past cannot therefore be described as always-already assimilated within a totalizing “sense of history” that renders these events intelligible at the expense of their origins in sensory experience.<sup>78</sup> On the contrary, Wordsworth’s claim to have “felt and touched” the horrific events of September 1792 draws attention both to the risks and rewards of imaginative labor, at once suggesting the poet’s ability to “touch” and inform others through historical representation, and evoking his own experience of having been touched too closely (P, 10.66).

PULSES, PERIODS, AND THE POET’S WORK:

THE CASE OF BLAKE

Every Time less than a pulsation of the artery  
 Is equal in its period & value to Six Thousand Years.  
 For in this Period the Poets Work is Done: and all the Great  
 Events of Time start forth & are concievd in such a Period  
 Within a Moment: a Pulsation of the Artery.

*Milton*, Book the First, 28:62–29:3 (WB, 490)

I have so far sought to show how Wordsworth’s records of vivid sense-experience in *The Prelude* – from his depiction of the infant babe as both heir of and alternative to French enlightenment thought, to his portrait of the military officer as victim of “national convulsion” – reflect an understanding of these experiences, and the conditions of their narratability,

as shaped by a Revolutionary history that the poet also documents. Wordsworth is not, of course, the only Romantic figure to whom this understanding can be ascribed; in concluding this chapter, then, I wish to consider briefly the work of another poet, namely Blake, who in presenting a counter-narrative of the revolutionary past provides at the same time a very different account of “Man’s” emergence. As in Wordsworth’s psychologized portrait of the infant babe, Blake’s mythopoetic narratives depict the human being as historical in its inception. Yet Blake goes further in asserting the inherent connection of the senses to the very concept of historical periodization. In his narratives of the genesis of the human form, Blake shows that historical time – and the poet’s work as an art of time – emerge coevally with that of the body. This is an inherently dialectical process, generative of both a prison-like individuality and of the conditions for its overcoming. In what has been called Blake’s “dialectics of embodiment,” the poet narrates the formation of the actually existing body as well as the promise of its eventual renovation.<sup>79</sup>

The paragraphs that follow can do little more than gesture towards Blake’s extensive writing on and powerful critique of the “senses five,” and will pass with similar haste over a sophisticated body of criticism dedicated to exploring these themes in his work. The poet’s resistance to the finite ratio of the five senses and to the empiricist philosophy that underwrites it is in any case well known, and needs no elaboration here. Blake has long been regarded as a figure for whom the “politics of vision,” to quote the subtitle of Mark Schorer’s 1946 book on the poet, are especially profound and apparent.<sup>80</sup> Nor do we need to search long through Blake’s poetry to find evidence of his belief that the senses have a history. Indeed, a strong case could be made almost exclusively on the basis of the earliest of Blake’s Continental poems, *America: A Prophecy* (1793). That poem, which concludes dramatically at the brink of revolutionary transformation, culminates with an image of the soon to be transformed senses. Consider the final lines of the poem:

Stiff shudderings shook the heav’nly thrones! France Spain & Italy,  
 In terror view’d the bands of Albion, and the ancient Guardians  
 Fainting upon the elements, smitten with their own plagues  
 They slow advance to shut the five gates of their law-built heaven  
 Filled with blasting fancies and with mildews of despair  
 With fierce disease and lust, unable to stem the fires of Orc:  
 But the five gates were consum’d, & their bolts and hinges melted  
 And the fierce flames burnt round the heavens, & round the abodes of men.

(WB, plate 16, lines 16–23)

Blake’s figure for the counter-revolutionary retrenchment of Europe’s “Guardians” is the “law-built heaven” of the brain and its sensory portals, which America’s act of rebellion will destroy. What is at stake in such moments is not the transcendence of the senses but rather their purification and expansion – a similar sort of intensification as “will come to pass by an improvement in sensual enjoyment,” as Blake writes in his *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* of the same year.<sup>81</sup> In contrast to that text, however, *America* is not principally interested in the “improvement” of the senses so much as in their salutary destruction. It is true that Blake’s illustration for the final plate of the poem somewhat complicates this progressive narrative: depicting the five senses as miniature figures crouching around the prostrate central figure, Blake intimates that the unleashing of revolutionary energies is no more at present than a possibility that the text records (fig. 2.1). While ultimately refusing to indicate whether such change is an historical *fait accompli* or rather – as *America*’s subtitle indicates – a “Prophecy” of changes to come, Blake’s poetry of the 1790s repeatedly attests to the contingency and mutability of the actually existing senses.<sup>82</sup>

Beyond suggesting a subjectivist understanding of revolution and its effects, Blake’s poetry frequently presents a form of incarnate history in which the senses do not simply reflect a prior historical development, but rather serve as an active harbinger or agent of change. In *America*, for instance, the actualization of Revolution depends crucially upon the ability to sense its necessity and arrival. That Blake regards historical transformation as dependent at least in part upon a correspondent transformation in the senses is evident from the first prophecy of the poem, uttered by the “shadowy daughter of Urthona” on the violent appearance of Orc:

On my American plains I feel the struggling afflictions  
 Endur’d by roots that writhe their arms into the nether deep . . .  
 . . . O what limb rending pains I feel  
 This is eternal death; and this the torment long foretold.

(WB, plate 1, lines 16–23)

In one of Blake’s many dramatic literalizations of the concept of a national body, the subterranean roots of “my American plains” are likened to subcutaneous nervous fibers. Nor would we be exaggerating Blake’s facility at carrying visual as well as verbal puns to see the design immediately to the right of these lines not only as roots which bear the “struggling afflictions” of impending revolutionary conflict, but also as a nerve-bundle whose writhing arms transmit these sensations throughout the body politic

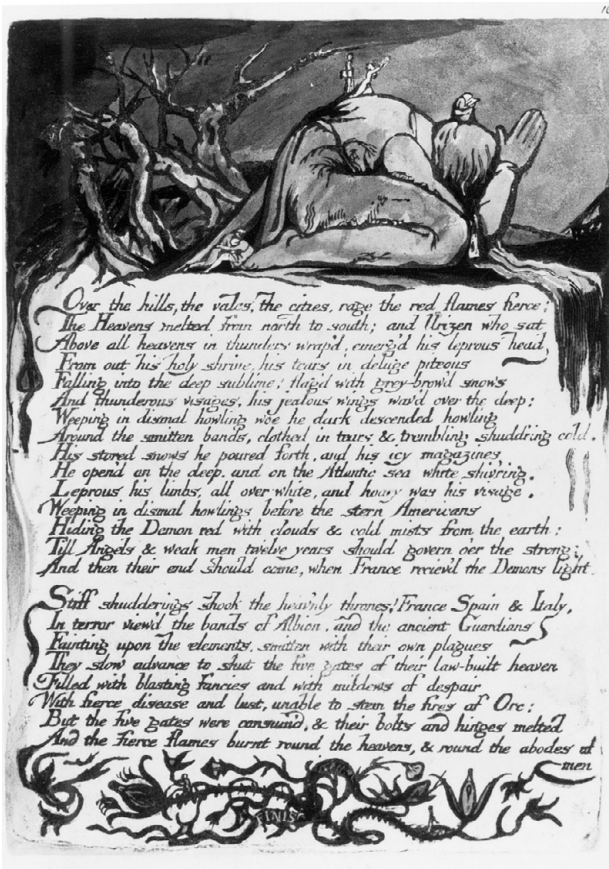


Figure 2.1 William Blake, *America: A Prophecy* (1793), copy M, plate 16.

(fig. 2.2). These are, we might say, roots whose arms extend like those of the “Tree” in “The Human Abstract,” to “grow[] . . . in the Human Brain” (WB, 27). The notion that the individual might immediately “sense” history in this way was familiar enough to Romantic authors, who inherited from the literature of sensibility a penchant for depicting certain figures as doomed, by the liveliness of their sensations, to feel all the ills of humanity. In Shelley’s “Julian and Maddalo,” for instance, the character of the Maniac describes himself in a memorable image as “a nerve o’er which do creep / The else unfelt oppressions of the earth” (SPP, 131). While describing a historical reality made similarly palpable (capable of being “felt and touched,” in Wordsworth’s terms), Blake also offers an



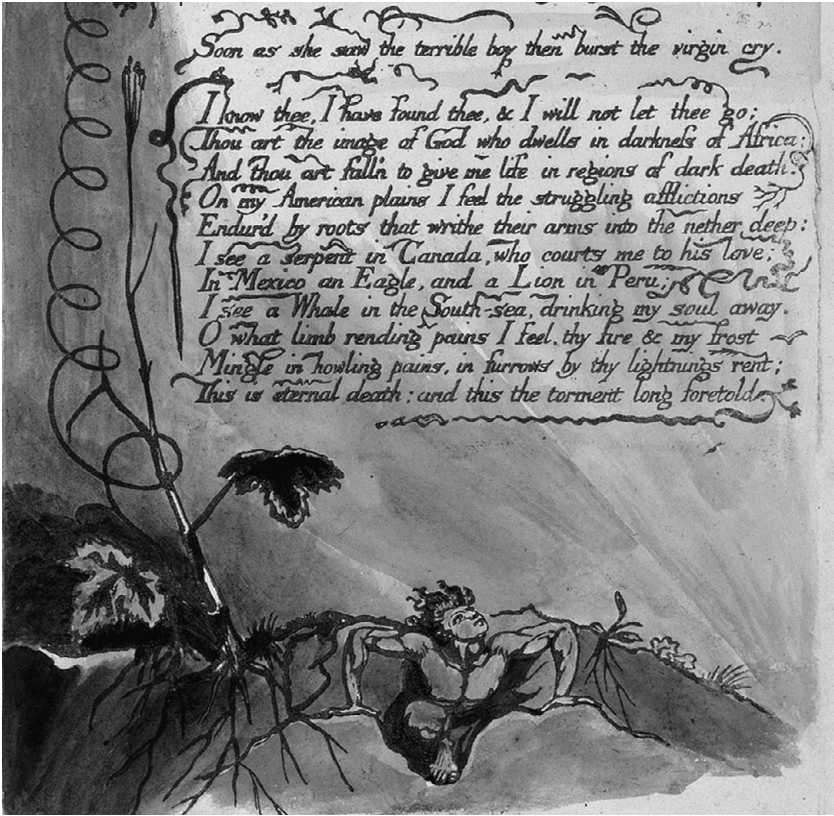


Figure 2.2 William Blake, *America: A Prophecy*, copy M, plate 2 (detail).

account in which the act of giving expression to such “limb rending pains” is identified as all but necessary to revolution.

If Blake often associates the unbinding of the senses with the unleashing of revolutionary energy, he just as frequently describes the formation of the finite body as emerging coevally with an enslaving modern system of historical chronology. Blake’s tendency to describe as mutually constitutive the senses and the abstract units of modern time anticipates Foucault’s argument that the emergence of “Man,” born of an “analytic of finitude,” is possible only within the epistemic framework of development over time. Blake’s most extensive articulation of this premise occurs in his account of the binding of Urizen by Los, a narrative repeated in several of the poems including *The Book of Urizen*, *Milton*, and most extensively in Blake’s long poem *Vala, or The Four Zoas*.

Composed, after Edward Young's *The Complaint; or, Night Thoughts* (1742–4) in nine books or "Nights," *The Four Zoas* radically literalizes the premise of the introspective poem, narrating the fall of Albion, the Eternal Man, into a divided state in which the human faculties, sense organs, and physiological functions war with one another until they are united once more in an elaborate "Last Judgment" in "Night the Ninth."<sup>83</sup> At the center of this narrative, in Book 4 of the poem, Blake describes Los's creation of the body of Urizen as signifying the point of farthest fall from an integrated consciousness that will eventually be restored through the course of the poem's second half. When Tharmas commands Los and Enitharmon to "[w]eave soft delusive forms of Man above my watry world,"<sup>84</sup> Los's first act is to forge the links that bind the limbs of Urizen in the units of abstract time:

Frightend with cold infectious madness. In his hand the thundering  
 Hammer of Urthona. Forming under his heavy hand the hours  
 The days and years. In chains of iron round the limbs of Urizen  
 Linkd hour to hour & day to night & night to day & year to year  
 In periods of pulsative furor. mills he formed & works  
 Of many wheels resistless in the power of dark Urthona

(plate 52, line 28 – plate 53, line 4)

In an account richly attentive to the historiographical consciousness of Blake's poetry, Nicholas Williams has characterized Urizen's embodiment by Los in terms of a "loss of faith in the narrative of progress" – an argument in support of which Williams reads *The Four Zoas* against the openly progressivist narrative of *America*.<sup>85</sup> While Williams is certainly correct to detect an evocation of temporal circularity in images of the chains "round the limbs of Urizen," and thus reference to a traditionalist conception of historical time as cyclical, his claim that Blake's passage represents a critique of Burkean history seems misguided insofar as Blake also exposes a linear model of history to equal opprobrium. Blake's litany of the units of measurement, themselves "linkd" by repetition and conjunction – "hour to hour & day to night and night to day & year to year" – evoke, through the evocation of both linear and circular progression, a condition of similarly enslaving monotony: "he laboured beating / The Links of fate link after link an endless chain of sorrows" (plate 53, lines 27–8). In the succession of "links" that bind and enslave Urizen, Blake sketches a condition of historical vacuity for which an appropriate figure is not Burke's traditionalism so much as Benjamin's "homogeneous, empty time," a chronology deprived of qualitative difference and thus bereft of



the possibility of its being experienced otherwise than in its present form.<sup>86</sup> The principles of linearity and circularity, historical progression and eternal return, are in Blake's terms Negations rather than Contraries, deadening rather than vivifying alternatives. Neither Burke's cyclical history nor Paineite progressivism are free from the threat of perversion for tyrannical ends; both, then, are fittingly implicated in Los's "infectious madness."

Taking shape within the homogenous units of historical time, the individual components of Urizen's body – the skeleton, circulatory system, and finally the senses (in order: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch) – are each experienced as a moment or "state" in a parody of the seven ages of creation. Suggesting the narrative artifice of Condillac's statue-man, a philosophical abstraction that Blake would surely have found as limiting as did Wordsworth, Blake depicts the stages of Urizen's confinement within a determinate physical form as separate "states" of a Fall: "bones of solidness froze over all his nerves of joy / A first age passed. a state of dismal woe" (plate 54, lines 13–14). Like the "endless chain" that binds Urizen to the empty units of hours, days, and years, Urizen's backbone and its vertebrae are forged as a "linked chain" binding him to a finite body (plate 54, line 11). Los's beating of the anvil "[i]n periods of pulsative furor" creates the units of temporal measurement as well as the physical pulse of the blood through the arteries; the periods or "states" of human history and the separate components of the human body emerge coevally and share roughly the same function, at once dividing and imprisoning the "eternal Man" within a physical form and an abstract chronology.<sup>87</sup> Both temporal and corporeal units, moreover, are characterized by a principle of repetition without difference closely identified with the deathly monotony of history as homogeneous, empty time; these separate "states" or "periods" offer no further principle of variation than do the imprisoning ratio of the five senses. Blake's history of perception presents not only a record of the individual's confinement by the "senses five," but an account in which the formation of the senses engenders the enslaving experience of modern historical time.

If there is a dialectical component to this process, by which the imprisonment of the "Eternal Man" reveals at the same time the conditions for its eventual liberation, it may well be indicated by the claim that poetry – and meter as poetry's closest link to time – is born from the very same act that produces the body as a determinate physical form. To put this point in terms already suggested to us by *Prometheus Unbound*: on the one hand, Mercury's searching question to Prometheus – "Thou

canst not count thy years to come of pain?” – raises the unsettling possibility of unremitting bondage to the “periods” of historical time. To the extent, however, that such metrical language can itself be “counted” (and in Shelley’s case eminently so – ten words, each monosyllables, in a line of flawless iambic pentameter), Romantic authors gesture towards the productive capacity of the poet to “make” history or – in what for Blake amounts to the same thing – to impose a breach in the continuum of homogeneous empty time. The artisanal labor of Los, father of poets, produces “[i]n periods of pulsative furor” the phenomenon of poetic meter as an art of both time and the body. Blake thereby signals the ambivalent status of the poet as participatory in that originary event. While signifying the enslavement of humanity, however, the binding of Urizen – as in the binding of Isaac by Abraham to which the event alludes – is an act that holds forth the promise of its eventual undoing.<sup>88</sup> Identifying the emergence of the senses with the origins of poetry itself, Blake gestures towards a productive if politically ambivalent role for the poet as both an historian of the senses and a prophet of their imminent transformation. In sketching notes towards the realization of that project, Blake’s account of the origins of human perception presents a version of what Foucault famously called a “history of the present,” most saliently characterized by an effort to apprehend the conditions of our own knowledge so as to realize in turn the conditions of its transformation.<sup>89</sup> The poet’s efforts to historicize the conditions of perception precede our own, and survive in them too.

It is true, of course, that both Wordsworth and Blake do at times mount considerable resistance to the idea of historical determination, and often indeed go further to wage war against the “analytic of finitude” that binds us to bodies and to histories we inherit as well as make. Nor is it unusual for either writer to conceive that the way things are is primarily the result of an error of perception or a flaw in the perceptual organs; for both poets, the fallibility of the senses and of the periodizing imagination are often seen as faults of a similar order. Inasmuch, however, as these poets regard imagination as capable of effecting “changes even in our physical nature,” their preoccupation with marking the periods of human perception might be seen as just such an attempt to reveal, through embodied self-reflection, the conditions for transforming consciousness and context alike. To perceive “Eternity in an hour,” as Blake famously defined that task in “Auguries of Innocence,” or “a Period / Within a Moment,” as he writes in *Milton*, is to realize the transformative potential latent within even the least promising of mental or historical states. While

avoiding extremes of either naive idealism or mere biological determinism, then, these poets do conceive the historical period to be a perceptual fiction of a certain kind, subject to continual revision and transformation.

In seeking to offer one critical history for the kinds of questions we ask about the sensory organization of the past, and in locating the origins of these inquiries in the early Romantic period, I do not mean to overlook the ways in which such a genealogy may be insupportable. At base, the critical history that I offer here is meant to raise the question of how we can revisit without reifying a quintessentially Romantic investigation into the nature of consciousness, of all subjects the most tirelessly invoked and in reference to this period. Notwithstanding the obvious limitations of Romantic history, with its frequent equation of psychic terrain and social totality, we might at least be receptive to the possibility that such investigations may consist in more than the single-minded effort to consolidate the authority of the subject. Rather, by attending to the cultural and historical conditions that define and circumscribe sensibilities, these narratives furnish a broader context for – and in cases such as Blake’s significantly problematize – the very category of individuality that would make such histories possible. We can therefore find in this literature a “sense of history” neither premised solely on the legitimation of the present nor on the displacement, evasion, or erasure of historical context, but rather offered as an account of how we have come to feel and to know in the way we do, and how, with the aid of poetry itself, these states too might change.



PART II

*Senses of community: lyric subjectivity  
and “the culture of the feelings”*



*Critical conditions: Coleridge, “common sense,”  
and the literature of self-experiment*

In the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth famously wrote of the tendency of his poems to evoke feelings of “more than common pleasure” in the reader. It is with the aim of delivering such pleasures that Wordsworth urges the reader to judge “by his own feelings genuinely” against what the poet took to be a prevailing tendency to decide on the basis of “what will probably be the judgment of others” (LB, 241–2, 270). Few remarks serve as a better reminder of how fully Wordsworth was committed to refining and reforming common laws of judgment and understanding. In this aim, of course, the poet finds common cause with his friend and creative partner Coleridge, who insisted throughout his life on the necessity of elevating common sense through philosophical thought and rigorous self-reflection: “it is the two-fold function of philosophy,” Coleridge wrote in the *Biographia Literaria*, “to reconcile reason with common sense, and to elevate common sense into reason” (BL, 1:270).<sup>1</sup> Yet consult, in that same volume, Coleridge’s critique of Wordsworth’s use of common language, and you have a notion of how much more openly sworn was the former to maintaining the distinction (whose initial framing was Anna Seward’s, and whose canonical formulation we owe to Hazlitt) between “genius” and “common sense” (BL, 2:40–57).<sup>2</sup> If Wordsworth purports to ground his own reform of common judgment in the language, scenes, and affections of common life, by all accounts Coleridge – poet of the supernatural, theorist of the “clerisy,” and vigorous advocate of grounding opinion in philosophical thought – would seem far more committed to a thoroughgoing critique of existing “common sense.”

To the extent that Wordsworth in particular seems committed to reforming “common sense” while retaining a strong and explicit connection to it, the issues that his work raises might be compared to problems raised a century later by Antonio Gramsci. In the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci lamented the antagonism that typically obtained between mental

and manual laborers, and sought accordingly to reduce the conflict between the "philosophy of the intellectuals" and that popular conception of the world that he named "common sense." By way of resolving this conflict, Gramsci conceives a dialectical approach, at once critical of "common sense" and deeply dependent on it, with more than a passing resemblance to Wordsworth's poetics: as Gramsci argues, "A philosophy of praxis . . . must be a criticism of 'common sense,' basing itself initially, however, on common sense" in order to demonstrate that philosophy itself is the task "of renovating and making 'critical' an already existing activity."<sup>3</sup> While Wordsworth and Gramsci may share a commitment to reconciling "common sense" with the critical exercise of reason or self-reflection, however, Wordsworth's request that the reader consult his feelings over against the judgment of others would appear to put the "genius" of the poet or philosopher above or at least prior to the "common sense" of the people, and thus sharply distinguish his own vision from Gramsci's call for a revolutionary critical philosophy. Indeed, Hazlitt himself, far from seeing Wordsworth as a defender of common sense, asserts in the second of his essays on the subject that the poet's egotistical genius is wholly opposed to it.<sup>4</sup> Whereas Gramsci, then, imagines a philosophy of praxis as a critique at once aimed at common sense and based on it, both Wordsworth and Coleridge locate the source for the truest commonality not in the multitude but in the individual's capacity for self-reflection, which they regard as crucial both to the revelation and the renovation of "common sense."

Ironically, it is on account of the view that self-reflection might serve as the basis for the truest commonality that critics from Hazlitt down to the present have been prone to read the Romantics as having least to do with "common sense" precisely where these poets are most actively engaged in the task of renovating and reforming it. The transformation that Harold Bloom, many years ago, named the "Copernican Revolution" of Wordsworth's poetry – "the evanescence of any subject but subjectivity, the loss of what a poem is 'about'"<sup>5</sup> – largely persists as a model for understanding the greater Romantic lyric, perhaps especially in criticism that has taken such acute inwardness as a sign of historical occlusion or displacement. If the early Romantics too presumptuously aimed to "fit" the mind and the world, many historicist readings of this period have taken the opposite approach, attempting rigorously to extract the self-consciousness of Romantic lyric from its social and political engagements.<sup>6</sup>

Yet what is most obviously overlooked in the identification of inwardness with historical occlusion is an understanding of the historicity of



inwardness itself, or the social contexts of self-reflection. Critics have so far failed to register, for instance, how fully the writers of this period conceive self-reflection as an activity designed to reveal general and even universal laws of mankind. In fact, this activity was frequently conceived as a means of addressing some of the most pressing questions confronting the emergent human sciences. In the Preface to the *Discourse on the Origins and Foundations of Inequality among Men*, Jean Jacques Rousseau raised some of these questions: “What experiments would be necessary to achieve knowledge of natural man? And what are the means for making these experiments in the midst of society?”<sup>7</sup> While complicated by Rousseau’s assumption that modern “man” had forsaken his natural state, such questions nonetheless capture the chief difficulty generally facing the human sciences in the moment of their emergence – the problem, that is, of how to determine the basis for commonality among humans in the first place. One approach to Rousseau’s problem – that which we most often associate with human science – was to turn human subjects into experimental objects. An alternative to this approach, however, was to make of oneself an experiment of a similar kind. Of this self-experimental approach Coleridge provides an instructive example in a notebook entry of 1803: “Seem to have made up my mind to write my metaphysical works, as *my Life*, & *in my Life* – intermixed with all the other events/or history of the mind and fortunes of S. T. Coleridge” (CN, 1:1515). Coleridge here settles on a mode of philosophizing that finds its truths, its method, and its evidentiary foundation in “S. T. Coleridge” himself. As in the canonical Romantic lyric, his program for philosophical research seems to admit no subject but subjectivity, and no metaphysics but that which the examples of his own life supply.

I want to pursue in this chapter some of the experimental means for acquiring, through practices of self-observation, knowledge about humankind “in the midst of society,” and to focus on the literary form in which I believe these practices to be concentrated: namely, the “experimental” lyric of early Romanticism. I focus on Coleridge in this context not only because of the range of his experimentation (in philosophy, natural philosophy, and medicine, to name a few fields), but also because of his insistence, within and across all of these fields, on attentive self-observation. It is Coleridge, after all, who in a letter records having performed “a multitude of little experiments on my own sensations and on my senses” in the course of his studies (CL, 2:731); far from representing an aberrant component of his work, such pursuits were utterly central to it. Whereas Descartes famously vowed to “turn away all [his] senses” the better to know himself,

for Coleridge inwardness is necessarily an "aesthetic" in the broadest sense of that term – a form of sensuous cognition integrally related to the process of self-discovery.<sup>8</sup> Following Coleridge, then, I want to ask what kind of knowledge we acquire when we attend to our own sensations, and further ask how, through experimental self-observation, early Romantic literary culture sought to reform "common sense."

We speak regularly, of course, of "experiments" in literary form and practice, and often credit the Romantics with having pioneered the concept of literary experimentation in the first place – a usage perhaps best reflected in Romantic scholarship by the title of Mary Jacobus's study, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads (1798)*.<sup>9</sup> While such a description generally refers (as it does in Jacobus's study) to a spirit of formal innovation rather than to any experimental protocols per se, I will contend that the experimental lyric has a fuller – and more fully literal – connection to philosophic and scientific experimentation in this period.<sup>10</sup> As I will argue, the experimental lyric at once addresses and attempts to resolve the question of how, through self-observation, one determines the basis for "common sense." Inasmuch as such poems depict and frequently seek to promote the activity of self-observation, the experimental lyric raises in a different register questions more familiarly associated in this period with the philosophical discourse of autonomy – with a "Copernican Revolution," in other words, which is associated most closely with Kant. The Romantic literary experiment thus emerges as a unique instantiation of the discourse of autonomy, both an expression of and an effort to overcome the most difficult question raised by that discourse: how does one acquire a standpoint for making judgments that are shared and at the same time individual? In stretching the bounds of convention, the experimental poem is meant to promote self-reflection upon the basis for one's attachment to those conventions in the first place. On account of its explicit or implied emphasis on self-reflection, however, the experimental lyric invites charges of solipsism precisely where it seeks to get beyond it. Thus, the problem that such texts bring to the fore is the difficulty of invoking a "common sense," or normative basis of assent, as the pre-existing foundation for aesthetic, ethical, or political relations.

While much historicist work has gone no farther than to identify inwardness with political escapism *tout court*, or has otherwise viewed it as something the Romantics themselves managed to get beyond,<sup>11</sup> my own approach sees the Romantic literary experiment as seeking paradoxically to realize the social uses of solipsism – if only by revealing in especially

clear terms its own categorical negation. In Coleridge's work especially, one discerns an experimental aesthetics in which "common sense" is realized neither through the formal character of the reflective judgment nor through the universality of sense perception. Rather, I suggest that Coleridge paradoxically sets the condition for invoking common sense as the seeming violation of commonsensical perception. The activity of embodied self-reflection that is both depicted in and required by such experiments is thus of a uniquely self-canceling kind, calling into question the self-sufficiency and integrity of the individual in moments where it seems most to assert it. My essay tracks such experimentation from its formulation in Romantic aesthetic theory to contexts in moral philosophy and medicine. From a consideration of the inevitably "aesthetic" (both sensory and literary) dimension of experimental self-observation, I turn to Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight," a lyric in which the social uses of self-observation are most tellingly explored. While Coleridge's lyric reflects an awareness that there is neither relief from self-consciousness nor an easy way of invoking community, the poem imagines autonomy not as the endowment of the isolated, elevated individual, but rather as the capacity for imagining the conditions of a common sense that is imperceptible but no less integral to subjectivity in the first place. Far from effecting an aestheticized flight from politics, Coleridge's literary experiments seek rather to reconceive the aesthetic as a basis for imagining profoundly altered conditions for judgment and for communities based on the same.

#### AUTONOMY, EMBODIMENT, EXPERIMENT

In his 1803 notebook entry, Coleridge expresses a wish simultaneously to embody the work of metaphysics "*in my Life*" and to textualize his own life "as" a form of metaphysical inquiry. Kathleen Coburn is therefore correct to remark in her gloss on that entry that Coleridge offers "The first hint of the *Biographia Literaria*, and an important elucidation of its form" (CN, 1:1515n). Beyond that "hint," though, Coleridge gestures towards a momentous revolution in modern philosophical thought. Underlying Coleridge's decision to write his metaphysics in and as his life is a shift occurring in this period towards the role of the self as a legitimate source for such discoveries, and for the universal validity of principles so derived. It is a story, in short, of autonomy. Coleridge implicitly posits the autonomous self as the favored basis for metaphysical truth, and as the normative source for such discoveries. In terms familiar to us from Foucault, Coleridge establishes himself as at once the transcendental

subject and empirical object of knowledge that marks the founding moment of modernity and the emergence of "Man."<sup>12</sup>

When Coleridge pledges to ground metaphysics in his life, and Foucault writes of the rupture that brought forth "Man" as the subject and object of knowledge, both clearly invoke the authority of Kant. As is well known, Kant's claim was that the universal laws of judgment, understanding, and morality must be the laws of the agent's own will. It is thus with Kant that what Christine Korsgaard has called "the sources of normativity," or the basis for the claims that morality makes upon us, receives a radically new grounding.<sup>13</sup> Throughout his writings, indeed even before the period of his presumed introduction to Kant, Coleridge claims for the workings of his consciousness a general validity, and is sworn to the notion that the laws of philosophy must be self-derived; as he puts it in a letter of 1796, "My philosophical opinions are blended with, or deduced from, my feelings" (CL, 1:41).

Such remarks are familiar to us in part because they so closely resemble statements made about the normative basis of aesthetic judgment in this period as well. When Wordsworth, for instance, requests that the reader "decide by his own feelings genuinely, and not by reflection upon what will probably be the judgment of others," his remark can be read in terms of the Kantian argument that the normative basis for aesthetic judgment, as for ethical behavior, must be autonomously derived. Certainly Wordsworth's request bears considerable resemblance to Kant's appeal to autonomy over against an earlier model (one which Korsgaard herself associates with Hume) of "reflective endorsement."<sup>14</sup> Using Korsgaard's terms, we can say that the Romantic revolution in aesthetic thought was to have forsaken such a model of "reflective endorsement" for one in which the self-reflection of the autonomous agent determines the normativity of feeling. In one sense, then, Wordsworth's request, like Coleridge's notebook entry, registers what has made the Romantic period, both in its British and German variants, so generally associated with the emergence of the autonomous modern subject.<sup>15</sup>

But Wordsworth's plea to the reader to "abide independently by his own feelings" (LB, 270) bears a dimension unfamiliar to Kant, for whom truly aesthetic judgments are distinct from judgments made on the basis of "feeling." It is true that Kant begins the *Critique of Judgment* by defining an aesthetic judgment as one based on the feeling of pleasure, thus distinguishing aesthetic response from theoretical cognition. Yet Kant repeatedly insists that in order for aesthetic judgments to claim any universal validity they must have their basis for determination in the

faculty of reflection and not in mere sensuous response. So independent is the universal basis for aesthetic judgment from mere sensuous gratification, in fact, that Kant can insist that “aesthetical art, as the art of beauty, has for [its] standard the reflective judgment and not sensation.”<sup>16</sup> Thus as many critics have argued, Kant’s aesthetic emerges peculiarly as an *anaesthetic*, a theory of aesthetic pleasure paradoxically divorced from sensuous pleasure of any kind.<sup>17</sup> As much as Wordsworth’s plea to the reader to “decide by his own feelings genuinely” (like Coleridge’s claim to deduce his philosophical opinions from the same source) echoes Kant’s argument about the autonomy of judgment, in this particular they are distinct. Indeed, this emphasis on kinesthetic as well as affective “feeling” suggests a crucial distinction between Kantian and much of British Romantic aesthetics – even among those British writers, such as Coleridge, most obviously influenced by Kant’s thought.<sup>18</sup> This distinction has been lately re-asserted by a number of critics investigating the embodied basis of imagination in British Romanticism.<sup>19</sup> Yet these same critics have tended to bypass altogether the “normative question” central to the third *Critique*: namely, how aesthetic “feeling” can lay claim to what Kant called “subjective universal validity” at all.<sup>20</sup>

Far from resolving the normative question of Kantian aesthetics, in fact, Romantic testimonies to the embodied character of aesthetic judgment further complicate it. For Kant, the principle condition for the “subjective universal validity” of aesthetic judgment is precisely its status as disinterested and reflective, that is its non-reliance on organic sensation. The assumption of Kant’s aesthetics, moreover, is that self-reflection yields common laws of judgment. And in the third *Critique*, Kant ascribes these laws to the *sensus communis aestheticus*, to “common sense.”<sup>21</sup> Yet what is the possibility for common sense when the senses themselves are the organs of judgment? what are the experiments necessary to illuminate the laws of common sense? and how does one establish the criteria for making such judgments?

As we are now in a position to see, the questions that British Romantic aesthetics raises for the fate of “subjective universal validity” indicate the need for a specifically aesthetic variation on Rousseau’s problem. Such questions, I submit, receive an early and especially powerful formulation in the Romantic period – not least, indeed, by Wordsworth, who famously labeled his poems “experiments” in the “Advertisement” to the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*, and continued to think of them as such throughout his career. Yet Wordsworth is far from the only writer of the period to have arrived at such a conception of aesthetic experiment, or to have understood

its stakes. For Kant, as we have seen, the judgment of taste is normative, that is it claims to be valid for all. Yet the problem that Kant poses for aesthetic judgment is how a subjective response can at once resist being subsumed under *a priori* laws and yet still satisfy the conditions of universal validity. Thus Kant remarks parenthetically, "we cannot determine *a priori* what object is or is not according to taste; that we must find out by experiment."<sup>22</sup> For want of a general standard against which to evaluate works of art, one needs to arrive at a judgment of taste for each individual work. For Kant as well as for Wordsworth, moreover, such trials are to be "considered as experiments" designed to test the normative claims of taste (LB, 7). The question of experimentation is thus raised in Kant's work precisely where the autonomy of judgment becomes an issue. And literary "experiment" is the name that is given in this period to the object that confronts, expresses, or attempts to resolve this issue in aesthetic form.

For Edmund Burke, the most pressing problems of aesthetic common sense were solved simply by referring to the universality of flesh and blood. As most people share the same senses, Burke argued, so "the whole ground-work of Taste is common to all."<sup>23</sup> I confess that I share with Kant, as well as with those literary critics recently concerned with vindicating him, a sense of the inadequacy of such a conclusion.<sup>24</sup> Yet we are mistaken to assume that Burke's is the only position available to an empiricist aesthetics. An alternative approach to the empirical demonstration of common sense, for instance, is suggested by Thomas Reid, to whom I will shortly turn. And Coleridge and Wordsworth further differ from Burke in seeing the problem as more constructively approached through techniques of self-reflection designed, as in Kant, to yield a common sense. It is because aesthetic judgment supposes and indeed requires an act of self-observation – because thinking *for* oneself (*Selbstdenken*, the condition of possibility for critique) necessitates thinking *of* oneself – that the history of aesthetics intersects most compellingly with "the invention of autonomy" in this period. Whereas Kant sought to distance his own use of "common sense" from the external senses, however (ascribing it instead to "the effect resulting from the free play of cognitive powers"),<sup>25</sup> Coleridge – closer to Reid in this respect – regards common sense as dependent for its manifestation, and frequently for its very foundation, on the senses themselves.<sup>26</sup> It is on account of this strongly empirical approach to common sense that the experimental character of British Romantic aesthetics finds a relevant context in the practice of scientific self-experimentation. To understand how self-experiment became

a crucial component of literary evaluation, then, we must attend to its earliest manifestation in the fields of natural and moral philosophy.

#### TECHNIQUES OF THE SELF-OBSERVER

As historians of science have demonstrated in recent years, the experiment – defined broadly as posing “a specific question about nature which the experimental outcome is designed to answer” – was the product of a complex shift occurring through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, not fully codified in any modern sense until the age of Newton.<sup>27</sup> Not long after this time, the procedures of collecting, testing, and verifying sensations in an experimental context were analogized with the practices of reading and aesthetic evaluation, and the literary text began to develop a rhetoric and a set of protocols for examining (and modifying) the principles of critical judgment by similarly experimental means. Aesthetic evaluation and scientific self-experimentation were united through evidentiary criteria and rhetorical strategies that these two pursuits shared.<sup>28</sup> If the first of these criteria was the obvious necessity of appealing to the sensations of the experimental subject, the second condition was that the experience be subject to replication, both in terms of its communicability to a broad range of readers and, increasingly with the Romantic writers, in terms of its capacity to be re-read with the same or a greater degree of pleasure. Just as natural philosophical and medical research put vivacity among the key criteria of evidence, and made the replication of experiment crucial to the determination of its veracity, so too it was largely on the basis of the vivacity and reproducibility of sensations that aesthetic judgments were thought to be made.

It is on account of its resolutely anti-dualist approach to common sense that Romantic literary experimentation not only suggests the most thorny problems raised by the third *Critique*, but also their concrete instantiation in the practices of scientific self-experiment. The story of how the body became an instrument and a legitimate source of critical judgment in aesthetics, and how literature in turn was conceptualized as an experiment designed to test the claims of taste, properly begins with the use of the body as an instrument of knowledge in natural philosophy. In his essay “Self-Evidence,” Simon Schaffer has demonstrated how crucial this practice was to satisfying basic criteria for establishing matters of fact in eighteenth-century science.<sup>29</sup> Schaffer’s essay narrates a struggle in this period over the normative foundations for what would count as scientific evidence. Signaling his departure from Ian Hacking’s definition of evidence as



consisting "in one thing pointing beyond itself," Schaffer highlights instead the vividness of evidence, or the immediate sensuous appeal of empirical observation.<sup>30</sup> It was because vividness was such an important criterion of natural philosophical research, Schaffer contends, that self-experiment was crucial not only in establishing matters of fact, but, in numerous instances throughout the eighteenth century, in estimating the legitimacy of experimental claims.<sup>31</sup>

Schaffer's narrative concludes with Coleridge and the dawn of the Romantic period, at a stage at which he believes the culture of self-experimentation to have departed significantly from the principles on which it was originally established. Other critics have since extended this history, discerning in the self-experimentation of figures such as Humphry Davy and Johann Ritter a literal embodiment of Romanticism's most cherished premises.<sup>32</sup> As the editors of a volume on Romanticism and the sciences have reminded us, this is a period in which the questions central to both literature and the sciences were alike perceived as "questions of self-understanding."<sup>33</sup> What Stuart Strickland has called "the ideology of Romantic science," namely its insistence upon "the mutual implication of self-knowledge and knowledge of nature," thus clearly holds as true for Coleridge as it does, in Strickland's essay, for Ritter.<sup>34</sup> A friend and pupil of Davy and an avid reader of Ritter's work, Coleridge was the very model of a self-experimental ideal. Like Ritter, moreover, whose death at the age of thirty-four was precipitated by frequent self-experimentation, Coleridge's researches were conducted at a price. In the letter to Thomas Poole from which I have already quoted, Coleridge wrote of the ruinous effects of his frequent self-experimentation, and of his turn to opium and alcohol as a consequence: "In the course of these studies, I tried a multitude of little experiments on my own sensations and on my senses, and some of these (too often repeated) I have reason to believe did injury to my nervous system" (CL, 2:731).

Notwithstanding the occasional complaint, Coleridge was deeply steeped in a philosophic and scientific tradition that believed sensuous vivacity to be a crucial criterion for the legitimacy of evidence and the veracity of a truth-claim. Though Coleridge was critical of those who mistook the "sensualized Understanding" for "the true principles of an Experimental Philosophy – i.e. Philosophy suggesting and dictating Experiments,"<sup>35</sup> and therefore insisted upon approaching self-experimentation from the direction of philosophy and not the other way around, it is important to remember that these philosophical pursuits were themselves described and commonly understood as forms of sensuous self-experimentation. Thus, "feelings,"



as Coleridge put it in his letter, remained in a real sense the source of “philosophical opinions.” As early as 1711, Shaftesbury’s *Characteristics* likened the science of the mind to the “practice and art of surgery” – and then promptly added that the obvious difference is that instead of having the “meek patient” before us, “we have each of us ourselves to practise on.” Anticipating by nearly a century the metaphor that Wordsworth would immortalize, Shaftesbury remarks that the activity of self-exploration is thus better likened to “the business of self-dissection.”<sup>36</sup>

#### THOMAS REID AND THE *SENSUS COMMUNIS*

Shaftesbury’s analogy between self-observation and self-experimentation is a typical example of the tendency of moral philosophers at once to assert the relationship between these practices and to draw attention to the fictionality of that relationship. In fact, self-experiment in philosophical writings was much more often an analogical than an actual procedure. In *The Rhetoric of Empiricism*, Jules Law has argued that empiricist writing self-consciously mimics rather than seeks faithfully to duplicate the procedures of natural philosophy. Its much remarked upon emulation of natural philosophical method is thus more fluid and less uncritically positivist than has been asserted: as Law argues, “empiricism does not proceed so much by experiment as by examples and analogies *presented as reproducible experiments*. Thus classical empiricism offers us example and analogy (and thus rhetoric) precisely in the place where modern empiricism would expect experimental procedures.”<sup>37</sup>

In discussing the techniques of empiricist writing, however, Law does not examine the work of a philosopher who did seek to bring a genuinely experimental moral philosophy into alliance with the tenets of “common sense,” namely Thomas Reid. Not only did Reid’s pupil, Dugald Stewart, credit his mentor with being the first to apply the experimental methods of Baconian induction to the science of the mind; more recently, philosophers of science have credited Reid with being “the first major British philosopher to take Newton’s opinions on induction, causality, and hypotheses seriously.”<sup>38</sup> The very title of Reid’s famous work, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind, on the Principles of Common Sense*, underscores how fully “common sense” is meant to serve as the presupposed ground of inquiry. Yet there are moments in Reid’s text where what one critic has called the author’s “aggressive hyper-inductivism” causes him to inquire further into the foundations of common sense itself, even at the risk of raising doubts as to the sturdiness of those foundations.<sup>39</sup> Reid thus offers

an example of a strong empiricism which, unsettling the very commonality it would assert, reflects an emergent tension and apparent conflict between inwardness and "common sense."

As is well known, Reid's philosophy is expressly meant to correct the damaging conclusions of philosophers, Berkeley and Hume foremost, who mistake the images of external objects for the objects themselves, thus falling into positions either of idealism or skepticism. In his experiments, however, Reid seeks paradoxically to disprove these positions by invoking in the reader perceptual effects most likely to confirm them – effects, as he writes, "most contrary to the common rules of vision."<sup>40</sup> That we do not "see things always in their true place and position" Reid is more than willing to grant;<sup>41</sup> yet our firm belief in their "true place" is one of the most basic and incontrovertible laws of our physical and mental constitution. In support of this hypothesis, Reid gives a series of experiments that require one to observe an object at varying distances, and from perspectives or through media (such as pinholes in a card) that will produce a duplicate or even triplicate visual image of the object. The simplest of these experiments requires one to observe a candle or similar object at a distance, obtrude a finger into your line of vision, and then focus alternately on the finger or the candle. In this act of attention, Reid points out, the other object will appear as two.

Though double vision is easily produced through such exercises, Reid argues, it is not, under normal circumstances of vision, present to the mind, for the simple reason that no such doubling appears in the world. To adopt the terms of Reid's important distinction, the experience of double vision is a sensation but not a perception in having for its object only the feeling itself. It is in falsely conflating sensation and perception, Reid argues, and in thus mistaking the chimera of sensation for indications of a chimerical real, that the errors of philosophy have been perpetrated. Therefore it is only by separating these synthesized components of our perception that we may understand how the very synthetic character of consciousness conforms to constant and recognizable laws of nature. Experiment, in Reid's understanding, thus relies on a two-stage process in which one first dislodges common sense – violates the "common rules" of perception – in order to reaffirm it. Reid's experiments call for the violation of "the common rules of vision" so as to bring home to the reader how common in fact these rules are. In experimentally demonstrating the bifurcation of the visual field – a peculiarity of sensation not so much overcome as *overlooked* in everyday perception – his experiments are designed to avoid the trap into which he believed other philosophers to have fallen.

One cannot fail to note, however, the extent to which Reid's experimental procedures seem to jeopardize the conclusions to which his experiments are supposed to lead. His technique of experimentally replicating an aberrant sensation in order to affirm a basic truth about common-sense perception obviously requires one to attend to a sensation that would otherwise go unnoticed. Yet in turning the attention to this new sensation – in converting sensation into perception, in Reid's own terms – there is a greater likelihood that the perception will remain in the brain, and thus through habit or custom determine future perceptions.<sup>42</sup> Is the phenomenon of double vision a sensation which, once perceived, will render common-sense vision itself aberrant? And if not, by what covert laws does this sensation manage to escape notice? The questions to which Reid's experiments inevitably give rise explain why the only scholars to attend at any length to Reid's account of double vision acknowledge its conceivable "outrage against the common sense which it was the general purpose of his philosophy to confirm."<sup>43</sup> Experimental self-observation in Reid's work can be seen as alternately supporting and unsettling the foundations of common sense, exposing the synthetic nature of reality even while it purports to establish it as normative. In so revealing the aberrance of our "natural" (though occulted) sensations, such experiments open the possibility that our common sense is the result not of a natural order but arises rather as the effect of a prior act of construction.<sup>44</sup> The mental operations on which Reid stakes his experimental demonstration of common sense thus conceivably endanger as much as they confirm those essential laws of belief.

#### MAPS OF MISREADING

As Reid's examples make clear, experiments designed to explain the laws of belief that structure commonsense perception aim precisely to disrupt common sense in order to better understand its occulted processes. Reid's commitment to the easy reproducibility of these procedures further explains why such experiments involve the most common objects. It may not surprise us, then, to learn that the object most frequently invoked in records of self-experiment is the book itself. In the *Inquiry*, for example, Reid bids the reader to "look upon any familiar object, such as a book, at different distances and in different positions," in support of the most "commonsensical" claims (here, that the same object will appear differently to the eye).<sup>45</sup>

Yet if we take seriously Law's contention that empiricist thought engages dialectically with the relation of perception to language, we will see that the experimental use of the book also serves as an occasion to examine and compare the exercise of innate faculties and acquired traits. Through the use of the book in scenes of experimental self-observation, issues of psycho-physiological perception slide ineffably into issues of cultural and even aesthetic perception, and these are revealed to be fundamentally related registers of cognition. The importance of the book in the experimental scene is not only due to the fact that it is a familiar object, but also that reading is a process occurring – in the case of those Britons of the "polite" ranks to whom such texts were written – without a conscious act of reflection upon the conditions of its practice that make that activity possible. By making an alteration in perception precipitate a momentary failure of reading, then, such experiments estrange the common activities of seeing and reading in order to call attention to the otherwise imperceptible conditions that make these activities possible (or impossible) in the first place.

For an example of what I mean, consider the following passage from a medical text of the late eighteenth century, Alexander Monro's *Three Treatises on the Brain, the Eye, and the Ear* (1797). A member of the most influential medical dynasty in eighteenth-century Scotland (his father, Monro *primus*, was Edinburgh University's first Professor of Anatomy), and himself a frequent practitioner of self-experimentation, Monro *secundus* offers this easily reproducible experiment with visual perception:

In a closet, lighted by a small single window, I sat on a chair, with my back to the window, and fixed a Book, with Small Print, on the opposite wall. I then brought my Eyes so near the Book, that the Letters became indistinct. I then made an Exertion to read, without contracting the Orbicularis; or, I opened the Eyelids wide, by acting with the Attollens Palpebram Superiorem; or, I held the Upper and Under Eyelids with my fingers at a distance from each other, and then repeated my effort to read the Book; but found I could not do it.<sup>46</sup>

I think that one needn't be able to identify the "Attollens Palpebram Superiorem" in order to conduct the sort of experiment that Monro describes here – and of course this is partly the issue. In its appeal to objects of immediate accessibility and qualitative indistinguishability (the only criterion for the book itself, after all, is that it have small print), it is a form of experiment committed to easy replication and therefore to a publicness fitted to what Steven Shapin has determined as "the audience for science" in eighteenth-century Scotland, an audience consisting mostly in landholders with little or no formal background in science.<sup>47</sup>

Like Monro, Coleridge (who was at least minimally familiar with the physician's work) was invested in conducting experiments designed to illuminate familiar structures of perception.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, like Monro's, Coleridge's experiments frequently employ the book as an experimental object, and reading as an activity to be disrupted through a perceptual alteration. Consider the following experiment, recorded in a notebook entry of 1803:

Morning / Just rolled bits of paper, many fine little bits of wick, some tallow, and the soap together/the whole flame equal in size to half a dozen Candles did not give the Light of one / & the letters of the Book looked by the unsteady Flame, just as thro' Tears, or in dizziness. <Every line of every Letter dislocated into angles / or like the mica in crumbly Stones.> (CN, 1:1771)

Coleridge's inference from this experiment, that motion "is presence and absence rapidly alternating" in our consciousness, has its roots in his reading of Kant, and will be worked out at greater length in the *Biographia Literaria* (BL, 1:116–28; see also CN, 1:1771n.). In an account more obviously attentive than Monro's to the particularity of his sensations, Coleridge records the perceptual effects produced through his experimental use of the book – effects which, as he argues, occur in us constantly without our awareness. As in Reid's experiments, then, Coleridge calls attention to the presence of two discrete phenomena – "presence and absence rapidly alternating" – that we experience under normal circumstances as unified. His experiment attempts to disrupt in order to apprehend more adequately an overlooked phenomenon of consciousness.

It will be clear that Coleridge's experimental uses of the book are designed to produce an "aesthetic" experience even if the text itself is not considered more narrowly aesthetic or literary per se. Moreover, such experiments ask for scientific purposes questions equally central to eighteenth-century aesthetics: what are the conditions for reading, and for construing that activity as a "common sense"? While for Reid the experimental use of the book serves as a figure for how idealist and skeptical philosophers fall into error, Coleridge's practice of experimental reading indicates a subject not exclusively for scientific reflection, but for aesthetic perception itself. Through the use of the book, in other words, Coleridge indicates, in terms we often associate with Kantian thought, how the project of philosophy effectuates and completes itself in the aesthetic domain. It is in defamiliarizing the activity of reading that one is allowed to experience a simulation of the many conditions – of physiology, psychology, and environment – that make a conventionally

aesthetic experience possible. Perhaps it is that the failure to read the book under controlled conditions will persuade us, as such experiments in Reid are clearly meant to do, of the triumph of common sense when such conditions obtain. But to say as much is to underestimate the degree to which the failure of reading is a highly ambivalent phenomenon, at once an enabling and disabling condition for the assertion of a *sensus communis*.

I want to argue that a version of the scenario I have just described features centrally in Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight," where the experimental scene of reading is presented to similar effect. I refer to lines in that famed "conversation" poem where the speaker recollects the visions that sustained him during his childhood in the city. As is well known, that poem tracks the speaker's thought as it ranges from the present-tense observation of the "fluttering *stranger*" in the fireplace grate, to recollections of his childhood triggered by his observation of the "stranger," and then in the final movement of the poem to an anticipation of Hartley's future development away from the city and its harmful influence (STC, 1:240–2, quotation from line 26). The scene that I want to call "experimental" occurs in the second of these movements, when as a child he gazed at the grate, day-dreaming

till the soothing things, I dreamt,  
Lulled me to sleep, and sleep prolonged my dreams!  
And so I brooded all the following morn,  
Awed by the stern preceptor's face, mine eye  
Fixed with mock study on my swimming book . . . (34–8)

The failure of reading in this passage is obviously also a scene of failed pedagogy. Yet it is not the simulation of attention in "mock study" that makes this scene of instruction a failure. In fact, Coleridge does not depict a state of inattention so much as one of excessive attention, figured by the "unclosed lids" and "[f]ixed" gaze of the speaker (27, 38). The child's attention is fixed so exclusively on the hope "to see the *stranger's* face" (41), however, that his mind neither rests upon the book nor upon his own sensations. It is this high degree of concentration, coupled with a "most believing mind" (24), that makes the book appear to "swim." The attention fixes on the immediate objects of perception only insofar as they portend of "things to come" (33).

Analyses of "Frost at Midnight" have tended to read this episode as significant only insofar as it represents a "before" to the "before and after" portraits that the poem most obviously offers.<sup>49</sup> Thus in most critical readings of the poem, the scene of failed instruction is itself considered

instructive only as a cue to recognizing that the pedagogical experience therein depicted is to be redeemed in the future. In his sensitive reading of Coleridge's poem, for instance, Reeve Parker has argued that the significant movement of the poem tracks "from the willful and superstitious solipsism of a depressed sensibility . . . to the apprehension of a regenerate companionship" in Hartley and the world of nature.<sup>50</sup> Following the logic of Parker's argument, we can say that the boy's "superstitious" cast of mind prefigures the solipsistic "musings" of the speaker in the opening of the poem (6), and thus both represent states of mind that must be replaced by the apprehension of a companionship founded on a more substantial basis. The knowledge that comforts the speaker, therefore, is the possibility that his son "shalt learn far other lore, / And in far other scenes!" (50–1). Not surprisingly, we learn that this new and more effective lore will entail, through interaction with nature, a stronger and more permanent relationship to objects of sense: "so shalt thou see and hear / The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible / Of that eternal language, which thy God / Utters" (58–61). The education that the child will receive will redeem the failed education that is imaged in the speaker's "swimming book." Coleridge therefore invokes the scene of failed reading to indicate a possible line of flight from solipsism, and the speaker's anticipation of a future that Hartley himself will come to embody.

Described in this manner, "Frost at Midnight" offers a straightforwardly diachronic solution to the problem it presents: the sound education that was wanting in Coleridge himself will be realized in Hartley, who will come to have a more solid grounding in "common sense." The poem reaches its conclusion when the speaker's consciousness reflects an awareness of this "regenerate companionship," in Parker's words, and so learns to rejoice in it. Parker is certainly correct to discern the most significant movement in the poem as one of consciousness towards this apprehension. Yet "Frost at Midnight" is also, and just as obviously, an exploration of the mechanisms of consciousness. Coleridge's poem, in other words, is not solely designed to record a moment of consciousness; just as crucially, it is intended to shed light on the mental operations that account for this state of consciousness. In a symbiosis typical of the age – think of Wordsworth's daffodils poem – the activity of the mind not only constitutes the action of the poem (the movement from superstition to substantial belief, as Parker describes it in the case of "Frost at Midnight"), but the action of the poem also seeks to explain something about the activity of the mind.

"Frost at Midnight" provides an exemplary instance of such reciprocity between internal and external action in keeping this double purpose

firmly in view. For example, the celebrated lines in which the speaker finds a "companionable form" in the fluttering stranger evince both a consciousness of their likeness and a commentary on the nature of the comparison itself (19). As a simple instance of analogical thinking, the speaker's comparison is described as a "toy of Thought" (23) not unlike that which Reid excoriates in his philosophical contemporaries. In the first printed version of the poem, Coleridge is even more explicit in calling such analogies "curious toys / Of the self-watching subtilizing mind" (STC, 1:241). Indeed, the peculiar construction of the lines in which Coleridge introduces the comparison between himself and the "stranger" – "*Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature / Gives it dim sympathies with me who live*" (17–18, my emphasis) – at once suggests and linguistically reproduces such a state of "self-watching."

In Parker's reading of the poem, and in many readings since, it is precisely this state of "self-watching" that represents the tyranny of the solipsistic mentality over the consciousness of regenerate companionship. Indeed, there has been considerable critical consensus that the poem depicts the process by which one overcomes self-consciousness, or at least attempts to do so.<sup>51</sup> Yet this interpretation fails to account for why Coleridge's poem would *itself* be represented as a toy of the self-watching mind, a reflection on the activity of self-reflection – why, in other words, the narrative of socialization that Parker rightly describes as central to the poem is embedded within an account of the poet's own "self-watching" mental activity. A more adequate interpretation must therefore read "Frost at Midnight" as a meditation on the very conditions of self-consciousness, or the processes by which one reflects upon the "film" (as the "stranger" is first introduced in the poem) that structures consciousness and marks it as always-already social in the first place (15). As in those experiments involving the failure of reading, the speaker's self-exploration is meant to illuminate the conditions of perception, mental bearing, and environmental or social context that make commonsensical perception possible. It is undeniable that by the turn to Hartley in the final movement of the poem Coleridge wishes to indicate the ultimate necessity of socializing these "[a]bstruser musings" (6). Yet while, on the one hand, "Frost at Midnight" seems to advocate abandoning the preoccupations of the "self-watching subtilizing mind" for the consciousness of a regenerate companionship, on the other, the poem suggests that it is only within and through such self-observation that one may establish those more permanent connections in the first place.<sup>52</sup>



For Coleridge, then, it is not by overcoming so much as by intensifying self-consciousness that the speaker of “Frost at Midnight” comes to experience a “companionable form” in Hartley. The dialectical movement of mind that Coleridge describes here, however, bears little resemblance to the Romantic journey in and through self-consciousness described by Hartman and Bloom, but rather more closely resembles those experiments in which, by the seeming violation of common sense, one reveals new conditions for imagining a *sensus communis*. In fact, Coleridge makes explicit his experimental disruption of “common sense” in lines revised for the *Poetical Register* of 1808–9 (not published until 1812), attributing such toys of thought to “the living spirit in our frame” that projects itself into “all things,”

sometimes with deep faith,  
 And sometimes with a wilful playfulness  
 That stealing pardon from our common sense  
 Smiles, as self-scornful, to disarm the scorn  
 For those wild reliques of our childish Thought,  
 That flit about, oft go, and oft return  
 Not uninvited.

(STC, 1:241)

Coleridge’s lines draw an explicit parallel between these “reliques” of childish thought and the “superstitious wish” of his childhood, but without the opprobrium that critics often believe to be attached to these incidents. Indeed, the motions of the “self-watching subtilizing mind” that first seem inimical to the apprehension of a “companionable form” are instead revealed as crucial to that apprehension. Coleridge thereby seeks to demonstrate how “common sense” might be debilitated and rejuvenated – both renovated and made “critical,” in Gramsci’s terms – in the same stroke.

While generally not counted among the verse-experiments of 1798, then, “Frost at Midnight” does offer, in a characteristically Coleridgean mode, a template for understanding how such experiments are carried out.<sup>53</sup> But there is another sense in which we can read the experimental scene of Coleridge’s poem, namely as an experiment in reading itself. The references to books and reading serve as a reminder, should any be needed, of how clearly “Frost at Midnight” is intended to allegorize the reading experience: in Coleridge’s account of the “swimming book,” that is, we read an appeal to how one might best approach the book presently in hand. To follow the experimental logic of the poem, however, we find the reading that “Frost at Midnight” prescribes to be of a highly unusual kind. It is not uncommon for the literature of the period to insist on a

state of fixed attention that would inhibit the "mock study" that Coleridge describes. In the dedicatory preface to *The Deserted Village*, for instance, Oliver Goldsmith declared that "I want [the reader's] unfatigued attention," and indeed much imaginative writing of this period – Wordsworth's included – makes similarly stringent demands on its readership.<sup>54</sup> Yet Coleridge gestures to a use for that experience of "mock study" as paradoxically allowing for a more faithful and ethically sensitive reading of the text than would be possible through a more focused act of attention. In its appeal to readerly self-observation, "Frost at Midnight" gives a different kind of support to the more modern notion that the strong reading is necessarily a misreading.<sup>55</sup>

#### SOLIPSISM AND SOCIALITY

I have been arguing that we can best understand "Frost at Midnight" and poems of its kind not as efforts to overcome self-consciousness so much as attempts to dramatize the conditions of self-consciousness that make possible the apprehension of a "common sense" or basis for community in the first place. As in "Tintern Abbey," a poem whose indebtedness to "Frost at Midnight" is well known, Coleridge's "conversation" lyrics culminate in a moment of "virtual" conversation or address to an otherwise absent audience. Yet the critical view that the speaker of these poems turns to another out of a need of the imperial consciousness at once to extend and secure its domain<sup>56</sup> – a reading to which "Frost at Midnight," like "Tintern Abbey," would appear particularly vulnerable – seems to me fundamentally mistaken. For these "conversation" poems imagine conversation neither as the reward of a transcendent consciousness nor as the extension of its powers; rather, such poems conceive community as the very medium of self-consciousness (its "film," in Coleridge's idiom), as a constitutive outside that structures perception imperceptibly from within. The revelation of a *sensus communis* (an aesthetic or social community) in these poems thus depends crucially on the seeming violation of a common sense (a normative structure of perception) that erroneously trusts to the integrity and self-sufficiency of one's perceptions in the first place.

That the apprehension of commonality in these poems is arrived at by such circuitous means is due in part to the solitary acts of self-reflection that such experiments describe and would appear to require. The processes that Reid and Monro elaborate for acts of experimental self-reflection, and which Coleridge and Wordsworth develop for aesthetic experience, set the conditions for judgment not only in a state of altered perception,

but conceive such acts of judgment as taking place, at least figuratively, in privacy. Coleridge's depiction of the scene of self-observation in the opening lines of "Frost at Midnight" – of a "solitude, which suits / Abstruser musings" (5–6) – thus anticipates a still more insistent depiction of lyrical solitude, John Stuart Mill's "What is Poetry?," which famously characterizes poetry as "feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude," and compares lyric utterance to "the lament of a prisoner in a solitary cell, ourselves listening, unseen in the next."<sup>57</sup>

As an attempt to define the privacy of the lyric speaker, Mill's account emphasizes the poet's total (though arguably unwilling) self-enclosure. Though neither Coleridge nor Wordsworth produce in their poetry a similar *reductio ad absurdum* of authorial autonomy, neither poet was entirely free of a tendency to valorize such a condition as the normative model of subjectivity. In 1801, for instance, Coleridge writes about his wife Sara, whom he suspects of having "an habitual absence of reality in her affections":

Sara's . . . coldness perhaps and paralysis in all *tangible* ideas and sensations – all that forms *real Self* – hence . . . she creates her own self in a field of Vision and Hearing, at a distance, by her own ears and eyes – and hence becomes the willing Slave of the Ears and Eyes of others. – Nothing affects her with pain or pleasure as it is but only as other people will *say it is* . . . (CN, 1:979)

Coleridge's distinction between the thoughts and sensations constitutive of "real Self" and those which, having their point of reference "at a distance" from oneself, have their source more in the "Ears and Eyes of others," has its basis in an epistemological privileging of "tangible sensations" over the senses of vision and hearing, which are intelligible only in relation "to some distinct separate, visible part of some other Body."<sup>58</sup> As an assertion of perceptual autonomy over what Korsgaard names the method of "reflective endorsement" (which locates the normativity of a given claim in the probable response of others), Coleridge's entry bears a strong resemblance to Wordsworth's contemporaneous assertion of the autonomy of aesthetic judgment over against that reflective mode of criticism that the poet excoriates in the 1800 Preface.

There is not much to surprise us in Coleridge's conclusion that "real Self" – that is, autonomous subjectivity, "the Life of the whole man" (CN, 1:979) – is preferable to the reflective self that he attributes to Sara. Nor can or should we overlook the sexism of Coleridge's remark, not only as it privileges his own perception, but as it raises the more troubling question of whether autonomy is an ideal that is universal in theory but

exclusive in practice. Indeed, Coleridge's entry indicates how persistently the discourse of autonomy is capable of producing a universal ideal whose very parameters are implicitly defined by criteria such as gender or class, for instance, which include an elect few and exclude others. One may trace a similarly problematic assertion in Wordsworth's caveat to his claim for the autonomy of aesthetic judgment: "An accurate taste in poetry," Wordsworth writes, "is an acquired talent, which can only be produced by severe thought, and a long continued intercourse with the best models of composition" (LB, 8). Though Wordsworth, having appealed to the reader's feelings over against "our pre-established codes of decision" only sentences before, is fully capable of perceiving the difficult position he has struck with respect to the autonomy of judgment, he is less successful in evading or circumventing this difficulty. Instead, the poet's effort to resolve a contradiction previously grappled with in Hume's "Of the Standard of Taste" necessitates the impossible task of persuading "the most inexperienced reader" of the inaccuracy of his or her own judgment without actually disqualifying the judgment itself (LB, 8).

Neither in their writings nor in their poetic careers did Wordsworth or Coleridge manage to provide a fully satisfactory account of how a radical inwardness might square with the demand that poetry be read by an audience of more than one; nor, I think, have such difficulties proved easier to resolve today. To see the full force of this problem expressed, however, one could do worse than to turn to an overtly experimental poem of 1798 such as Wordsworth's "Simon Lee." That poem reverses the trajectory of "Frost at Midnight," at first invoking and then repudiating a straightforward community through sympathy with the eponymous figure. "Simon Lee" courts only to reject an unreflective sympathetic response, and then insists, in the poem's famous apostrophe, that it is only the reader who takes pains to "think" who will be able to make meaning of the incident (LB, 62, line 79). Romantic experiments such as these demand that the reader turn inward and thus reproduce the condition of inwardness that is so often their implied subject. Implicitly or explicitly, they refuse the self-evidence of a *sensus communis*, complicating the notion that one may invoke a pre-existing community of taste, sympathy, or doctrine as the ground of aesthetic or social relations. In so insisting on the priority of inwardness, however, such experiments also expose the limitations of the very category of individuality that supposedly underwrites them. One apprehends the conditions of possibility for a common sense when through introspection the normative pre-suppositions of consciousness are found to be in error.

While historicist readings of Romanticism frequently discern a communal dimension of lyric emerging largely in spite of its self-conscious subject (in both senses of that word), I am more inclined to see these poems as questioning the notion that consciousness is truly private at all, and thus as imaginative reflections on the conditions for creating alternative forms for community.<sup>59</sup> In “Frost at Midnight,” the speaker’s solitude initially appears to be a condition for the ensuing meditation, with Hartley’s presence barely more than an afterthought. Through the course of the poem, however, it becomes increasingly clear how central is Hartley’s presence to the speaker’s thoughts. The meditation that first seemed to depend so much on isolated subjectivity turns out, on the contrary, to have depended all along on the presence that fills up “the interspersed vacancies / And momentary pauses of the thought” (46–7). Through self-reflection, in other words, the speaker becomes aware of the intervening medium of a “stranger” that is revealed to be the essential supplement to his own consciousness. Whereas “Simon Lee” more explicitly emphasizes the frailty of existing social bonds, thereby establishing a need for new conditions of communal awareness, “Frost at Midnight” moves towards the speaker’s apprehension that his isolated consciousness is neither thoroughly isolated nor truly “his” at all. The standpoint of autonomy in such poems is not that of isolated, elevated selfhood so much as it is the capacity for destabilizing the ground on which the self and the social are alike defined.

#### NORM AND FORM: THE CASE OF METER

The challenge that such experiments in perceptual defamiliarization conceivably presented to the foundations of common sense philosophy were plain to its defenders. In his critical and biographical account of Reid, for instance, Stewart defines common sense as a regulative idea which, if questioned, “would expose [men] universally to the charge of insanity.”<sup>60</sup> The irony of Stewart’s assertion is that Reid himself describes experiences of aberrant perception not merely as deviations from common sense, but as means to its apprehension. On this basis, Reid’s account of the process by which the “common rules” of perception are violated or temporarily suspended anticipates Romanticism’s better-known accounts of poetry as a medium for “awakening the mind’s attention from the lethargy of custom,” as Coleridge famously described the project of the *Lyrical Ballads*. Coleridge’s conception of poetry as removing “the film of familiarity” that compromises our perception emerges as a central

component of the avant-gardist critical aesthetics of Shelley, who adopts this phrase in his own famous remarks on poetry in the *Defence* (BL, 2:7; SPP, 533); and the same premise features centrally in critical reconstructions of this ideal by (among others) Abrams, who made the defamiliarizing function of Romantic poetry a key component of its naturalized theodicy.<sup>61</sup>

To understand better the sense in which Romanticism's tactics of defamiliarization might at the same time, as in Reid's experiments, reveal conditions for constituting or reconstituting a common sense, we must shift focus from the paradigm of visual experimentation – from Reid's account of double-vision to the "film" and "swimming book" of Coleridge's "Frost" – to consider a formal feature closely associated with the purposes of literary experimentation in this period, namely poetic meter. If the body was the instrument on which an experimental poetry was supposed to act (producing "changes even in our physical nature," as Wordsworth claimed), metrical language was readily identified as its first and most powerful stimulus. We'll recall that Wordsworth begins the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* by characterizing the experiments therein as efforts to adapt "the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation" to the purposes of "metrical arrangement" (LB, 241). From the very inception of a self-described experimental literary practice, poets defined meter as a test case for the ambitions of poetry to act on and to alter the sensibilities of its readership.<sup>62</sup>

The notion that metrical language plays an integral part in defamiliarizing habitual acts of perception provides a foundation for David Miall's argument that Romantic poetry has unique access to "powerful bodily rhythms that tend to pass unnoticed," thereby "put[ting] us in touch with this level of our bodily functioning."<sup>63</sup> On this account, the physicality of meter does more than merely call attention to the occulted functions of the body. More importantly, by estranging the reader's habitual and automatic associations of sensations to ideas, Romantic poetry serves a vitally epistemo-political function by mounting a resistance to "the old, damaging, dualistic forms of thought."<sup>64</sup>

Where Miall makes an elegant case for meter as an instrument for short-circuiting customary channels of thought and feeling, other critics have emphasized the opposite tendency of meter to furnish a psychological basis for the concept of literary convention. In this view, the characterization of metrical language as a fundamentally defamiliarizing medium elides a crucial component of Romantic theories of meter, in which the gratification of associative mental habits is described as being of

primary importance. In his essay "Romantic Verse Form and the Metrical Contract," John Hollander suggested that a significant facet of poets' approaches to meter in this period was their consciousness of what Wordsworth called the poet's "formal engagement [to] gratify certain known habits of association" by the act of writing in verse (LB, 243). By identifying the deep-seated customary basis of metrical language, Wordsworth was thus first to forge something approximating the "modern literary-historical concept . . . of convention."<sup>65</sup>

Is the principal function of meter, then, to reinforce existing norms and "known habits of association"? Or is meter rather intended, through formal innovation and experiment, to loosen our unconscious attachment to those conventions? In noting the widely dissimilar conclusions to which readers of Romanticism have been led, scholars have in fact observed how fully this debate over the function and effects of meter was an invention of the Romantics themselves. More particularly, though, we can observe how for Coleridge especially the very terms of this debate are held in suspension. Coleridge's profound commitment to the formal autonomy of meter, and his resistance to assigning to metrical language a determinate purpose or end, was in fact vital to his conception of an experimental poetic practice. In the *Biographia*, Coleridge sought to distinguish metrical language from poetic diction, and criticized Wordsworth for what he regarded as the poet's conflation of these terms (e.g., BL 2:66–7). In the early notebooks especially, Coleridge's frequent experimentation with various metrical arrangements attests to his long-standing interest in meter considered independently of other poetic features and effects (e.g., CN, 1:372–3, STC, 2:1014–19).

For Coleridge, that is to say, the poet composes in meter neither to defy nor to gratify readerly expectation; nor, in his view, has either of these effects any self-evident ascendancy over the other. While granting that meter inevitably (though tacitly) works towards both ends, Coleridge is at the same time insistent that this process takes place at a distinctly sub- or pre-conscious level. Consider the following passage from the *Biographia*, where Coleridge provides one of the period's fullest accounts of how metrical language affects the consciousness of poet and reader alike:

As far as metre acts in and for itself, it tends to increase the vivacity and susceptibility both of the general feelings and of the attention. This effect it produces by the continued excitement of surprise, and by the quick reciprocations of curiosity still gratified and still re-excited, which are too slight indeed to be at any one moment objects of distinct consciousness, yet become considerable

in their aggregate influence. As a medicated atmosphere, or as wine during animated conversation; they act powerfully, though themselves unnoticed. (BL, 2:66)

In language reminiscent of his former affiliation with the Pneumatic Institute, Coleridge describes the process by which meter increases the "susceptibility" of the feelings and attention while remaining just beneath the threshold of consciousness. If attention, as Reid influentially defined it, is the power that renders the mind receptive to impression, then meter is in Coleridge's account nothing more or less than a stimulant of stimulation itself – a consciousness-raising medium that eludes conscious apprehension in its own right.<sup>66</sup> (Coleridge returns to this paradoxical formulation in his most cogent, if also most blatantly tautological, definition: "Metre in itself is simply a stimulant of the attention" [BL, 2:69].) In the idiom of Reid's common sense philosophy, these are sensations that rise only intermittently, if at all, into perceptions.

For Coleridge, then, the sole purpose that can be ascribed to metrical composition is the categorical distinction imposed by the decision to use language in this way: "I write in meter because I am about to use a language different from that of prose" (BL, 2:69). As a model for the mind on which it also works, meter simulates habitual patterns of association that are made only fleetingly available to consciousness through those "feelings of strangeness and awkwardness" that Wordsworth identified as the central effect of an experimental literary practice.<sup>67</sup> Metrical language is thus at once in the position of perpetually ratifying and violating the normative conditions of mind to which it corresponds. Meter elicits sensations, or furnishes conditions for receiving sensations, against which the normative terms of the metrical contract itself are gauged.

#### CONCLUSION: THE *EXPERIMENTUM CRUCIS*

In his 1804 review of Dugald Stewart's *Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Reid*, Francis Jeffrey punctured the ambitions of so many would-be Newtons who had claimed to have reduced the study of mind to an exact science. The general charge of Jeffrey's argument is that the much touted analogy between natural and moral philosophy is ultimately false. In contrast to natural philosophy, Jeffrey maintained, moral philosophy allows us to observe but not to alter the operations of mind: "we cannot subject them to experiment, or alter their nature by any process of investigation."<sup>68</sup> It is on account of this paucity of psychological inquiry that the Whiggish Jeffrey is led to conclusions quite opposite to the so-called "Whig interpretation of history": "In reality, it does not appear



that any great advancement in the knowledge of the operations of the mind is to be expected . . . or that the condition of mankind is likely to derive any great benefit from the cultivation of this interesting but abstracted study.”<sup>69</sup>

Having bluntly asserted, however, that the philosophy of mind was incapable of experimentally establishing the principles of common sense, and thus that this branch of study was unlikely ever to provide any material benefit to the world, Jeffrey capitulates on this point only paragraphs later. The key to proving or disproving an epistemological common sense, he suggests, might indeed be obtained through an analysis of altered states of consciousness: “The phenomena of Dreaming and of Delirium . . . appear to afford a sort of *experimentum crucis*, to demonstrate that a real external existence is not necessary to produce sensation and perception in the human mind.”<sup>70</sup> An unregenerate skeptic, Jeffrey saw the case against Hume as far from closed, and thus calls for a new direction in psychological research. Yet Jeffrey’s remark also serves as a reminder of how far the writers of his generation pursued this new direction of inquiry and explored the possible consequences of such an *experimentum crucis* in imaginative as well as scientific form. Stewart, for instance, who responds at length to Jeffrey’s critique in the “Preliminary Dissertation” of his *Philosophical Essays* (1810), notes the patently experimental character of aesthetic judgment in his influential essay “On Taste” from that same volume. Though the science of the mind may not permit regular experimentation on its object, Stewart argued, in connection to the sense of beauty “we possess . . . the singular advantage of always carrying about us the materials of our experiments.”<sup>71</sup> While acknowledging that such aesthetic experiments lack the rigor and formality of the natural sciences, and despite the fact that in most cases the mind remains “wholly unconscious that such experiments have ever been made,” Stewart makes a strong case for regarding the sensuous exercise of the aesthetic judgment as analogous to, but ultimately independent of, “the rules of philosophizing.”<sup>72</sup>

For further expressions of this experimental ideal in the Romantic period, we can turn, as has Jennifer Ford in her recent study, to Coleridge’s reflections on dreaming as a mental state suspended between mind and body; to Humphry Davy’s literary and scientific records of his self-experimentation with nitrous oxide and other gases; or, somewhat later in the nineteenth century, to the experimental record of dreaming and delirium offered up by that most famous epigone of the early Romantics, Thomas De Quincey. De Quincey’s wish that his *Confessions* would be

"useful and instructive" is well known, as is his frequent insistence that his considerable experimentation with opium makes him well-qualified to speak as an expert on the subject.<sup>73</sup> What De Quincey self-consciously suggests is how the literature of this period might count, both in ways that we have long explored and ways that we have just begun to register, as a contribution to the theory and history of knowledge.

Yet there is another sense in which De Quincey might offer an *experimentum crucis* – not for the science of mind, however, but for aesthetic judgment itself. For De Quincey's narrative of dreaming and delirium exploits more rigorously than any Romantic-period text the fundamental similarity between the practices of self-experimentation and the formal conditions of aesthetic judgment. I have traced how the activity of experimental self-observation frequently produces a distortion of common sense – an experience of double vision, a relic of childish thought – as the condition of invoking a *sensus communis* or basis for aesthetic or ethical community. Such narratives as the *Confessions*, with its anxious opening address "To the Reader," embody this experimental act and so compel its readers to encounter it in similarly embodied form. Underlying De Quincey's pleading and his nervous sensitivity to reproach in those pages, perhaps, is the recognition that the critical judgment is subject to the same distortions. The *Confessions* thus brings the rule of aesthetic judgment into contact with the cognitive procedures that it mimes.

I am interested in De Quincey as a limit-case for aesthetic judgment, however, only as he may raise in especially clear terms a question often raised in this period concerning the social form of aesthetic experience. When Kant famously attempts in the third *Critique* to explain why "the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good," he attributes this correspondence in part to the normative disinterestedness of both moral and aesthetic judgment, highlighting their mutual "elevation above the mere sensibility to pleasure received through sense" (CJ, 198–99). The freedom of the subject from his or her senses may indeed be the shortest way to realizing that principle of "similitude in dissimilitude" which Wordsworth identified not only as central to aesthetics, but to sexual and ethical relations as well (LB, 265). But there is little to prevent the possibility that such communion remains either a mere projection of the self onto the other, or the simplistic inference of my own likeness from yours. To "put [oneself] in the place of another and of many others," is thus to risk a conflation of self and other that may doom in advance this gesture of sympathy, however well-intentioned.<sup>74</sup>

There is an alternative to this scheme, however, which is suggested not so much by the flesh-and-blood universalism of Burke as by the activity of self-observation entailed by the literary experiment. Such works conceive a common sense not founded on the recognition of the self in the other, but rather on a moment of self-communion that forces the sensuous encounter with one's own otherness. In the experimental aesthetics of Romanticism, we may thus begin to grasp the import of a gnomic statement from Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*: "Art is the historicophilosophical truth of a solipsism that is untrue-in-itself."<sup>75</sup> I take Adorno to mean that the "untruth" of solipsism, inasmuch as it is disclosed in art, is neither revealed through any overt commitment to intersubjectivity, nor through the coalescence of the object and the subject, but rather is disclosed as an inevitable effect of inwardness – by which means art provides, at least in theory, the conditions for making "critical" consciousness itself. The task of an experimental literary aesthetics, then, may be to estrange one's immediate relation to the manifold conditions that make possible one's reading, "habits of association," standard of taste, or conception of autonomous selfhood – and in the distortion of common sense produced thereby, to indicate the possibility for radically transforming those conditions. If the experimental aesthetics of Romanticism does not itself fulfill that role, it leaves at least a map of misreading towards its possible realization. For the Romantics, after all, it is not simply that in reading we read ourselves, but that in reading we read ourselves as changed.

*Sense and consensus: Wordsworth, aesthetic culture, and the poet-physician*

In the important first chapter of *Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams set out the methodological procedures that had guided his previous examinations of culture and society, and elaborated his vision for a properly materialist history of literary form and expression. Here and throughout his work, Williams stressed the importance of approaching such critical keywords as “culture” not as hypostatized entities but as historical processes – “not concepts but problems, not analytic problems either but historical movements that are still unresolved.”<sup>1</sup> As Williams repeatedly emphasized, “culture” originally signified a process rather than a thing in its own right; until the late eighteenth century, he writes, it “was still a noun of process: the culture of something – crops, animals, minds.”<sup>2</sup> This original sense of “culture” as entailing the cultivation of crops and minds might bring to mind that famous final line of Voltaire’s *Candide* – *Il faut cultiver notre jardin* – whose call to “cultivation” sounded a rallying-cry for enlightenment aspirations.

The present chapter follows Williams in tracing a context for the conceptual development of aesthetic culture through the century or so (roughly 1750–1850) that Williams designates as crucial. My approach to this concept, however, will not mainly attend to its association with the *topos* of cultivation, nor even to an emergent distinction – one routinely attributed to the Romantics – between “cultivation” and Enlightenment “civilization.”<sup>3</sup> Instead, this chapter will examine a closely related claim for aesthetic culture in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain, namely regarding its reparatory function, its constitution as a sphere outside the domains of polity and economy and as a corrective to those domains. My emphasis will thus fall not on the motif of cultivation so much as upon that of medication – not on the “culturing” of crops and minds, but on the healing of bodies and social bodies through the exercise of the aesthetic imagination. In short, this chapter will examine the imaginative endowment that Matthew Arnold paradigmatically named

the “healing power” of the Romantic poet, and especially that of the poet, Wordsworth, in whom Arnold believed this power chiefly to reside.<sup>4</sup> While Williams’s reading of “cultivation” remains positively central to any account of modern culture, I want to offer a more detailed archaeology of the notion of the poet-as-physician on which a conception of aesthetic culture crucially depended. The following chapter therefore attends to how the political claims for aesthetic culture play out over the notion of “healing power” as that property is influentially defined by Wordsworth, attributed to him by the Victorians, and re-invoked, in postures of both praise and blame, in our own critical discourse.

Indeed, few motifs were more closely and regularly identified with the ambitions of the poet in this period. When Romantic writers wanted to describe the poet’s role and function within society, they often compared their work to that of the physician. Keats’s description of the poet as “[a] humanist, physician to all men” draws memorably on this trope. In well-known lines from *The Fall of Hyperion*, the figure of the poet defends the charge that he is but a “dreaming thing” (JK, 166), and poetry no different from a dream. His response is to the question put to him by the interrogatory goddess Moneta, who asks, “What benefit canst thou do, or all thy tribe, / To the great world?” (JK, 187–8). Keats’s poet replies in defense of his “tribe”: unlike the dreamer, whose reveries merely vex the world, the poet “pours out a balm” to soothe and heal it (JK, 200–1). As in his earlier “Sleep and Poetry,” Keats mounts an impassioned defense of poetry staked upon its noble ambition to cure society. Keats is surely neither the first nor the last writer to analogize between the healing art of the physician and of the poet. If the motif of the poet-as-healer was and is a familiar convention, however, it carried significant political freight for the writers who employed it.<sup>5</sup> In an effort to take these representations seriously, then, I want to ask how the capacity to heal gets attached to the poet in this period, and to explore the scientific contexts that underwrite and partly authorize this convention. By what means was poetry newly vested in this period with the power to heal society? Against what forces did the poet seek to lay claim to such power? And how – to invoke Williams’s argument that the keyword of “culture” undergoes gradual reification, to emerge “as an abstraction and an absolute” – do these poets articulate processes of “culture” that would emerge as properties attached to that name?<sup>6</sup>

As suggested by Keats’s depiction of the poet as a “physician to *all* men,” the power of poetry to heal its readership is a profoundly social claim, most often described as a capacity to unite or reunite the social body, to heal

the wound of division through an act of imaginative sympathy. Of course, political philosophers since Locke had maintained that the social body depended for its peaceful existence on an act of rational consent. For the Romantics and their Victorian readers, however, the capacity to heal society is attributed to the poet who can produce not rational but rather affective grounds for achieving social consensus. As Arnold attributes this quality to Wordsworth, "healing power" is characterized by the poet's capacity to cultivate and unify individuals through the agency of feeling or embodied affect. Linking "healing" with "feeling," these poets provide a uniquely aesthetic approach to a political problem of social or national cohesion. If the literary trope of psychic and social "cultivation" was thus increasingly used to imagine how, in Mary Poovey's phrase, one could aggregatively "make a social body," the trope of "healing power" was correspondingly employed in the effort to maintain or sustain it.<sup>7</sup>

For over a decade now, the centrality of feeling to the political work of culture has been subject to rigorous examination by literary and cultural historians, many of whom have found in late eighteenth-century literary aesthetics a project to conceptualize newly effective models of normative subjectivity for the modern state. This is a claim perhaps most familiarly associated with Terry Eagleton's attempt to expose an "ideology of the aesthetic" or normative standard of feeling which, in theory at least, bound individuals of the polite ranks to the mechanisms of state power. In the field of Romantic studies, Foucauldian critics such as Clifford Siskin have trenchantly examined how didactic conventions of verse were in Wordsworth's poetry replaced by aesthetic imperatives, and so naturalized and internalized via the normative content of feeling.<sup>8</sup> Focusing on the regulatory status of feeling in this period, these critics have skilfully anatomized the role of aesthetic experience in short-circuiting reason so as more effectively to promote a vision of consensus across the social body.

At the same time that Romantic imperatives to feel have come under close critical scrutiny, though, other scholars have returned to a long-standing tradition of historical-materialist critique that finds in the rhetoric of aesthetic culture the effort to efface the incommensurate body for what Herbert Marcuse called the "abstract internal community" of the soul.<sup>9</sup> For these critics, aesthetic culture promotes a vision of social consensus at the expense of the individuals and embodied subjectivities it would supposedly represent. David Lloyd and Paul Thomas offer the most forceful expression of this view in their assertion that a homologous logic of abstraction presides over the discourse of aesthetic culture and

that of the emergent British state; as Lloyd and Thomas argue, “[c]ulture produces the consensual ground for the state form of representative democracy by drawing the formal or representative disposition in every individual out of each person’s concrete particularity.”<sup>10</sup> The ideological claim of culture to furnish sites of reconciliation for a fractured society is thus most clearly advanced in the work of late eighteenth-century writers who sought, in the words of one critic, to obtain “distance from the senses, and from the divisive interests associated with them.”<sup>11</sup> By abstracting subjects from their sensuous particularity, the discourse of aesthetic culture renders individuals socially equivalent and politically “representable,” thereby laying the groundwork for an abstract vision of social or national consensus.

In a remark that has been read as furnishing the clearest evidence of the ideological character of aesthetic culture, Arnold memorably asserted that “culture suggests the idea of the State.”<sup>12</sup> Arnold’s claim has been read as a “bald” and even “authoritarian” statement of how culture at once models the harmonious order of the state-form and produces lawful subjects to inhabit it.<sup>13</sup> While such formulations are undeniably troubling, critics have so far given insufficient attention to the paradox that the abstraction of an imagined community populated by Arnoldian “best selves” remains dependent on the material agency of the senses or feeling for its realization.<sup>14</sup> To attend further to this paradox would require us, for instance, to pay closer attention to Arnold’s use of the connecting verb “suggest,” to make inferences on the basis of the senses – a term which, as illustrated in an earlier chapter, was often invoked by nineteenth-century writers to express the social ambitions of aesthetic form. Arnold’s invocation of “suggestion” thus itself suggests that for the very idea of “the State” to exist it must first be made available to sensuous apprehension – embodied, as is Arnold’s conception of “culture,” in the sensuous qualities of “sweetness and light.” (Nietzsche’s great dictum comes to mind: “The more abstract the truth you want to teach the more you must seduce the senses to it.”)<sup>15</sup> To understand better Arnold’s faith in the process by which “culture suggests the idea of the State,” then, we need to examine more closely the ways in which authors imagined a sensuous basis for eliciting and mediating these abstract concepts.

While historical-materialist critics discern in Wordsworth a tendency to abstraction that effaces all traces of sensuous particularity, and Foucauldians see precisely that sensuous register as the site of disciplinary power, I approach the duplicitousness of “healing power” as expressive of the antinomic, simultaneously sensuous and abstract character of modern political

subjectivity. Moreover, I argue that Wordsworth's accounts of imaginative healing reflect profoundly on the fraught relationship between the sensuous identity of individuals and the abstractions constitutive of community, thereby complicating both forms of ideology critique. Though designating a vital social function for the therapy of feeling, the poet's claim to heal his readership is neither exclusively a naive form of sentimentality nor a politically insidious presumption of social order. Rather, I suggest that Wordsworth sees feeling as serving two distinct purposes, each indispensable to the poet-physician as that role is influentially defined by him. In the first instance, the poet appeals to feeling in order to integrate and recuperate difference within a cohesive whole. In Wordsworth's poetry, however, feeling is often but an ambivalent basis for consensus, calling attention to experiences and individuals that exceed their recuperative containment. By keeping this ambivalence in view, we find in Wordsworth not only an effort to promote a vision of social consensus through the agency of sympathy or feeling. Rather, by raising as a fundamentally insoluble problem the paradox of political subjectivity, Wordsworth's poetry may just as significantly suggest a basis for critical reflection on the alleged "healing power" of aesthetic culture. In attending to this central motif of aesthetic culture as an ongoing process, in Williams's terms, and a problem that remains with us to this day, my aim is thus to provide an alternative to a mode of diagnostic reading that makes extraordinarily problematic all attempts to get beyond it.<sup>16</sup>

My trajectory for this chapter is archaeological, proceeding backwards in time from the Victorian period to the era of sensibility, and then returning to the scene of Wordsworthian healing with a better sense of its contexts and legacies. I begin with two Victorian commentators, namely Arnold and Mill, whose well-known elaborations of Wordsworthian "healing power" represent a later stage of that process by which culture emerges as an abstract form. Their attribution of "healing power" to Wordsworth opens up a consideration of that poet, whose figure of the distempered Solitary in *The Excursion* ironically furnishes us with the best account of the aims of Wordsworthian healing. The self-diagnosis and implied scheme of cure that the Solitary offers in that poem has a clear medical basis in the late eighteenth-century science of nervous sensibility, to which I turn briefly in the next section. I conclude with a reading of Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence," a poem that uses the motif of "healing power" to negotiate, with some self-consciousness, the psychic as well as political problem that its title names.



## THE CONFLICT OF THE FACULTIES

The notion of the poet-as-healer has an ancient pedigree that goes at least as far back as Plato's notorious condemnation of the poet as the antithesis of the physician.<sup>17</sup> Were we to sketch the most significant chapters in the history of this trope, we might turn next to Aristotle's theory of catharsis as perhaps the earliest of attempts to delineate the process by which the poet produces salutary physical effects in the reader. Yet the antiquity of this metaphor should not cause us to ignore the extraordinary frequency of its appearance in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, most notably in the work of poets who, like Mark Akenside, Erasmus Darwin, George Crabbe, and Keats himself, were also students or practitioners of medicine. At one level, the exchange in *The Fall of Hyperion* represents Keats's self-conscious re-enactment of a debate between the two most influential positions from classical antiquity on the issue of poetry's utility. At another level, though, Keats's analogy between the poet and the physician marks the poet's resistance to an incipient division between the disciplines of the arts and sciences more generally. As historians of medicine have pointed out, the decades immediately following Keats's death would see the formation of a veritable medical profession in England: a set of established protocols, a formal system of credentialization, and certain foundational assumptions that all professionals could be expected to hold. All of these developments would make over medicine as a practice suited only for properly licensed professionals.<sup>18</sup> At the heart of this newly popularized literary convention, then, is the process by which emergently differentiated faculties – and the objects and modes of analysis proper to them – were conceived, contested, and negotiated in the emergent domain of aesthetic culture.

Less charitable in his public estimation of medical science than Keats, Wordsworth once denounced the physician as a heartless and "fingering slave" ("The Poet's Epitaph," LB, 212).<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, it is with a certain irony that Wordsworth's nineteenth-century readers often credited him with having been the last figure to exert a harmonizing influence over warring faculties and disciplines of analysis. For the paradigmatic attribution of "healing power" to Wordsworth we can turn to the poem from which that phrase is taken, Matthew Arnold's "Memorial Verses," composed on the occasion of Wordsworth's death in 1850. There Arnold offers something like a hierarchy of medicinal effects calibrated to the poetic powers of this bygone era, from Byron's strong if undisciplined capacity to stimulate (though not, Arnold chides, to teach), to the unsurpassed ability of

Goethe, "Physician of the iron age" (17), to diagnose the ailments of the world. Yet Byron's stimulants and Goethe's diagnostics do not compare to Wordsworth's mighty "healing power," of which Arnold mourns the late passing:

Others will teach us how to dare,  
And against fear our breast to steel;  
Others will strengthen us to bear –  
But who, ah! who, will make us feel? (64–7)

While poet-philosophers will continue to strengthen and sustain the age, Wordsworth's "healing power" is depicted as unique and, for all intents and purposes, inimitable. His passing in "Europe's latter hour" (62) is the sign of the poet's "belatedness" in a far more capacious sense than that in which Harold Bloom used this term. Thus, Arnold not only mourns Wordsworth's passing, but also laments the passing of an age in which poetry was still capable of ameliorating what Arnold calls the "doubts, disputes, distractions, [and] fears" of modern society (44).

Repeatedly in his praise of Wordsworth's therapeutic value, Arnold conceives the property of healing power as an "aesthetic" in the broadest sense of that term, that is as a salutary resource of sensation or "feeling." Accordingly, he describes Wordsworth's capacity to elicit feeling as a last line of resistance against an anaesthetized socio-historical state: "He found us when the age had bound / Our souls in its benumbing round: / He spoke, and loosed our heart in tears" (45–7). By reconciling potentially conflicting faculties, the poet furnishes a model and a basis for the integration of divisive social interests; Wordsworth's healing power thus serves as the warrant for Arnold's very assumption that the poet speaks to "our" heart and awakens "our" collective feelings. Arnold's conception of Wordsworthian "healing power" resembles in this respect "the culture of the feelings" that John Stuart Mill later attributes to the poet in his *Autobiography*, where in a well-known chapter Mill narrates his encounter with Wordsworth's poetry at a crucial moment of mental crisis.<sup>20</sup> Both Mill and Arnold share an understanding of Wordsworthian "healing power" as a fundamentally integrative force, and one dependent upon the salutary work of feeling for its operation: for what made Wordsworth such a powerful "medicine for my state of mind," Mill writes, was the power to supply what he calls "a source . . . of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings."<sup>21</sup>

As suggested by Mill's famous phrase, the poet's therapeutic power is readily understood as referring to processes of an aesthetic "culture" that is at once constituted by and sustained through feelings of pleasure. The

processes celebrated in Mill's narrative, and attached to the sphere of culture generally, refer to powers to heal divisive rifts both within the self and between members of society. By promoting a therapeutic integration of human faculties and feelings, the work of the poet-physician thus serves as the precondition for imagining such sites of reconciliation at ever-larger degrees of generality. Of course, some of the best-known Romantic testimonies to the power of imagination turn similarly on this ability to resolve conflicting faculties, feelings, or experiences into a harmonious and integrated whole. The notion appears centrally, for instance, in Coleridge's well-known remark that imagination "brings the whole soul of man into activity"; and still more evocatively in Wordsworth's testimony in *The Prelude* to unifying powers within the mind of man: "There is a dark / Invisible workmanship that reconciles / Discordant elements, and makes them move in one society" (BL, 2:15–16; P, 1.352–5). Though Wordsworth refers here to the internal "society" of thoughts and feelings, the psychological premise he articulates is clearly meant to be applicable to society in general. In his 1809 essay on the convention of Cintra, for instance, Wordsworth wrote in praise of the "tender and subtle ties" that unite and render mutually dependent the elementary and advanced mental faculties as well as the differing orders of society to which these faculties supposedly correspond: "The higher mode of being does not exclude, but necessarily includes, the lower; the intellectual does not exclude, but necessarily includes, the sentient" (WWP, 1:340). In strongly Burkean terms, Wordsworth advances the prospect of a harmonious, if unequal relationship between the senses and the intellect, and describes this relationship as central to the successful promotion of "National Happiness" (WWP, 1:341). As writers who inherit Wordsworth's conception of the poet as one who "binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society" (Preface, LB, 259), both Arnold and Mill imagine the integration of human faculties as both a precondition and a model for the harmonization of society under the benign aegis of aesthetic culture.

Indeed, the integrative properties that I have described as characteristic of Wordsworthian "healing power" are traits that were regularly attributed in the nineteenth century to the processes of "culture" – by Coleridge, for instance, who asserted that "cultivation" inheres in "the harmonious development of qualities and faculties that characterize our humanity."<sup>22</sup> Such is the foundation for Friedrich Schiller's influential claim that the aesthetic fulfills the demands of sense and idea without sharing in the limitations of either; and is as well the basis for Coleridge's argument, itself strongly indebted to Schiller, that the imagination enables "the

balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities" (BL, 2:16) – including, among other such oppositions, the general and concrete, the individual and representative. Arnold's testimony to Wordsworth's "healing power" must therefore be considered as part of that longer historical process by which "culture" emerged as an alternative and salutary corrective to the perceived ills of "civilization." Such characterizations of poetic healing power require us to attend more closely to the medical lexicon of the poet to whom Victorian commentators ascribed such curative effects.

#### NERVES AND HEART

If one wished to find an extended Romantic-period treatment of healing power, one could do worse than to turn to *The Excursion*. Wordsworth's long poem of 1814 was the work on which, with perhaps less than perfect foresight, he staked his claim to posterity, and it was received by admirers and critics alike as a major and programmatic production. This poem, of course, has as its central narrative the healing of the figure of the Solitary, whose "distempered nerves" it is the task of the other major characters of the poem to cure and "correct."<sup>23</sup> I will return to the specific issue of the diagnosis shortly. For now I want to highlight the larger issues to which this diagnosis gives expression – issues that put what Celeste Langan calls the "curious commingling of two different agendas, the political and the therapeutic," in high relief.<sup>24</sup> Wordsworth describes the Solitary's illness as brought on by personal, spiritual, and political crises: the death of his wife, his separation from the church, and most significantly his investment in and subsequent disillusionment with the cause of the French Revolution. More explicitly than the other major characters of the poem, the Solitary is conceived as a socio-historical type: loosely modeled, as Wordsworth reported in the Fenwick notes, on the radical dissenter Joseph Fawcett, he is representative of a crisis plaguing former English radicals in the wake of what Coleridge called "the complete failure" of that event (CL, 1:289). In keeping with Coleridge's lofty expectations for Wordsworth's blank-verse epic, moreover, the poem is explicitly conceived as an effort to address and redress that crisis.<sup>25</sup>

Neither Arnold nor Mill, of course, were great fans of *The Excursion*, and so could hardly be said to have derived their appreciation of Wordsworthian healing power from this poem. In his status as what Langan calls the "defaulted (i.e., privatized)" liberal subject,<sup>26</sup> however, the Solitary represents precisely that condition of disenchanting subjectivity that healing

power, and the domain of culture generally, would be reputed to cure. The Solitary is repeatedly shown as negating, both in word and deed, the social bonds that the “culture of the feelings” were thought to promote and restore. Even prior to his first appearance in the poem, the Solitary is characterized as having committed numerous breaches of the social contract; the Wanderer thus recites the details of his biography as a litany of breaks from family, faith, and country: “He broke from his contracted bounds;” “he broke faith with them;” “he forfeited / All joy in human nature” (2.215, 2.247, 2.296–7). Indeed, Wordsworth describes the Solitary’s illness as a resistance to the “culture of the feelings” in both a figurative and a surprisingly literal sense. When the Poet, for instance, avers that “they perhaps err least, the lowly class / Whom a benign necessity compels / To follow reason’s least ambitious course” (5:593–5), the Solitary replies in terms that not only pervert the Poet’s meaning, but would threaten to parody Wordsworth’s own ambition to speak in “the real language of men”:

“Yes,” buoyantly exclaimed  
 The pale Recluse – “praise to the sturdy plough,  
 And patient spade; praise to the simple crook,  
 And ponderous loom – resounding while it holds  
 Body and mind in one captivity;  
 And let the light mechanic tool be hailed  
 With honour; which, encasing by the power  
 Of long companionship, the artist’s hand,  
 Cuts off that hand, with all its world of nerves,  
 From a too busy commerce with the heart!” (5:601–10)

Where the Poet, with naïve optimism, would find virtue and “benign necessity” in material want, the Solitary ironically celebrates the laborer’s reduction to a state of mere physical being. By holding “[b]ody in mind in one captivity,” the instruments of labor inhibit thoughts which, in guiding schemes of human perfectibility, lead only to despair. The existence that the Solitary champions is a life of pure sensation that countless enlightenment thinkers took to be the signature of pre-modern mind.<sup>27</sup> The Solitary co-opts this concept, however, in a defense of the anti-modern: a realm in which all “commerce” is suspended between physical and moral registers of feeling – between the hand, with its “world of nerves,” and the heart.

Yet as the instruments and arts of husbandry (from the georgic “plough” to the pastoral “crook”) are supplanted in the Solitary’s speech by mention of the “ponderous loom” and “mechanic tool,” and agricultural

by pre-industrial labor, so the anti-modern is exposed as a mere effect and specter of economic modernity. The Solitary hails a condition of "captivity" to the instruments of labor that signified not only a kind of materialist death-in-life, but a distinctly modern problem to which nineteenth-century social commentators often attended. As in a similarly ironized dystopia, Dickens's Coketown, the laborer is metonymically reduced to the status of an isolated "hand"; anticipating Marx's critique of political economy, the Solitary describes the peasant's labor as "a physiological fact" or expenditure of bodily energy whose seemingly naturalized quality is rather the effect of modern modes of production.<sup>28</sup> The Solitary thus exposes the Poet's enlightened faith in "benign necessity" as a cruel fiction behind which lurks an enslaving automatism.

"Culture," as Williams taught us, originally connoted the working of the land, and these associations persisted through a metaphorical transferral of "culture" to processes of intellectual, artistic, or spiritual development. The notion of education as national husbandry was a prominent theme for poets, as suggested for instance by Thomas Gray's "The Alliance of Education and Government," which explicitly associates the cultivation of the land, and of the subjects who inhabit it, with the cultivation of the state.<sup>29</sup> The correspondence between the cultivation of English subjects and of the English nation is just as fully apparent in *The Excursion*. In the ninth and final book of the poem, the Wanderer recommends implementing a system of national education, lest the subjects of England's soil "be left to droop / By timely culture unsustainable" (9:304–5). "Culture" here stands clearly for the process by which the English subject – organic product of native soil – is "cultivated" for participation in the civic life of the nation.

In the Solitary's ironic eulogy, however, the "[i]nglorious implements of craft and toil" (5.611) supplant the "mute inglorious Milton[s]" of Gray's best-known poem, thereby undermining its praise for England's unsung national treasures.<sup>30</sup> The Solitary derives his argument from a commonplace distinction in eighteenth-century writing between the physiology of mental and manual laborers. David Hume, for instance, draws on an established medical assumption in writing that, "as the skin, pores, muscles, and nerves of a day-labourer are different from those of a man of quality, so are his sentiments, actions, and manners."<sup>31</sup> This is an assumption that Wordsworth famously sought to overturn in writing the *Lyrical Ballads* "with a view to shew that men who do not wear fine cloaths can feel deeply" (Wordsworth to Charles James Fox, 14 January 1801 [LEY, 315]). Yet the Solitary privileges the instruments of labor

rather than its agents, denies to those latter the capacity of meaningful self-cultivation, and threatens to undermine the ambitions of middle-class poets to speak for the poor.

Surely the celebrated final line of Voltaire's *Candide* was in Wordsworth's mind as he proposed a competing organic metaphor for the cultivation of national character. One of the few authors to be mentioned by name in Wordsworth's poem ("The divine Milton" is, predictably, another [1:250]), Voltaire represents both the ideological goad to Revolution and the moral bankruptcy of that cause. In fact, *The Excursion* goes so far as to identify *Candide* – a copy of which the Wanderer finds discarded in one of the Solitary's sequestered nooks – as the epitome of such misguided "cultivation." This book – "dull product of a scoffer's pen, / Impure conceits discharging from a heart / Hardened by impious pride" (2:484–6) – exemplifies the opposition to "culture" that the Solitary represents in the poem.<sup>32</sup> It is an opposition which, following Coleridge, is best described as a conflict between English "culture" and Frenchified "civilization."

Indeed, by a semantic drift common to the period, the Solitary's critique of the "mechanical" arts reads also as an indictment of those arts that we would now call "liberal." Lord Kames was one among many moral philosophers who espoused a "culture of the feelings" in a fully literal sense, and in the process articulated a moral and political benefit to aesthetic culture. In the Preface to the *Elements of Criticism*, Kames urged his British readers "to second the purposes of nature, by cultivating the pleasures of eye and ear, those especially that require extraordinary culture, such as are inspired by poetry" and other arts.<sup>33</sup> Yet the Solitary's "distempered" speech forecloses the possibility of so culturing the feelings, instead celebrating, with bitter irony, the separation of "the artist's hand" from the workings of "the heart." The Solitary's bitter parody of cultivation thus anticipates the appearance of the Pastor, whose role in the final books of the poem is to cultivate a vital political community from the stories based on the lives of the dead in the country churchyard. In divorcing "culture" from its analogues in husbandry, the Solitary forces his company to reckon with its second-order, curative function; his self-diagnosis thereby paves the way for the "healing words" of the Pastor in the following book of the poem (6.1033).

As suggested by its references to the hardened heart of Voltaire and to the "distempered nerves" of the Solitary, the social ailment to which *The Excursion* attends is principally identified as a disconnection of somatic feeling from the exalted sentiments of the soul. Accordingly, the healing powers of Wordsworth's poem are largely dedicated to re-opening in the

Solitary "the passages / Through which the ear converses with the heart" (4:1154–5). Nor is *The Excursion* the only poem of Wordsworth's to address the vitally restorative effects of connecting or reconnecting the nerves and the heart. The poet imagines a similarly harmonious relationship between these organs in well-known lines from "Tintern Abbey," referring to the salutary power of youthful experience to bestow, in "hours of weariness,"

sensations sweet,  
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,  
And passing even into my purer mind  
With tranquil restoration. (LB, 28–31)

These famous lines describe in the union of the nerves and heart a restorative experience of which the Solitary's speech represents the obvious negation. Whereas the Solitary describes the disconnection of the nerves and heart as confining the laborer to a condition of mere material existence, Wordsworth imagines their integration as entailing a kind of embodiment that represents at the same time a release from the limitations of embodiment.<sup>34</sup> While fully rooted in the organism, in other words, such experiences suggest the elevation of the "purer mind" above mere physical functioning and present on this basis a corrective to the Solitary's rejection of anything more than the most material of social bonds.

Though the philosophy of the senses in these lines is characteristically opaque, the context for Wordsworth's ambition to unite the nerves and the heart is clearer in light of contemporary scientific efforts to establish just such a connection. For an analogous though more obviously literal conception of a cooperative relationship between the nervous and circulatory systems of the body, we can consult a treatise entitled *On the Influence of the Nerves upon the Action of the Arteries* (1814) by the physiologist Sir Everard Home, Fellow of the Royal Society and a brother-in-law of the famed anatomist John Hunter. Written as an address to his colleagues in the Royal Society, Home's short essay identified a pervasive role for the nervous system in regulating circulation and in maintaining "the necessary operations of the animal economy." Home's principal aim is to show how "the dominion of the nerves" extends even to bodily processes thought to be independent of nervous influence. Home therefore describes these two discrete systems as inextricably linked, their continued cooperation necessary to the health of the human body.<sup>35</sup> Published in the same year as *The Excursion*, Home's treatise offers scientific backing to Wordsworth's imaginative conception of "sensations . . . felt along



the heart,” and a rejoinder to the Solitary’s wish to suspend “commerce” between these bodily processes.

As a figure for the integration of discordant registers of feeling, Wordsworth’s vision of union between the nerves and the heart offers a closely described physiological language for depicting the effects of aesthetic culture. Of course, this feat of physiological reintegration remains an ideal only negatively expressed by the Solitary. Yet such representations do, as Paul Youngquist has asserted, indicate “a more material sort of healing” than readers of Wordsworth’s poetry have previously acknowledged.<sup>36</sup> By the same token, they indicate the curious dependence of the immaterial on the material body and thus the mutual relationship between these two expressions of poetic healing power. To understand better the purpose to which Wordsworth frames the repair of the social contract as a reunion of the nerves and heart, we must attend further to the paradoxical, simultaneously sensuous and abstract roles attributed to feeling within the eighteenth-century discourse of nervous sensibility, to which subject I now turn.

#### FICTIONS OF CONSENTANEITY

What Wordsworth imagines as a consensual relation between the nervous and circulatory systems of the body – relations analogous in their effects to consensus within the body politic – has clear origins in the eighteenth-century science of the nerves. As cultural historians have noted, the emergence of an extensive neuroscience in Great Britain coincides with the positing of “feeling” generally at the center of civic identity in eighteenth-century British political thought. When writers of this period analogize between consensus within the body and in the body politic, they draw not only on a venerable political trope, but more immediately on the work of physicians who, like Whytt, Cullen, and Monro, raised the nervous system to a position of unprecedented importance in the study of the human body. As Williams and others have reminded us, the term “consensus” – literally “an agreement or common feeling” – has its roots in physiology, where, like “sympathy,” it signified a harmonious relation between organs or parts of the body; so close are their physiological definitions that Johnson’s *Dictionary* describes these terms as essentially synonymous.<sup>37</sup> In his *Observations* on nervous disorders, Whytt wrote of a generalized “consent between various parts of the body” that was presided over by the nervous system.<sup>38</sup> “All sympathy, all consensus,” writes Whytt, “presupposes sentiment and consequently can exist only by the

mediation of the nerves, which are the only instruments by which sensation operates."<sup>39</sup> In providing a scientific basis for linking "sense" with "consensus," then, the culture of sensibility promoted an image of society held together by bonds of feeling. That the British system of taxation and both the American and British postal services could be described as "nerves of state" exemplifies the extent to which the nervous system provided a model by which to conceptualize the orderly flows of communication or capital, and a screen upon which to project the cohesion of the state.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to affirming the legitimacy of traditional analogies between the body and the social body, many British medical writers of this period went further in promoting a physiological account of nervous sensibility consistent with a theological account of the soul. In his influential research on the nervous system, for instance, Whytt identified an immaterial "sentient principle" responsible for regulating the diverse functions of the animal economy.<sup>41</sup> Whytt's vitalist conception of the nerves as co-extensive with the immaterial soul was an account often echoed by both medical and literary writers within the culture of sensibility. In 1768, the author of *A Dissertation Upon the Nerves* could assert that an immaterial nervous aether was "[t]he medium, that holds the two distinct substances, soul and body, so closely together, that nothing but death can dissolve the union."<sup>42</sup> In the same year, Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* challenged a spiritless French materialism by conceiving the harmonious operation of the body as irrefutable proof of the soul's existence.<sup>43</sup>

Building on such contemporary associations between the involuntary or reflex action of the body and the self-evidence of the immaterial soul, Samuel Richardson gave a name to a form of consensual response that was as natural and automatic as feeling itself. That term was "consentaneousness," a quality that combined the attributes of consensual and instantaneous behavior to describe the harmonious union of the mind and body and the condition for moral behavior. In *Clarissa*, Richardson's heroine praises Lovelace's "consentaneousness of corporeal and animal faculties," a "soul and body . . . fitted for, and pleased with, each other."<sup>44</sup> A pre-volitional attribute, "consentaneousness" signified the conditions of body and mind essential to a character's receptivity to moral instruction and necessary to achieve a harmoniously consensual attachment. As *Clarissa* is quick to point out, though, Lovelace's consentaneousness must be cultivated and consciously fostered by him in order to make him both manageable and marriageable. Of course, we hardly need to be reminded how unreceptive to moral instruction Lovelace remains

throughout most of the novel. “Consentaneousness” is therefore introduced in Richardson’s text as a necessary but insufficient ground for social regulation, the condition of possibility for consent but distinct from consent itself.<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, writers versed in the rhetoric of sensibility remained highly interested in the social or political work that might be achieved by “the culture of the feelings.” The political uses of “consentaneousness” come up for explicit commentary in Thomas Love Peacock’s well-known satire of Romantic thought and literature, *Nightmare Abbey* (1818). In that novel, Peacock satirically employs a variant of the term in a conversation between Flosky, or Coleridge, advocate of necessity, and his son Sythrop, Shelley, impassioned defender of free will. The principle of “consentaneity” is introduced by Flosky as a term intended at once to mediate contradiction between these alternatives, though for Peacock the term shows how feeling might serve as a smokescreen for more insidious forms of social control. It’s no accident, then, that the argument between Flosky and Sythrop over the proper meaning of “consentaneity” terminates in a scene of hypocritically sentimentalized tyranny.<sup>46</sup>

An acute reader of Wordsworth, Peacock would have encountered numerous examples of consentaneity in that poet’s work. “Our bodies feel, where’er they be, / Against or with our will,” Wordsworth writes in his lyric defense of philosophical necessity, “Expostulation and Reply” (LB, 104). Had he known the text, Peacock might have encountered another such testimony to the reflex action of feeling in previously quoted lines from *The Prelude* in which Wordsworth describes how, through the suggestive powers of imagination, “even the grossest minds must see and hear, / And cannot chuse but feel” (P, 13.83–4); and he surely would have encountered it in words the Wanderer addresses to the Solitary in *The Excursion*: “You have felt, and may not cease to feel” (4.1151). In these various passages, Wordsworth attests to the inevitability and involuntariness of feeling, and thus to the role of consentaneity as furnishing a non-consensual ground for supposedly consensual acts. More specifically, Wordsworth references to this concept suggest how the poet’s ability to cultivate feeling serves fundamentally therapeutic ends. Conceived in Richardson’s time as a principle of character, consentaneity thus emerges in the Romantic period as a principle of aesthetic representation, epitomized by the writer’s ambition to “make us feel.”

Such claims for the aesthetic to command and act upon the feelings of the reader, as reflected both in Arnold’s account of Wordsworth and in

Wordsworth's accounts of consentaneous affective response, have lately been situated in a narrative of how late eighteenth-century literature lost its overt didacticism to become a less overt but more effective kind of didacticism, one naturalized and internalized through the poet's activity of making us feel. In Siskin's variation on an argument more familiarly associated with Foucault, Wordsworth's "healing power" epitomizes a process by which individuals constitute their individuality through tacitly embodied consent to the law. Thus Siskin interprets the work of the poet-physician as a project more generally linked to the effort to produce, through feeling, newly effective models of normative subjectivity. Once the moral imperatives of the sensibility movement are "rewritten and psychologized as aesthetic imperatives," Siskin argues, the poet's work of making us feel supplies an unconscious, embodied basis of assent to the mechanisms of disciplinary power.<sup>47</sup> With the emergence of the aesthetic, in other words, the law of political absolutism is replaced, in Eagleton's phrase, by "the law of the heart."<sup>48</sup>

While these critics discern in the late eighteenth-century cultivation of feeling a generally effective mode of social control, however, neither Richardson nor later writers were nearly as sanguine about the ability of consentaneousness to secure consensus through the medium of bodily sense. In light of the clear limitations placed on forms of consentaneous physical experience in this period, we might indeed look skeptically on the notion that feeling functioned unproblematically as the basis for positing an abstract vision of a harmoniously consensual social order. Likewise, I want to resist the assumption that the normative content of feeling was self-evident in the first place, its materiality easily subsumable under abstract laws of social consensus. Indeed, though Romantic authors often vested feeling with the ability to reconcile conflicts of the faculties, and to integrate conflicting interests within a harmonious social whole, sensation frequently surfaces in their work as something other than the guarantor of consensus. Within the culture of sensibility, "feeling" was defined both in terms of the particularity and self-interest of the bodily senses, and in relation to the presumed disinterest of what was referred to as the "moral sense." On account of the tenuous link between these competing modes of feeling, however, sensibility was often only ambivalently conceived as an agent of consensus. Consider Yorick's well-known apostrophe from *Sentimental Journey*:

Dear sensibility! . . . 'tis here I trace thee – and this is thy divinity which stirs within me – not that, in some sad and sickening moments, *my soul sinks back*

*upon herself, and startles at destruction* – mere pomp of words! – but that I feel some generous joys and generous cares beyond myself – all comes from thee, great, great SENSORIUM of the world! which vibrates, if a hair of our heads but falls upon the ground, in the remotest desert of thy creation.<sup>49</sup>

In a memorable figuration, Sterne offers a picture of the world as a nervous system of sorts, binding society together in a web of sympathies and transmitted sensations. His approach – freely adapting from Newton’s, whose supposition that space is God’s sensorium he invokes here – posits the sensorium as the redemptive link between the body and the body politic. It is a vision for which Yorick, though himself a parson, purports to reject a theological account of “soul” as “mere pomp of words” for a more “philosophical” (what we would call scientific) position.

For all his seeming confidence of analogy, however, the connection that Sterne posits between the soul and body is frail at best. Likewise, as he indicates in a letter of this period, Sterne construes sentimental writing and writing “to the body” as two discrete alternatives only marginally capable of reconciliation.<sup>50</sup> The tenuousness of the link between sentiment and the body is suggested by Sterne’s own figure of speech: the “sensorium of the world” responds to hair falling from the head, though not, perhaps, to any more direct contact with the body itself. The paradox of Sterne’s apostrophe is that while “sensibility” is dependent on the sensorium (if only to serve as its basis in metaphor), one appeals to sensation at the risk of annihilating sentiment. The faculty that Sterne wishes to locate in the sensorium is thus pre-emptively revealed as the expression of an abstract and immaterial “divinity.”

The harmonization of bodily affection with the immaterial soul is the figure for the social integration that is the work of the poet-physician – and will become the work of “culture” – to effect. Yet the ambivalence that I have traced in the literature of sensibility must be seen to complicate any notion that “the culture of the feelings” could provide the ground from which an abstract conception of citizen-subjectivity – or the abstractions of “culture” and “the State” – unproblematically emerges. Though the science of nervous sensibility provided a conceptual model for the cohesion of the state, accounts of consentaneousness in late eighteenth-century and Romantic literature suggest that the body marked both a conceptual basis and a significant problem for such visions of harmonious social order. Consequently the effort to “make us feel” is made all the more problematic for those authors whose objective was to reunite the nerves and heart.

## AESTHETIC CULTURE AND THE OCCULTATION OF "SENSE"

To the extent that Foucauldian readers of Wordsworth regard the affective dimension of his poetry as naturalizing a conception of normative subjectivity, their work might usefully be compared to historical-materialist criticism to which this argument presents both a complement and a counterpoint. Locating the ideological work of aesthetic culture not in feeling but, on the contrary, in the mechanisms of abstraction, these critics read Wordsworthian aesthetics as performing a kind of violence against the concrete individuals that his poetry would purport to represent: by abstracting individuals from the sources of their difference or incommensurability, the poet furnishes a model for how aesthetic culture promotes its totalizing vision of social consensus. For these critics, then, the "healing power" of Wordsworth's poetry is regarded as largely emblematic of the process by which singular identities are dissolved in the reparatory domain of culture, to become absorbed within the larger representative body of the state.

Though the fact is not often noted, the faculty of abstraction – "one of the sublimest operations of mind," as Godwin wrote<sup>51</sup> – was often explicitly identified in this period as a basis for the conceptual work of nation-building. In the *Elements of Criticism*, for instance, Kames characterized abstraction as the capacity to unite disparate concepts or beings under the heading of a single idea, and thus as a crucial source for conceptions of the nation and of national belonging:

It is by the faculty of abstraction that we distribute beings into *genera* and *species*: finding a number of individuals connected by certain qualities common to all, we give a name to these individuals considered as thus connected, which name, by gathering them together into one class, serves in a curt manner to express the whole of these individuals as distinct from others . . . A number of persons connected by being subjected to the same laws and to the same government, are termed a *nation*.<sup>52</sup>

"[B]y enabling us," in Kames's words, "to comprehend in our reasoning whole kinds and sorts, instead of individuals without end," abstraction not only serves a basic epistemological need; it also performs an indispensable social function.<sup>53</sup> Appropriately, then, Kames offers as an instance of abstraction the mental operation that unifies a number of diverse individuals under the heading of a nation, and which identifies this aggregate body as "distinct from others."

For a complementary account of the political work of abstraction, we can look to the physician James Makittrick Adair, whose *Philosophical*

*and Medical Sketch of the Natural History of the Human Body and Mind* (1783) offered the general reader an introduction to the elementary principles of physiology and faculty psychology. If Kames's definition of abstraction emphasizes the power of this faculty to aggregate diverse individuals under a single concept, Adair rather emphasizes the discriminative function of abstraction. His account therefore points to the reverse tendency of abstraction to isolate and segregate individuals from the imagined community that it creates:

*Notions* are those ideas which are formed by *abstraction*, which is that effort of the mind by which we separate a part from the whole; as the quality of blackness, when I think of a negroe, independent of the circumstances of form, character, &c. in which he is not different from any other men.<sup>54</sup>

Adair's definition of abstraction identifies this faculty as the power of mind to "separate a part from the whole" as a kind of surplus or inassimilable positivity. As he offers in a revealing illustration, abstraction is not the faculty that separates the black man from his body, thereby uniting individuals under a common identity, but rather that which separates the black man's body from the community of "men" generally. While the body, in other words, marked the metaphorical condition of social cohesion, within a political structure in which citizenship depended upon abstraction it also symbolized the unrecuperable particularity that was necessary to suppress.<sup>55</sup> The accounts of Kames and Adair indicate the wide range of political functions that were attributed to abstraction in this period – both to aggregate diverse individuals under a single concept, and to separate other racialized or gendered bodies from the nation's unified conception of civic identity. Considered together, these accounts illustrate how abstraction could serve with equal effectiveness both aspects of a dialectical process of nation-building.

In his early sociological writings, Marx asserted that a conflict between conceptions of sensuous and abstract personhood was not a transhistorical dichotomy so much as one firmly grounded in late eighteenth-century political thought. Marx's 1843 essay "On the Jewish Question" characterized the opposition between an abstract conception of political identity and the materiality of the body in terms of a modern conflict – one he attributes to Rousseau in particular – between subjects considered in their "sensuous, individual, and immediate existence" and in their "abstract, artificial" capacity as citizens.<sup>56</sup> More recently and in a more general vein, Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx* has returned our attention to the paradoxical, simultaneously sensuous and abstract entities that haunt

Marx's work, of which the commodity-form is the elementary expression. Derrida characterizes the phenomenon of the Marxian "specter" as "a paradoxical incorporation" distinguished by its physical, phenomenal liminality; the specter, he writes, is "some 'thing' that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other." Ambiguously situated in time and space, the specter is a figure for anachrony (a time "out of joint," in the phrase from *Hamlet* to which Derrida repeatedly turns), the spectral embodiment of a past that has not fully passed, and of a future that looms over and jeopardizes the apparent continuity of the present. Derrida finds a literary model for such specters in the gothic fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and more generally in imaginative scenes of occult visitation where the ontological status of the object is uncertain and "one cannot decide between hallucination or perception."<sup>57</sup>

For such images of "spectralization" in Romantic literary culture, we can turn, as has Emma Clery in her fine study of late eighteenth-century supernatural fiction, to those narratives of ghostly visitation that articulate the phantasmatic desires of consumer society with the conventions of literary gothic. Alternatively, we might explore an emergent relationship in the period between "high" aesthetic culture and occult representation – a relationship epitomized, perhaps, by Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," which situates the Mariner's tale of supernatural visitation within a frame-narrative of the Wedding Guest's ethical and spiritual development. As an alternative to these, this concluding section of my chapter will draw neither on the conventions of the gothic, nor on Coleridge's recasting of these conventions in the context of the "Rime," but rather on a unique triangulation of culture, the occult, and the occultation of "sense" in Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence" – a poem which, I will argue, meditates purposefully on the central paradox of modern political subjectivity. By foregrounding in his poem the tension between the sensuous existence of individuals and the abstractions generative of their social identity, Wordsworth presents a self-conscious, if equivocal, reflection on the capacity of aesthetic culture to "suggest" and constitute an abstract community.

Like many of Wordsworth's most characteristic works, "Resolution and Independence" narrates an incident of healing from the perspective of the once-suffering poet himself. As is well known, the poem records a moment of imaginative crisis occasioned by anxieties which beset the speaker: fears, as he records, of "Cold, pain, and labour, and all fleshly ills; / And mighty Poets in their misery dead," which haunt the poet with



doubts over his continued security of mind, body, and profession (P2V, lines 122–3). In terms most obviously distinct from Victorian narratives of Wordsworthian “healing power,” then, it is the poet himself, and not his readership, who stands most urgently in need of cure: Physician, heal thyself. Of course, Wordsworth’s poem has a further explicit relationship to a medical context, namely that suggested by the occupation of the leech-gatherer himself, whose appearance has an appropriately salutary effect on the figure of the poet.<sup>58</sup> It is in the throes of the speaker’s crisis that the leech-gatherer appears; and through their conversation it is the realization that, despite his hardships, the man still possesses “so firm a mind” (145), that assuages the poet’s fears of fleshly, mental, and professional ills. Thus in the closing lines of the poem he vows to think of and to receive spiritual fortification from the old man.

As many readers of the poem have observed, one of the more striking features of “Resolution and Independence” is its tendency to emphasize the abstract, ghost-like appearance of the leech-gatherer in his encounter with the speaker. From the initial moment of the old man’s appearance to the poet, he is described as an apparition, a cloud (82), arguably a fabrication of the speaker’s own troubled mind: “When up and down my fancy thus was driven . . . / I saw a Man before me unawares” (125). Driven to distraction by his overactive “fancy,” the speaker may, in Derrida’s terms, be either hallucinating or perceiving the man, though through the majority of his tale of the encounter he cannot say which is the case. Nor is this ambiguity fully resolved by the end of the poem, where again the leech-gatherer appears to the speaker as a spectral presence, either a tutelary spirit or an elaborate mental projection:

. . . the whole Body of the man did seem  
Like one whom I had met with in a dream;  
Or like a Man from some far region sent  
To give me human strength, and strong admonishment. (116–19)

As he described his ambitions for the poem in a letter of 14 June 1802 to Mary and Sara Hutchinson, Wordsworth explicitly made the leech-gatherer appear to the speaker as a kind of supernatural visitation, and wished to communicate as well a similar “feeling of spirituality or supernaturalness” to the reader (LEY, 366). More than anything else about the old man, it is this spectral quality that designates him as a spiritual guide for the poet, sunk so low in his dejection that only a being of apparently proportionate elevation would be sufficient to relieve him of his anxious thoughts. For a sense of how fully Wordsworth carried through on his

ambition to portray the leech-gatherer in a strongly supernatural light, we can compare his depiction of the man to the keen precision of Dorothy Wordsworth's account of the leech-gatherer in her journal entry of 3 October 1800.<sup>59</sup> In stark contrast, Wordsworth conceives the man in openly, albeit ambiguously, allegorical terms, cast in the role of a divine emissary sent, as the speaker supposes, to admonish, enlighten, and cheer.

Inspired, perhaps, by Lewis Carroll's brilliant parody of the poem in "The White Knight's Song," critical commentaries on "Resolution and Independence" have often noted the serio-comic manner in which the speaker's dejected state of mind prevents him from being fully aware of the leech-gatherer. The speaker's abstracted relationship to the old man has long been emphasized by readers who interpret Wordsworth's poem either as the critique of the solipsistic mentality or – in Carroll's case most explicitly – as its symptomatic expression.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, while most critics acknowledge the ironizing self-reflexivity of the poet's depiction of the leech-gatherer, many have asserted that what David Simpson has described as Wordsworth's "tendency to reify human life into insentience" represents a troubling ethical tendency to abstract from the particularity of the characters of and for whom the poet purports to speak.<sup>61</sup> The apparent status of the leech-gatherer as a prop to the speaker's consciousness has thus been read, by sociologically-minded critics, as a subordinate element of Wordsworth's larger ambition to construct, through the narrative of his encounter, a role for the poet as a privileged agent of an assimilative and generalizing "culture."<sup>62</sup> As these critics argue, Wordsworth's account of the speaker's crisis and of its subsequent resolution at once allegorizes the emergence of "culture" as a reparatory domain and stages the election of its presiding figure in the person of the poet-healer. In a poem so demonstrably concerned with issues of identity and occupation (viz. the poet's insistent questioning of the old man – "what is it you do?" [126]), "Resolution and Independence" enacts the formation of a professional identity – that of the poet – whose role is to renovate the social body by normativizing or abstracting from the sources of its internal division.<sup>63</sup>

As if indeed to dramatize the poet's accession to his role as healer, Wordsworth attributes a reparatory function not only to the poet's encounter with the leech-gatherer, but to his imaginative representation of the man as well. Through its exalted imaginative descriptions of the man, the poem provides a formal as well as thematic resolution to the imaginative crisis that it describes; the formation of poetic "healing power" is therefore enacted both in the narrative of Wordsworth's poem

and at the level of representation. Consider the most famous stanza of the poem, where Wordsworth offers an imaginative depiction of the leech-gatherer in lines that have become some of the most lasting of his poetry:

As a huge Stone is sometimes seen to lie  
Couch'd on the bald top of an eminence;  
Wonder to all who do the same espy  
By what means it could thither come, and whence;  
So that it seems a thing endued with sense:  
Like a Sea-beast crawl'd forth, which on a shelf  
Of rock or sand reposeth, there to sun itself.

Such seem'd this Man . . .

(64–71)

Wordsworth's similes transform the old man into a stone, a sea-beast, and something indeterminately in-between. If one obvious effect of this exhibition is to communicate the "feeling of spirituality or supernaturalness" with which the leech-gatherer was first seen by the poet, it would appear that an equally significant effect of this stanza is to foreground the role of the poet's own work in resolving the crisis that occasions the poem itself. Appearing when the poet's despondency is at its worst, Wordsworth's figures of speech incorporate even into this moment of greatest threat the greatest promise. Thus when, in the final line of the poem, the poet vows to "think of the Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor" (147), and from thence gain necessary strength, he makes a promise that is fulfilled in and through his earlier demonstration of imaginative power. Assimilating the stately speech of the leech-gatherer, his "[c]hoice word, and measured phrase" (102), the stanza incorporates the leech-gatherer's power while reinscribing that power as the property of the poet who will stand, in common with the old man, as the practitioner of a healing art.

Even allowing that "Resolution and Independence" posits an aesthetic basis for the resolution of its central crisis, and thus rhetorically enacts a moment of "healing power," one still may have difficulty seeing how this stanza can be understood as performing the assimilative work that was by Wordsworth as well as by his Victorian readers attributed to this power. And it may be objected that in choosing to find in this depiction a partial resolution to the crisis that occasions the poem, I put an undue amount of pressure on a single stanza. In fact, I do no more than follow Wordsworth's own remarks from his Preface to the *Poems* of 1815. In that text, Wordsworth singles out this stanza for praise as a model of sublimely Miltonic force, evincing in the highest degree the "conferring, abstracting, and modifying powers of the imagination." As Wordsworth

notes, the stanza combines the two objects, stone and sea-beast, in such a way as these "unite and coalesce in just comparison" (WWP, 3:33). Wordsworth's self-congratulatory remarks are of interest not only as they suggest how explicitly this stanza draws attention to the poet's imaginative strength.<sup>64</sup> Just as significantly, Wordsworth's stanza and his later remarks on it suggest how aesthetic representation could perform a kind of work similar to that later attributed to the "healing power" of aesthetic culture – the power, that is, to integrate and unite through the exercise of imaginative sympathy. In his sublime representation of the man, Wordsworth advertises the force by which, with "Wonder with all," the poet sheds a healing influence over his readership. This is the capacity that Mill celebrates in Wordsworth as the power to furnish "a source . . . of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings." The coalescent power of these lines, in other words, not only refer to the person of the leech-gatherer as transfigured by the poet, but to the aim of such representations to "make us feel." In terms developed earlier, we can say that Wordsworth's aim is at once to describe and to produce in the reader an experience of consentaneous response that will serve as the basis for poetic healing.

Wordsworth's extensive revisions to "The Leech-Gatherer" in the spring or summer of 1802 – of which the addition of the stanza above was one direct result – have been well-documented by Jared Curtis and others.<sup>65</sup> Based on surviving evidence, we know that Wordsworth's other major editorial decision was to delete many lines that record the leech-gatherer's direct speech. In the earliest surviving manuscript version of the poem, for instance, the leech-gatherer addresses the state of his own health – "Feeble I am in health these hills to climb / Yet I procure a Living of my own" (P2V, page 323) – in lines that reinforce a distinction between the decrepit but mentally (and vocationally) firm leech-gatherer and the physically healthy but emotionally troubled young poet. In criticisms to which William and Dorothy responded in their letter of June 1802, Sara Hutchinson objected that that leech-gatherer was described in terms too prosaic to account for his importance in the narrative. Wordsworth responded defensively, insisting that the issue of the leech-gatherer's "figure and employment" was of less importance than "the fortitude, independence, persevering spirit, and general moral dignity of this old man's character," and that these qualities were in fact the proper object of the reader's attention (LEY, 367). Though Wordsworth's letter cedes little to the Hutchinsons' criticism, the extensive revisions that he made to the poem in June and July 1802 suggest that he took very

seriously the charge of the leech-gatherer's excessively prosaic presentation in the poem, and revised so as to shift the immediate focus of the encounter from the figure of the old man to the interior monologue of the ailing poet. Thus in the first published version of the poem in 1807, the direct speech of the leech-gatherer has, with the exception of three lines very near the end (131–3), vanished entirely, and the sublime stanza of lines 64–70 has been inserted in turn.

To the reader who sees Wordsworth as effacing the particularity of any individual or experience in preference for its general, representative aspect, these two most significant revisions to "The Leech-Gatherer" could – like the poet's eventual alteration to the title itself – appear broadly complementary in their intentions and effects.<sup>66</sup> Through images that "unite and coalesce in just comparison," Wordsworth's illustration of poetic abstraction provides a portrait of that faculty broadly consistent with Kames's account of the political work attributable to it, namely the power to unite disparate individuals and experiences under a common conceptual heading. Accordingly, the poet may be seen as inviting a comparison between these "abstracting . . . powers of the imagination" and the abstract image of social consensus that these lines would appear to promote. If Wordsworth's revisions claim a broader efficacy for the healing powers of the poet, however, Wordsworth's "vocabulary of abstraction" (as Peter Manning has called it in reference to the poem) just as clearly operates in the discriminative manner suggested by Adair: for what is obviously abstracted from the poem – though fully visible in Dorothy Wordsworth's earlier account – is the abject positivity, the classed and racialized body, of the leech-gatherer himself.<sup>67</sup> As Lloyd and Thomas interpret a very similar set of alterations to Wordsworth's poem "Animal Tranquillity and Decay" (formerly "Old Man Traveling; Animal Tranquillity and Decay, A Sketch"), Wordsworth's revisions "tend in the direction of generalization," both in the representation of the old men in both poems and in their presentation of the moral themes that are derived from these figures.<sup>68</sup> In its revised form of 1807, Wordsworth's poem might therefore be seen to promote the dual work of abstraction as defined in this period, on the one hand by aggregating individuals through the "conferring, abstracting, and modifying powers of the imagination," and on the other hand by rejecting or effacing the inassimilable somatic particulars that present a stubbornly material obstacle to such imagined communities.

Wordsworth's "vocabulary of abstraction" may indeed serve an analogously political function. However, we would be mistaken to overlook or

to ignore how the language of abstraction is described on several occasions in Wordsworth's poem as coming into a profound conflict with "the language of the sense." It is in this sense, in any event, that I read Wordsworth's decision, in the sublime stanza-above quoted, to arrest the vocabulary of abstraction at the seeming vanishing-point of bodily "sense." This transition is suggested not only in a shift from the past to the present tense, but in explicitly returning to and foregrounding the sentient existence of the leech-gatherer: "it seems a thing endued with sense." Conceived as a specter or mental projection through much of the poem, the living presence of the old man thus powerfully reasserts itself at the moment of its seeming disappearance.<sup>69</sup> Read out of context, this line could appear as the most egregious instance of objectification in the entire poem; in reality, the reverse is true. For while endowing the man with the colorings of the imagination, the poet's self-consciously imaginative representation has the ironic – though just as self-consciously intended – effect of heightening a literal recognition of the man himself. Of course the leech-gatherer on the lonely moor *is*, as the line supposes, "endued with sense" – at once less and more, that is, than a spiritual emissary or an embodiment of "general moral dignity." Yet this basic fact has escaped the observation of the speaker, absorbed as he is both in the turmoil of his own morbid thoughts and in his fantasies of receiving solace and redemption from the leech-gatherer. The speaker's "blind thoughts" (28) are therefore blind not only in the sense that he is unaware of their source or tendency, but to the degree as well that they prevent him from seeing the old man in his concrete particularity. From the initial moment of the man's appearance to the speaker, the ailing poet has wished to find in him a symbol – of fortitude in trying circumstances, of a healing power to which the poet himself aspires – yet finds that to do this he must first see the man in himself.

Wordsworth's display of aesthetic abstraction should thus be seen not only as an illustration of the process by which the poet promotes, with "Wonder to all," the vision of a harmoniously consensual social order. Just as importantly, these lines can be read as an invitation to question, to wonder *about*, the source and medium of that coalescent experience – "By what means it could thither come, and whence." As an early exercise of poetic "healing power," Wordsworth's sublime stanza presents an elevated imaginative conception that partially subverts itself, disclosing in the process a literal truth about the man that the speaker has yet to register. This tension between these competing possibilities for perceiving and representing the leech-gatherer – whether, in Marx's terms, to see

him in his “abstract, artificial” capacity or in his “sensuous, individual, and immediate existence” – is an explicit theme of Wordsworth’s poem, accounting most obviously for the poet’s distracted and repetitious interaction with the man.<sup>70</sup> Yet while “Resolution and Independence” clearly establishes the necessity of moving beyond aestheticized representations to an authentic recognition of the man, this conclusion is derived not despite but rather through the poet’s imaginative representation. Wordsworth’s sublime stanza, which effaces a sense of the man’s particularity only to recover it as if by accident, is thus revisited in the speaker’s particularized vision of the man in the climactic closing stanza of the poem:

In my mind’s eye I seem’d to see him pace  
About the weary moors continually,  
Wandering about alone and silently. (136–8)

Whereas the speaker had formerly vacillated between the morbid self-enclosure of his thoughts and his hopes (every bit a flawed product of those reflections) of finding the man to be a kind of spiritual aid, this transformation in the depiction of the leech-gatherer indicates as well a transformation in the narrator himself. While just as fully an imaginative exercise as in the previous stanza, the speaker’s vision becomes the unlikely source of “healing power” by furnishing new objects for the speaker’s thought, no longer “blind” but directly at least partially outward by the concluding line of the poem: “I’ll think of the leech-gatherer on the lonely moor!”

In reifying the leech-gatherer as an object of aesthetic wonder, then, the poet produces a sense of his particularity that might otherwise be lost in an exchange of fellow-feeling. By making a particular imaginative vision of the man crucial to the speaker’s renovated perception, Wordsworth associates the poet’s “healing power” not only with the speaker’s ability to derive abstract meaning from the man, but just as crucially to see him in his concrete existence. Thus, Wordsworth’s “healing power” has two faces and two different effects. If the first aim is to recuperate difference through the agency of feeling, Wordsworth’s task of making us feel is just as fully designed to produce an effect of aesthetic defamiliarization that might paradoxically offer a new basis for community. By promoting an experience of sensuous estrangement from the social, the poet aims to make possible a new and more adequate engagement with it.

In fact, Wordsworth’s “abstracting . . . powers of imagination” are frequently underwritten by moments of disorienting materiality that have

alarmed even his most devoted readers. We'll recall that Coleridge, by all means one of the poet's most insightful and incisive critics, regarded "Resolution and Independence" as uniquely illustrative of one of the major "defects of Wordsworth's poetry," namely "the INCONSTANCY of the *style*" (BL, 2:121). Coleridge's famous objection to his friend's stylistic "inconstancy," as he described it in the *Biographia Literaria*, has its source in Wordsworth's seeming failure to reconcile "opposite or discordant qualities" in a harmonious whole. In Coleridge's estimation, a confusion of diction marks a deeper structural shortcoming of Wordsworth's poem. For far from being made to serve a clear purpose, Coleridge insisted, such moments of "disharmony" – of which Coleridge takes Wordsworth's sublime stanza and the prosaic lines preceding it as representing a particularly egregious example – confound that pleasure in regularity that the reader is wont to expect. "There is something unpleasant," Coleridge notes peevishly, "in the being thus obliged to alternate states of feeling so dissimilar" (BL 2:122). I believe that Coleridge's expression of readerly displeasure has its source in the recognition that Wordsworth's poem withholds easy resolution into formal or thematic harmony, or at least demands vigilance before the process of such resolution. The poet's aim, if not wholly to disrupt the consensual ground from which such harmonies are achieved, is to integrate without effacing utterly those variant "states of feeling" that persist as after-shocks within and to the whole. What Coleridge names "inconstancy," in other words, we might rename as the means by which the poem bears the marks of its own negotiation with opposing interests.

In "Resolution and Independence," then, Wordsworth provides a very different account of what it means for the poet to effect what Coleridge calls the "reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities." Balancing the poem between the juxtaposed terms of its title, Wordsworth represents the process of coalescence in such a manner that the individual elements of its composition resist absorption into a cohesive whole, remaining instead as traces evident to the sense. Through illustration of the failure to achieve the harmonious accommodation of opposing interests, the poet negatively imagines conditions for achieving a consensual "resolution" of society that preserves the "independence" of its constituent members.<sup>71</sup> Thus, Wordsworth's "healing power" may consist not solely in the properties ascribed to it by the Victorian readers of his poetry: the capacity, that is, of ameliorating what Arnold calls the "doubts, disputes, distractions, fears" of modern society. Rather, in preserving and calling attention to the oppositional structure of political



subjectivity, Wordsworth's poem might be seen as leading towards a more fully critical engagement with the society that the poet claims to heal.

What I have not so far addressed at any length, of course, are more purposeful instances of non-consent to the assimilative law of feeling – a subject to which the following two chapters, which examine the practical critique of Wordsworthian aesthetics by authors from Keats to Wilkie Collins, will mainly attend. For important signs of resistance to the *topos* of Wordsworthian healing in particular, though, we might further consider performances of what might be called “dissentaneity,” or moments where feeling operates to quite different ends – a poetry like Byron's, for instance, which through its depiction of the “immedicable soul” strives to remain inassimilable to the domain of poetic healing.<sup>72</sup> An equally instructive counter-example might be sought in women's poetry of the period, much of which, as critics have lately taught us, refuses the hierarchization of mental faculties and thus often stages an oppositional relationship to masculinist constructions of feeling.<sup>73</sup> As I have aimed here solely to shed light on the ambivalently integrative work of feeling, however, such instances must lie outside the scope of the present chapter. I have sought to show how Romantic authors vested feeling with the curative ability to reconcile internal conflict, and thus to serve as a condition for the integration of the subject or the cohesion of the state. Yet I have tried also to complicate any notion that feeling functions unproblematically in this period as the ground for achieving social consensus. In the context of Romantic “healing power,” feeling or sensation functions both as the means of securing consensus and as the potentially unrecuperable remainder of that process. In raising this process *as* a process – as a historical problem which, in Williams's terms, has yet to resolve into a stable concept – Wordsworth's poetry retains a self-consciously provisional notion of what it means in political terms for the poet to “make us feel.”

Therefore, I hope that by returning to this trope with a new understanding of its historical complexity we will be open to modifying our own habits of reading the therapeutic ambitions of poetry, even or perhaps especially when that reading takes the form of a timely and important critical resistance. For there is obvious irony in the fact that our resistance to “healing power” should itself take the form of a diagnostic reading. In view of the damaging political ends to which the salvation narratives of culture have often been put, we would be mistaken not to approach with some skepticism these earliest of claims to “bind[] together . . . the vast empire of human society” through the agency of feeling. Yet it would

be an equally grave oversight to neglect how Romantic poetry might in reflecting on the problematic conditions of political belonging suggest something more than an inevitably authoritarian function for aesthetic culture. My effort has been to contest such patently symptomatic interpretations of the poet-physician, if only for the reason that the convention of “healing power” is not one that the Romantics uncritically inhabited. When, as critics, we hasten to assume the physician’s diagnostic role, we risk repeating Romantic premises precisely where we would get beyond them. Before assuming a place at the bedside of the poet-physician, in other words, we must read the case of healing power as the analysis of a problem with which Romantic poets vigorously and consciously contended, and for which they yielded more than one answer. In such a light, we may see this poetry as making us feel not in order to suspend critique, but rather to make it possible.

PART III

*The persistence of the aesthetic: afterlives  
of Romanticism*



CHAPTER 5

*John Keats and the sense of the future*

“Alas!”  
Said he, “will all this gush of feeling pass  
Away in solitude? And must they wane,  
Like melodies upon a sandy plain,  
Without an echo? Then shall I be left  
So sad, so melancholy, so bereft!  
Yet still I feel immortal!”

John Keats, *Endymion* (JK, 2:680–6)

I will assay to reach to as high a summit in Poetry as the nerve  
bestowed upon me will suffer.

Keats to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818 (JKL, 1:387)

“No one can question the eminency, in Keats’s poetry, of the quality of sensuousness.”<sup>1</sup> John Keats’s reputation as the most sensuous of British Romantic poets – next to Spenser, perhaps, England’s most richly sensuous poet – has proved resilient in the years since Matthew Arnold made this pronouncement more than a century ago. My aim in the present chapter is to re-open the familiar case of Keats’s “sensuousness.” In doing so, however, I wish to show how insistently Keats’s writing complicates this characterization of his work. For while regularly identified with a sensuous poetic style, Keats often describes his poetry as being most closely associated not with the senses but rather with the faculty of abstraction. In a surprising number of instances, Keats’s appeals to sensation remain just that: appeals self-consciously issued from the perspective of a deferred or denied sensuous immediacy. Thus, an irony often overlooked in critical recitations of that most famous sentence from Keats’s letters – “O for a life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!” – is the fact that Keats writes principally from the standpoint of “Thoughts” and not “Sensations” in the first place. “This morning Poetry has conquered,” Keats records in a 22 November 1818 letter to John Hamilton Reynolds – “I have relapsed into those abstractions which are my only

life ... There is an awful warmth about my heart like a load of Immortality" (JKL, 1:370). As "abstractions," or thoughts in the absence of things, Keats's poetic imaginings are conceived in only indirectly sensuous terms. Yet what accounts for the tendency of this famously sensuous poet to commit or submit himself to abstraction? Why do the sensory experience of the poet and the sensuous dimensions of poetry register so persistently as vexed topics in Keats's work? Conversely, what does it mean for the poet to derive a questionably pleasurable sensation (of "awful warmth") from an abstraction like "Immortality"?

Keats is not in fact the only author to associate the prospect of his literary immortality with his capacity for abstraction; Arnold's influential essay on Keats explicitly assesses the poet in these terms as well. Like his famous introduction to Wordsworth, Arnold's essay was an assertion of Keats's worth, and hence his best claim to posterity, against claims made on behalf of the poet by his most ardent admirers. Also in common with the Wordsworth essay, Arnold's essay on Keats was an overt exercise in canon-making: first appearing along with his well-known essay, "The Study of Poetry," in Thomas Humphry Ward's anthology *The English Poets*, Arnold's essay and accompanying selection from Keats's poetry was designed to introduce a judicious selection of his work to a general reading audience.<sup>2</sup> In a memorable assessment of the poet, Arnold insisted that Keats's eligibility for literary posterity increased in inverse proportion to the poet's eminently sensuous qualities. Where Keats is "the merely sensuous man," as Arnold twice names him, he is unworthy of canonization; where the poet promises to deliver something "more than sensuousness," however, namely "signs of character and virtue," he may be admitted. Keats "has made himself remembered," Arnold pronounces, "and remembered as no merely sensuous poet could be."<sup>3</sup> If Keats's letter suggests a link between abstraction and poetic immortality, Arnold confirms a causal relationship between these terms in his assessment of Keats as a poet whose capacity for abstraction renders him worthy to be read and remembered by future generations.

Once considered an obstacle to his literary immortality, Keats's sensuousness has undergone a substantial critical reevaluation in the time since Arnold's pronouncement.<sup>4</sup> Despite this ironic reversal of Arnold's judgment, however, the question that both Keats raises for his own work and that Arnold addresses in his assessment of the poet – what is the place of *aisthesis* in determinations of aesthetic value? – has remained central to recent theoretical debates on the processes of literary canon formation. In an exemplary contribution to this debate, for instance, John Guillory

influentially proposed a new understanding of the canon – one largely derived from Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology of aesthetics – that challenged existing conceptions of aesthetic value as rooted in the subjectivism of individual judgments of taste. Shifting focus away from debates over the capacity of the canon to “represent” diverse individuals and interest groups, Guillory insisted on the necessity of attending to the process by which social relations are reproduced through the systematic transmission of “cultural capital,” or “the means of literary production and consumption.”<sup>5</sup> Guillory protests against critics from the left who see the canon as composed through judgments of inclusion or exclusion, and is just as critical of a conception of literary value as determined on the basis of what Barbara Herrnstein Smith identifies as mutable and multiply configurable “contingencies” arising from factors such as biology, history, and social class. Instead, Guillory insists upon the need to attend to “the forms of objective structuration” that are responsible for maintaining dominant conceptions of aesthetic value over time.<sup>6</sup> In an account strongly critical of Smith’s liberal pluralism, Guillory argues that Smith challenges the validity of efforts to determine a basis for aesthetic value only to locate such a basis in the mechanisms of a “biophysiological” response that “operates beneath and before the emergence of social organization.”<sup>7</sup> Of course, aesthetic objects may well be sensuous or evoke a sensory response. But the value of those same objects – their status as cultural capital – is determined independently of their sensuous character.

Certainly Guillory is right to reject the notion that the canon is formed sheerly on the basis of the individual or valuing community. And yet it is plain that in dismissing the issue of “biophysiological” response as largely irrelevant to the determination of aesthetic value, Guillory implicitly dismisses this dimension as extraneous to the *discourse* of value, and thus to the historical process by which, in Guillory’s terms, literature comes to be conceived as “the embodiment of a quantum of aesthetic value” in the first place.<sup>8</sup> Like Smith, then, Guillory as well fails to account for how the “biophysiological” character of aesthetic experience might be constituted by, or otherwise come into contact with, the social. In the conclusion to his book, Guillory speculates that the work of art necessarily exceeds the labor of cultural or sociological analysis, whose “remainder,” he points out, “is nothing other than aesthetic experience.”<sup>9</sup> Guillory’s statement is often cited as authorizing a new kind of critical attention to aesthetic experience that would acknowledge, in the words of the editors of one recent anthology, “the mixed, *impure* conditions characteristic of every social practice and experience, however privileged or marginalized.”<sup>10</sup>

While opening this line of inquiry, however, Guillory's provocative remarks have so far not led scholars to take up the issue of whether the experiential or "biophysiological" dimension of art might itself have played a part in emergent conceptions of aesthetic value, or have presented a critical reflection on such conceptions in the period in which, by Guillory's account, the very notion of cultural capital emerges.

Despite his silence on this subject, Guillory is certainly not without a precedent for thinking about how the commodity, literary or otherwise, might embody in the biophysiological domain the social conditions under which it was produced. In *Capital*, we'll recall, Marx defined the commodity in terms of its appearance of having erased traces of a concrete labor process, by which, as Marx writes, "All its sensuous characteristics are extinguished."<sup>11</sup> Yet Marx further insisted that the antagonism between concrete and abstract characteristics remains immanent to the commodity-form, which embodies the antinomical conditions of its production. As in a "hieroglyphic," to invoke Marx's well-known analogy, this fundamental antinomy of sensuous/particular and abstract/general characteristics (those pertaining to use and exchange value, respectively) is legible within the commodity itself.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Guillory's account of how literature first came to be regarded as the embodiment of cultural capital relies on an understanding of aesthetics as having emerged contemporaneously and in a close conceptual relationship with the late eighteenth-century science of political economy. Yet cultural historians have so far not explored how poetry's language of embodied aesthetic response might reflect critically upon the entanglement and subsequent separation of these discourses.

If contemporary theoretical writing on the canon has been insufficiently attentive to the question of how the experiential character of art might bear upon the historical processes of canon formation, the existing critical discussion of Keatsian sensuousness has gone not much farther in situating the poet's persistent opposition of sensation and thought in relation to this period's emergent conception of aesthetic value. Though Keats's immortalization as a sensuous poet has by now been fully secured, Keats's sensuous style has generally not been considered a subject bearing significantly on the politics of aesthetic value in this period. An important exception to this critical neglect is offered by Marjorie Levinson's *Keats's Life of Allegory*, which forcefully describes how what decades of critics characterized as Keats's "sensuous sincerity" must be understood in relation to the poet's "alienated access to the canon" and his estrangement from the dominant social class that acts as its guardian.<sup>13</sup> In Levinson's



reading, Keats's response to this alienation is to produce a substitute life in imagination that symptomatically reproduces the social relations of the middle class through a "self-reflexive fetishistic inscription of the canon."<sup>14</sup>

My aim in the present chapter is to ask how the sensuous element of poetry was excised from literature of a canonical stature, and further to investigate how Keats wrestled with this separation in poems that have established his reputation ironically, though I believe justly, as the most sensuous of British Romantic poets. Far from viewing Keats as the hapless victim of a breach between sensation and literary value, however, I argue that he is its most incisive historian. While proposing a further context for understanding the conflict between "Sensations" and "Thoughts" in Keats's work, I want to re-orient this discussion by exploring how Keats thematized the uniquely divided form of literature in this period in which the modern conception of literary value emerged. Though this conflict takes many forms in Keats's writing, the divorce of *aisthesis* from aesthetic value is nowhere more evident than when, as Andrew Bennett has lately described, Keats depicts himself as speaking from a standpoint such as that of a future state from beyond the reach of the bodily senses.<sup>15</sup> The desire for literary immortality thus proleptically realizes itself in such moments when, to cite the best-known Romantic example from Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," "we are laid asleep / In body, and become a living soul" (LB, 46–7). I save for the final chapter a more detailed examination of how Wordsworth imagined a relationship between *aisthesis* and aesthetic value, and the ambivalent consequences of this conception for the nineteenth-century divide between elite and popular literary genres. In fact, both Wordsworth and Keats posit an intimate relationship between perception and ideation, and regard poetry as unique in its ability to sustain a balance between them. While both asserting the mutual dependence of sensation and reflection in aesthetic response, however, Keats's writing often critically reflects on an internal division between physical feeling and the morality of a disinterested aesthetic response that would appear to require a turn away from the senses. As the poet who famously derived intimations of immortality in moments of turning away from "sense and outward things" (WW, 1:528), then, Wordsworth offers a clear precedent for Keats's inhabitation of a subject-position beyond the physical senses. Yet while Wordsworth frequently privileges experiences in which the outward sense is subdued, contained, or momentarily suspended, Keats parodies and sharply criticizes the naturalization of this motif, even or perhaps

especially in work that seems to follow Wordsworth's lead. Through his dialectical critique of this renunciatory position, Keats imagines a negatively critical function for the autonomy of poetic feeling.

Just as significantly for our understanding of this critique, Keats's reflections on the sphere of literary value remain firmly anchored in a "biophysiological" context which, far from being opposed to socio-political context, is a vital expression of it. In Charles Bell's "new anatomy" of the nervous system, to which the poet was introduced while a medical student at Guy's Hospital, Keats found a figure for depicting a strikingly literal entanglement of – and a mutually dependent relationship between – the sensuous and abstract dimensions of the literary text. From Bell's influential discovery of the possibility of separating the sensory and motor nerves of the body, Keats derived a conception of the literary work of art as a product whose sphere of value is problematically estranged from the sensuous conditions of its production.<sup>16</sup> Thus, at the historical moment in which the work of art was newly understood as "the embodiment of a quantum of aesthetic value," Keats's writing reflects an understanding of the literary commodity as an internally divided form, estranged from a sensuousness that in the era of Spenser seemed to have been the very sign of aesthetic value. Dramatizing an evanescence of the senses that Marx will later identify as a central phase in the process of commodification, Keats reflects powerfully on the divided nature of literary production and on the kinship between conceptions of economic and literary value that underwrites this division in the first place. The internally conflictual, "biophysiological" character of this work, far from being the condition posited "beneath and before the emergence of social organization," is rather the figure for that work's social form, and the model for its profoundest ambitions.

#### POSTERITY AND THE DOUBLE-LIFE OF THE POET

Keats's prescient declaration that he "will be among the English Poets after my death" suggests not only the brash ambition of this young poet, but reflects as well the emergence of a national literary tradition to which anthologists had recently given a local habitation and a name (JKL, 1:394). Literary and cultural historians have long observed that the late eighteenth century witnessed the invention of "literature" in the modern sense, that is as a body of imaginative works rather than printed works in general. More recently, a number of critics have begun to revisit and refine that conceptual history through an emphasis on its national and

institutional contexts, exploring how in the same period a distinctly English literary canon was introduced through the curricula of schools and universities and various anthologies that endeavored to impose order and a sense of national coherence on the English literary past.<sup>17</sup> In influential collections from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, critics and editors such as Thomas Warton, Robert Southey, and Thomas Campbell produced the image of a native literary tradition which they, like Keats and later Ward, referred to as a unified textual body – “the English Poets.”<sup>18</sup> Such historians and anthologists of English poetry made up the rank and file of those who, as Keats puts it in the Preface to *Endymion*, were “competent to look, and who do look with a zealous eye, to the honour of English literature” (JK, 64).

As literary historians have recently shown, the codification of English literary history developed hand-in-hand with a tendency to locate the site of greatest literary authority in the authors and works of the past. Jonathan Brody Kramnick has demonstrated that by the late eighteenth century British critics and anthologists no longer looked to contemporary writers for the perfection of a “classical” style; instead, they vested past writers – especially the trinity of Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton – with an authority rivaling that of the classic authors. In Kramnick’s version of the process whereby modernity fosters its own antiquity and myth of origins, numerous eighteenth-century critics responded to the modernization of the book trade and the emergence of a popular reading audience by establishing “English antiquity as the moment of literary achievement against which all subsequent writing would be measured.”<sup>19</sup> When Keats in *Endymion*, then, laments that “the count / Of mighty poets is made up” (JK, 2:723–4), he is rehearsing a kind of popular critical orthodoxy which maintained that the glory of English letters was built upon, and largely confined to, the works of the past. In the preface to his history of English poetry for instance, Warton could speak of the decline of modern literature from “the golden age of English poetry” in the Elizabethan period.<sup>20</sup> Anticipating Peacock’s more wittily caustic assessment in “The Four Ages of Poetry,” Warton identifies the march of historical progress with the process of poetic decline.

Keats’s anxious regard for his place in English literary history has been a central topic of criticism at least since W. Jackson Bate – and Bate’s epebe Harold Bloom – characterized him as the model of the “belated” modern poet.<sup>21</sup> We know Keats, of course, as a fervent admirer of the Elizabethan era, whose poets – “The fervid choir that lifted up a noise / Of harmony” – he frequently praises as representing the pinnacle of

imaginative power (“Sleep and Poetry,” JK, 42). Moreover, critics have long observed that the sensuous richness of the Elizabethans, and of Spenser in particular, was a principal attraction for the young Keats, whose vocation as a poet begins, after all, with an “Imitation of Spenser,” long considered to be the first poem he wrote.<sup>22</sup> With the enshrinement of poetic achievement in the works of England’s literary past, however, there emerges, and Keats’s work especially reflects, a conception of writing as estranged from the sensuous immediacy of the present, oriented either towards the distant past or to a future well beyond the reach of the bodily senses. In what Bennett has identified as Romanticism’s “culture of posterity,” one traces a unique phenomenology of literary experience that manifests everywhere in Keats’s work; this approach is characterized by a future-oriented model of composition in which writing is conceived as the provision of material for posterity, and by a corresponding demand to separate the literary object both from the sensuous conditions of its production and from the sensuousness of England’s literary past. This paradoxical stance, consisting of equal parts self-realization and self-abnegation, derives to no small degree from an emergent distinction between the sensuous conditions of poetic making and an understanding of aesthetic value as embodied in a quantifiable figure (a “count / Of mighty poets”) that is already “made up.”

For an example of how Keats thematizes an emergent separation of *aisthesis* and aesthetic value, we can consult the early verse epistle “To My Brother George,” the centerpiece poem of Keats’s first volume of 1817. Like many contributions to this volume, Keats’s poem dwells to a considerable degree on his fears of artistic immaturity, inadequacy, and belatedness, especially with regard to his Elizabethan ancestors. The poem opens with the speaker’s rueful acknowledgment that, despite his best efforts, he “should never hear Apollo’s song” or produce a “divine” work in any of the poetic genres available to him (JK, 9–18). These melancholy thoughts are at first assuaged, however, by thoughts of the poet’s pleasures and imaginative plenitude. I noted in chapter 1 Keats’s elaboration in this poem of an ideal of poetic suggestion, an opening of the “enchanted portals” of sense through which numerous sights and sounds enter the poet’s brain (and are re-processed as sensory information for the reader). These visions provide access to a chivalric past, or more accurately to a literary rendering of chivalry most closely associated with Spenser. As in many of Keats’s early verses (the “Specimen of an Induction to a Poem,” for instance), Spenser figures in the poem not only as the embodiment of literary authority but – intimately related to this – as the figure

for an easy and pleasurable immersion in the sensuous world of poetic inspiration.

Having described such experiences as the reward of poetic inspiration, however, Keats distances himself from this ideal of sensuous mental imaging only lines later; indeed, Keats declares in the next stanza that these “living pleasures of the bard” are markedly inferior to “posterity’s award” (JK, 53, 67–8), whose particular virtues he goes on to enumerate in an extended dramatic sequence. This first sustained pledge to “posterity” in Keats’s poetry occurs not as a statement of the speaker’s own ambitions, but rather, in a curious ventriloquization, as a soliloquy by an unnamed “bard” on his deathbed:

What though I leave this dull, and earthly mould,  
Yet shall my spirit lofty converse hold  
With after times. – The patriot shall feel  
My stern alarum, and unsheath his steel;  
Or, in the senate thunder out my numbers  
To startle princes from their easy slumbers.  
The sage will mingle with each moral theme  
My happy thoughts sententious. (JK, 71–8)

In lines following, Keats acknowledges that this “mad ambition” is indeed his own (JK, 110). Why then does Keats develop the persona of the bard to speak for these ambitions? On the one hand, we can read this act of self-distancing as a reflection of Keats’s professional anxieties in this period. As in “Sleep and Poetry,” where Keats describes himself as a disciple but not yet a “denizen” of poetry’s “wide heaven” (JK, 48–9), “To My Brother George” displays an acute self-consciousness about his fitness and even the legitimacy of his desire to be a poet.<sup>23</sup> As the poetic imaginings of a precocious and inexperienced poet, Keats’s lines might therefore be read in terms of Levinson’s argument that Keats’s alienated purchase on the middle class required him to simulate literary authority through the invention of a fictional persona. On this reading, Keats’s ventriloquized “bard” represents the Cockney poet’s own fetishized appropriation of a sphere of literary authority from which he is excluded. Keats’s image of the dying bard is thus every bit as much a compensatory fantasy as is his depiction of luxuriant sensuous composition.

It is true that both those “living pleasures” and “posterity’s award” are depicted as absent from the speaker’s possession, and thus both signs of the poet’s lack. Despite this, however, there seems to be a more fundamental reason why Keats would wish to represent the condition of literary posterity through an act of ventriloquization: for Keats’s attribution of his

own ambitions to a nameless bard effectively dramatizes the impossibility of speaking *in propria persona* when one imagines a poetic afterlife or future state. Underwriting Keats's decision to attribute his own poetic ambitions to the bard is his understanding that one has to relinquish feeling so that subsequent readers will "feel / [the poet's] stern alarum" and be startled into thought or action; to speak "sententiously," as the bard wishes to do, one has to forego the ability to be, as it were, "sentient." Speaking from the imagined perspective of the future, Keats's bard literalizes a conception of aesthetic value in which the pleasures of the senses must be delayed or denied for higher rewards in the poetic afterlife: "Happy he who trusts / To clear Futurity his darling fame!" ("Sleep and Poetry," JK, 358–9).<sup>24</sup>

In his study of English literature's "culture of posterity," Bennett has demonstrated the centrality of such motifs to Romantic poetry, pointing out that it is in this period that posthumous life – the promise of survival in and beyond the death of the author – is newly established as a stimulus to poetic composition. Bennett reads such dramatizations of the author's demise as a reflection of the poet's flight from the material conditions of literary production. By appealing to a state beyond that of the earthly life, he argues, Romantic poets attempt to circumvent the critical and commercial demands of the literary marketplace, thereby placing their work beyond the grip of economic realities: thus, "Posterity, from the perspective of the producer, at least, is the ideal mechanism for extracting 'art' or 'literature' from its enabling conditions of production, of commerce."<sup>25</sup> Yet Keats's self-conscious enactment of this process would seem to argue against the notion that the poet's early work consists either in the "the simple reflex of Keats's self-alienation," as Levinson argues, or in a flight from the sphere of interested social activity.<sup>26</sup> On the contrary, "To My Brother George" suggests an alienation not so much suffered as deliberately thematized, and thus not so far removed from what Levinson sees as the more critically self-reflexive passages of Keats's later poetry. Indeed, Keats further describes this conflict as transforming the nature of poetic composition itself, which is described at once as a richly sensuous exercise and as an activity that involves the sacrifice of the senses. Thus, we note that the "living pleasures of the bard" are characterized not only by an obvious surplus but also by a *deficiency* of sense: "when a Poet is in such a trance," Keats informs us on authority from Spenser (though the information comes to him second-hand from Hunt), "*nought* they see, / In water, earth, or air, but poesy" (JK, 25, 21–2, my emphasis).

The division between the sensuous and abstract dimensions of the poet's life and work is a recurrent and explicit theme of Keats's early poetry. Consider, for example, a poem that Keats wrote in 1818 on the topic of "the double immortality of Poets" (JKL, 2:25). Even more explicitly than does "To My Brother George," Keats's poem thematizes a duality in the poet's role; whereas the former poem imagines this opposition for the living poet, though, the latter poem imagines the same duality for the poetic afterlife. On the one hand, the poet enjoys an afterlife in a heaven of sensuous pleasure: "the noise of fountains," "soft ease . . . on Elysian lawns," and the exquisite perfumes of flowers (JK, 225). In an earthly afterlife that presumably consists in being read by the living, however, the poet continues to perform his high duties for the sake of humankind, and serves, as in "The Fall of Hyperion," as a physician to society, teaching mortals "[w]hat doth strengthen and what maim" (JK, 226). Though the poet's posterity is a life obviously experienced "in a finer tone," to invoke Keats's famous phrase (JKL, 1:185), this doubling of souls is equally understood to be a continuation of the poet's own divided life; the double-life of the living poet produces an afterlife that is equally divided in itself. The poet's dual identity is further evoked in the rondeau of the poem, which Keats renders first in the interrogative and then in the declarative in the final lines of the poem:

Bards of passion and of mirth,  
Ye have left your souls on earth!  
Ye have souls in heaven too,  
Double-lived in regions new! (JK, 226)

If such poems reflect Keats's persistent awareness of the poet's double-life, this apprehension was ironically lost in Keats's earliest entry into the English literary canon. In his selection of Keats's poetry for Ward's anthology, for instance, Arnold extrapolated and chose for inclusion only the Bard's oration from "To My Brother George," a fragment to which he gave the new title, "The Bard Speaks." Arnold's editorial decision clearly reflects his aim to commemorate only those passages of Keats's poetry that suggest the "[c]haracter and self-control" of the great artist.<sup>27</sup> By excerpting the poem so as to remove any trace of opposition between the sensuous dimension of poetic making and the abstraction constitutive of poetic value, however, Arnold at once confirms and effaces Keats's understanding of literary immortality as necessitating a turn away from the senses.

## THE PHYSIOLOGY OF DISINTEREST

Keats's tendency to assert a form of moral authority in a turn away from the senses has one important and well-documented source in the writing of William Hazlitt. In Hazlitt's first book, the *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805), Keats had a basis for conceiving the morality of the imagination as not only distinct from that of the senses, but as crucially oriented towards a future state. Hazlitt's treatise, subtitled "a Argument in Defense of the Natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind," energetically rejects the notion – attributed by Hazlitt to sensationists such as Helvétius and his English disciples – that all behavior begins in sensation and is therefore fundamentally self-interested. Hazlitt summarizes his objection to this view on the first page of the *Essay*:

As an affair of sensation, or memory, I can feel no interest in any thing but what relates to myself in the strictest sense. But this distinction does not apply to future objects, or to those impressions, which determine my voluntary actions . . . The imagination, by means of which alone I can anticipate future objects, or be interested in them, must carry me out of myself into the feelings of others by one and the same process by which I am thrown forward as it were into my future being, and interested in it. (WH, 1:3)

Because "I have no distinct faculty giving me a direct present interest in my future sensations," Hazlitt argues, my self-interest with respect to my future identity cannot be distinguished from my interest in another being; consequently, as Raymond Martin and John Barresi have summarized Hazlitt's argument, "a person's so-called future self is metaphysically an 'other'" (WH, 1:3).<sup>28</sup> Hazlitt thus defines imagination as necessarily sympathetic, as equal in its regard for others as in its concern for "my future being." Previous to Hazlitt's *Essay*, of course, a number of influential texts in eighteenth-century moral philosophy, from Shaftesbury's *Characteristics* to Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, had drawn similar connections between the faculty of imagination and the capacity for sympathy. In a refinement of such arguments, Hazlitt both expands on this theory to argue that the imagination is by definition sympathetic, and significantly temporalizes the mind's disinterestedness as well, attributing to the imagination, in contrast both to perception and to memory, an essential tie to futurity.

Hazlitt's *Essay* is generally seen as having offered Keats a philosophical basis for his conception of the "camelion Poet," and thus for such well-known pronouncements as his claim that "Men of Genius . . . have not any individuality, any determined Character" (JKL, 1:118, 1:184).<sup>29</sup> In a



book containing one of the best accounts of Hazlitt's thought and its influence on Keats, David Bromwich contends that Hazlitt's use of the term "disinterestedness" was meant neither to imply "uninterest" nor "impartiality," but rather an openness to experience unhindered by habitual associations or prejudices. Bromwich writes: "All that an attitude of disinterestedness ought to mean for the person who holds it, is that his final judgment is the result of what he sees, hears, and feels as the merits of the case."<sup>30</sup> In Bromwich's view, Hazlitt's disinterestedness is that of the negatively capable individual whose ability to adjudicate from case to case proves his relativist credentials. It is in this sense that Bromwich sees Hazlitt as a significant precursor of pragmatist philosophers such as William James.<sup>31</sup>

Though Bromwich is certainly right to describe Hazlitt's notion of disinterestedness as a forerunner to a philosophical tradition of liberal pragmatism, he is mistaken to see Hazlitt's notion of disinterestedness as unequivocally given to the kind of empirical determination that he describes. For Hazlitt, on the contrary, the disinterested exercise of the imagination is necessarily and by definition non-sensuous. It is true that Hazlitt regards consciousness and memory as "affairs of sensation" and therefore embodied states of mind. But Hazlitt plainly separates imagination from these mental states on grounds that no bodily activity is involved in its operation and no sensory faculty is available for its apprehension. Though Hazlitt posits a physiological basis for one's past and present consciousness, he regards an imaginative perspective on the future as entirely independent of the senses.<sup>32</sup> Hazlitt's account of disinterestedness is on this basis almost entirely opposite to Bromwich's rendering of that state, as the interest that I am capable of feeling with respect to my future self "is not therefore something which I can handle, which is to be felt, or seen, it is not lodged in the organs or hearing, or taste, or smell, it is not the subject of any of the senses, it is not in any respect what is commonly understood by a real, substantial interest" (WH, 1:11). Though the exercise of the disinterested mind may indeed involve some degree of sensory activity, such a response is at best a by-product of disinterested cognition and not in any integral way connected to it.

In contrast to Hazlitt, then, Keats's tendency to regard sensation and abstraction as distinct but mutually dependent features of imaginative experience must be understood to owe to his insistence that imagination, in common with perception and memory, is itself an embodied state of mind. Though Keats invokes a familiar hierarchy between sensuous/self-interested and abstract/disinterested mental faculties, the poet depicts

these as mutually implicated and mutually embodied. Moreover, whereas Hazlitt conceives the morality of the imagination as owing to its independence from the senses, Keats asserts a separate identity for what he (after Coleridge) calls “poetical Sensation” as both distinct from the sphere of ethical action and generally continuous with it.<sup>33</sup> This understanding of sensation and abstraction as mutually dependent aspects of poetic experience is fully apparent in Keats’s “Bards of passion and of mirth,” which considers as a necessary pair both halves of the poet’s double-life.

Were we to seek a source for Keats’s conviction that disinterestedness is itself an embodied state of consciousness, we could do worse than to look to the content of the poet’s medical education. In fact, the anatomical lectures that Keats attended at Guy’s Hospital made explicit reference to the notion of sensation and volition as distinct but mutually dependent properties of the nervous system. As historians of medicine have shown, this finding was one of the most significant contributions of the anatomist Charles Bell, a figure celebrated in his own lifetime as one of the principal “authors of the modern physiology of the nerves.”<sup>34</sup> Bell’s 1811 treatise, the *Idea of a New Anatomy of the Brain*, introduced the conception of the modular brain that would become the foundation of modern brain science, and inaugurated a paradigm that we still associate with his name.<sup>35</sup> The lynchpin of Bell’s *New Anatomy*, and the insight for which he is best remembered, is the discovery of distinct functions for the nerves and for the anterior and posterior regions of the brain. Against the prevailing notion of the brain as a *sensorium commune* in which sense-impressions are mysteriously converted into directives for bodily movement, Bell determined that the nerves of sense and motion had distinct functions running separately throughout the course of the human body. As Bell argues, “the nerves which we trace in the body are not single nerves possessing various powers, but bundles of different nerves . . . which are distinct in office, as they are in origin from the brain” (NA, 5). These nerves, Bell shows, are separately responsible for the faculties of sensation and volition: “Through the nerves of sense the *sensorium* receives impressions, but the will is expressed through the medium of the nerves of motion” (NA, 35–6). As Anne Harrington has noted, Bell’s theory thus offered a way “for interpreting the psychological facts of sensation and motor response in physiological terms.”<sup>36</sup> By establishing a basis for regarding the nerves of sensation and motion as “distinct through their whole course” though “united in one bundle” for convenience of distribution, Bell’s treatise helped answered a question that had plagued

anatomists and physiologists for decades, namely why “a nerve may lose one property [of sensation or volition] and retain another” (NA, 6).

The notion that the sensory and motor nerves are distinct was a lesson clearly imparted to Keats in the course of his medical education, and is noted in the sole surviving notebook from Keats’s days as a medical student at Guy’s Hospital in 1815–16. Keats’s course in anatomy and physiology was taught by Astley Cooper, one of the 100 recipients of Bell’s privately distributed treatise and Keats’s primary instructor at Guy’s.<sup>37</sup> When Keats records in his notebook that “Volition is sometimes present while Sensation is destroyed” (PNB, 57), he is clearly taking this fact on authority from Bell’s new anatomy. In common with Bell, moreover, Keats understands these functions of the embodied mind as mutually dependent in a way that Hazlitt does not. Though the essential properties of the sensory and motor nerves are different, Bell argues, “their union and cooperation be necessary to the completion of their function – the development of the faculties by impulse from external matter” (NA, 34). From Bell’s anatomy of the brain, then, Keats had a contemporary scientific basis for conceiving the mutual dependence of sensation and disinterested human action.

Alan Richardson has demonstrated how closely Bell’s research on the central nervous system complements, and in Keats’s case directly informs, contemporary Romantic conceptions of mind, cognition, and subjectivity. Surveying Keats’s considerable knowledge of contemporary medical matters, Richardson observes that the central principle of Bell’s *New Anatomy* is “touched on only tangentially” in Keats’s medical notebook.<sup>38</sup> Yet we would be mistaken to regard this as an exclusively epistemological theme of Keats’s writing. Indeed, Keats often invokes a distinction between the sensory and motor functions of the body in the context of reflections on the morality of the imagination. Bell’s discovery plays a central role, for instance, in Keats’s famous comparison of human life to a “mansion of many apartments” in his 3 May 1818 letter to Reynolds. In this well-known passage, Keats charts the course of human development from the “thoughtless Chamber” of infancy to “the Chamber of Maiden-Thought,” where “we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there forever in delight” (JKL, 1:280–1). Keats describes here a developmental phase principally characterized by a state of “interested” (i.e. sensuous) cognition. Much as the “living pleasures of the bard” must be eschewed in pursuit of a higher end (and for potentially greater gains in the afterlife), however, Keats declares that this sensuous phase of

human life must be overcome in preference for a more advanced stage of human cognition, one that he describes Wordsworth's poetry in particular as having explored, in which the moral efficacy of the imagination is more fully developed. Far from distinguishing between the bodily basis of human consciousness and the metaphysical origins of human action, Keats accounts for this latter stage as well in physiological terms; one moves between phases, he writes, by "convincing one's nerves that the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness, and oppression" (JKL, 1:281). Freely metaphorizing on Bell's distinction between the sensory and motor nerves, Keats describes both self-interest and imaginative *disinterest* as mutually defined properties of nervous response.

Keats's distinction between a feminized "Maiden-Thought" and a higher, more purposive state of consciousness raises, in the language of Bell's new anatomy, a further context for what critics have identified as the ambivalent gender politics of Keats's work.<sup>39</sup> Keats's sensuous poetry was often read by his contemporaries as wanting in the manly resolve that Keats himself identifies with Wordsworth. In the essay "On Effeminacy of Character," for instance, Hazlitt chastised the poet for asserting "the prevalence of the sensibility over the will," patronizingly describing Keats as an author for whom "every sensation [is] wound up to the highest pitch of voluptuous refinement" (WH, 8:248–9). When, later in the century, Arnold searched for "signs in [the poet] of something more than sensuousness, for signs of character and virtue," his critique of Keats's "feminine" style relied on a similar dichotomy between the indulgence of the senses and the noble aspirations of the spirit.<sup>40</sup>

It is true that Keats frequently eschews a condition of feminized, sensual "Maiden-Thought" in preference for a condition of sturdily masculine (and explicitly Wordsworthian) resolve. In "Sleep and Poetry," for example, a work sharing many themes with Keats's verse-epistle, the speaker catalogues at length the vividly sensuous pleasures of poetic inspiration, only to suggest that he must "bid these joys farewell" in preference for "a nobler life" of higher ethical purpose (JK, 122–3). While critical of a sensuously "feminine" style in his own work and in that of others, however, Keats is just as frequently critical of a tendency of literature or of moral philosophy to subordinate sensation to thought, or to obstruct communication between these spheres; though ontologically and functionally distinct, each is dependent on the other. In terms similar to those offered by Bell's new anatomy, then, Keats often describes the loss of sensation as a defect of the nerves, most often the result of injury, and thus only ambivalently a desired end. As a source of disinterested

human action and a basis for a further, collective form of enjoyment, the suspension or deferral of gratification is a noble ambition and a necessary phase of ethical development. As a form of self-division entailing the sacrifice of the senses, however, the division of these mutually implicated faculties is conceived more as a symptom than as a normative ideal. Keats thereby depicts the loss of sensation as a kind of injury, often indeed a self-inflicted one, and is deeply ambivalent about the social necessity of subjugating the senses to the will.

For a uniquely literal approach to this predicament befitting the young medical student, consider the following anecdote, related to Keats by Cooper, from the poet's notes on the physiology of the nervous system: "The Patriot K. having had the Sciatic Nerve divided by a pike wound was a long while before his limb recovered any sensibility" (PNB, 55). "K" refers to Tadeusz Kosciuszko, the Polish patriot whose organization of an insurgency of Polish peasants against Russian soldiers is celebrated in a number of Romantic poems. On the evidence of other surviving notes of Cooper's surgical lectures in this period, the anecdote of Kosciuszko's injury was one of Cooper's favorite and most often repeated illustrations of Bell's new anatomy. In 1815–16, for instance, the same years in which Keats was a student at Guy's Hospital, a fellow pupil named George Ray entered the following information in his notes on a lecture concerning "Wounds of Nerves": "Cosciusko Polish General had Sciatic Nerve divided."<sup>41</sup> Another of Cooper's students from this period, one Thomas Appleby, similarly records the case of "The famous Polish General [who] had his Sciatic Nerve divided, and was twelve months before he got better."<sup>42</sup>

In his account of the politics of Keats's medical education, Nicholas Roe has read Cooper's reference to Kosciuszko in connection to the dissenting politics of many prominent figures within the Guy's Hospital establishment during the period of Keats's training there.<sup>43</sup> Yet I would suggest that we can discern a political dimension to Keats's recitation of this anecdote just as clearly in the disorder he describes as in the reference to the figure who suffers it. Kosciuszko's loss of feeling in his leg – his ability to operate in the absence of bodily sensibility – is a measure of his greatness as a soldier and patriot. To follow the dialectical logic on which Keats frequently draws, the wound that Kosciuszko suffers prefigures not only the return of sensation to his limb, but the eventual completion of the highest task to which he was devoted, namely the liberation of Poland. Keats will pick up this theme in his sonnet "To Kosciuszko," written just months after receiving his Apothecaries' Certificate, in which he hails the patriot with the assertion that "thy great name alone / Is a

full harvest whence to reap high feeling” (JK, 37). Like all Keatsian harvests – from the gleaning of the brain in “When I have fears” to the “half-reap’d furrow” of “To Autumn” – the work of reaping is seemingly more than can be accomplished within a lifetime. Much as the bard of “To My Brother George” anticipates his death in order to savor how future generations of patriots will “feel / My stern alarm,” however, Kosciusko’s loss of sensibility represents a sacrifice of living pleasure in pursuit of higher rewards. It is thus not from the intensification but rather from the relinquishment of sensibility that “high feeling” can be reclaimed and put to saving use.<sup>44</sup>

#### THE FEEL OF NOT TO FEEL IT

As suggested by his tributes to Kosciusko’s injury and accomplishments, Keats often declaims against the insufficiency of the aesthetic, or the sphere of *aisthesis* generally, to have any widespread political influence, and to this degree does clearly insist on the necessity of making art answerable to a higher moral purpose. Consider Keats’s impassioned appeal in an 1817 letter to Benjamin Bailey: “O for a recourse somewhat human independant of the great Consolations of Religion and undepraved Sensations. of the Beautiful. the poetical in all things – O for a Remedy against such wrongs within the pale of the World!” (JKL, 1:179). Keats’s remark is most obviously understood as offering a variation on the theme, memorably formulated by W. H. Auden, that poetry makes nothing happen. His appeal for a practical, “human” remedy to the world’s ills anticipates the critique of a so-called “Romantic ideology” – the notion, as Jerome McGann tacitly reformulated Keats’s point, that by dwelling in the aesthetic one “avoid[s] facing the truths of immediate history.”<sup>45</sup>

Though distinguishing poetic making from substantial human action, however, Keats does clearly assert the relative autonomy of “poetical Sensation” in relation to existing standards of practical reason and moral conduct. While maintaining the insufficiency of a purely “aesthetic” response to the world, that is, Keats also resists a tendency to make the sensuous content of art or aesthetic experience dependent upon or subordinate to its moral content. In terms suggestive of Bell’s new anatomy, and of the ethical argument to which the poet applied the anatomist’s work, Keats imagines the autonomy of the aesthetic as functionally distinct from but mutually dependent with the sphere of disinterested moral thought and action. Moreover, Keats takes Bell’s discovery of distinct but complementary functions for the sensory and motor nerves as

a figure for the mutually dependent relationship between the sensuous and abstract properties of the literary text. In one of his few forays into drama criticism, Keats asserts that “A melodious passage in poetry is full of pleasures both sensual and spiritual.”<sup>46</sup> In like manner, Keats describes the poet’s double-life, characterized by the pursuit of both “living pleasures” and of “posterity’s award,” as an effort to sustain a delicate balance between the sensuous/particular and abstract/general elements of the poet’s task.

In lines from *Endymion* that provide an epigraph to this chapter, Keats depicts the poet’s precarious division between sensuous experience and the pursuit of immortality. For no sooner has Keats’s protagonist begun to enjoy a vividly immersive (and paradoxically spiritual) sense experience – “His every sense . . . grown / Ethereal for pleasure” (JK, 2.671–2) – than he turns his mind to its inevitable passing: “‘will all this gush of feeling pass / Away in solitude? . . . / Yet still I feel immortal!’” We may read that “yet still” as marking an exception to the condition described in lines immediately above, and thus as a demand to know how feeling could fail to survive if the hero himself does. Yet we can also read the phrase as intended to qualify or mitigate the insentient condition of which he speaks, as if to indicate that to “feel immortal” is at least partial compensation for the loss of feeling itself. Behind this apprehension, then, fully expressed in his epistle to George, lingers a possibility stronger still: namely, that the price of immortality is paid by the loss of feeling. In a poem that Keats describes in the preface as representing a middle passage from boyhood to “the mature imagination of a man” (JK, 64), the poet self-consciously registers the sacrifice entailed by that transformation. In lines following, the narrator similarly laments his own inability to render adequately the consummation of his hero’s desire:

Although the sun of poesy is set,  
 These lovers did embrace, and we must weep  
 That there is no old power left to steep  
 A quill immortal in their joyous tears. (JK, 2.729–32)

Endymion’s plight – the imminent loss of feeling – is here reflected by (or has been transferred to) the belated author who fails to convey with adequate truth or power the sensuous subject matter of the poem itself. To read Keats as enacting, though the appeal to posterity, a flight from the sphere of interested social activity is therefore to miss or altogether to ignore how often the paradox of this position is itself a subject of critical reflection in Keats’s writing.<sup>47</sup>

Indeed, it is this predicament and accompanying sense of loss that most often drives what has been described as Keats's consciousness of his belatedness as a poet. "[T]hen how shall I / Revive the dying tones of minstrelsy," Keats inquires in the "Specimen of an Induction to a Poem," an early lyric that similarly identifies the works of the past with an enchantment and sensuous richness that is all but wholly lost to the present (JK, 19). Yet such moments of longing in Keats's work for the "old power" of the poets are comparatively rare. Instead of responding nostalgically to a situation in which immortality is gained through loss of feeling, Keats more frequently reveals the paradox of this position by accentuating the contradictory demands of literary production, especially as that activity is seen as entailing the sacrifice of the senses. Keats is thus unique among Romantic poets in consistently yoking together the extremes of sensation and abstraction, from the opening lines of the "Ode to a Nightingale" – "a drowsy numbness pains / My sense" – to the "ditties of no tone" of the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (JK, 279, 282). In what we might regard as a sly pun on Keats's part, and a further play upon this paradoxical conception, he announces that those "unheard" melodies are more "endear'd" than those addressed to the "sensual ear" – more precious, that is, and more "dear" or costly (JK, 282).<sup>48</sup> Indeed, Keats's poetry frequently represents this anaesthetized aesthetic – or, more properly, aestheticized anaesthetic – as the very site of literary value. In a sophisticated response to a perceived division between the sensuous and abstract dimensions of the literary text, Keats unites the extremes of feeling and not-feeling, and then claims that impossible, self-canceling condition as the locus for a new kind of literary authority.

For an example of what I mean, consider the short lyric that Keats wrote in the winter of 1817 following his composition of *Endymion*. In registering a contrast between human feeling and inanimate nature, Keats's lyric describes a sensibility so acute as to include and accommodate the very absence of feeling.

In drear-nighted December,  
 Too happy, happy tree,  
 Thy branches ne'er remember  
 Their green felicity:  
 The north cannot undo them  
 With a sleety whistle through them  
 Nor frozen thawings glue them  
 From budding at the prime.



In drear-nighted December,  
Too happy, happy brook,  
Thy bubblings ne'er remember  
Apollo's summer look;  
But with a sweet forgetting,  
They stay their crystal fretting,  
Never, never petting  
About the frozen time.

Ah! would 'twere so with many  
A gentle girl and boy!  
But were there ever any  
Writh'd not of passed joy?  
The feel of not to feel it,  
When there is none to heal it,  
Nor numbed sense to steel it,  
Was never said in rhyme.

(JK, 163)

Keats's well-known lyric turns on a basic contrast between the insentience of inanimate nature and humankind's acute consciousness of change; as Sharon Cameron writes, "[t]he poem is a lament for human memory which records temporal loss without being able to reverse it."<sup>49</sup> The poem's dominant conceit is the literary device that Ruskin named the "pathetic fallacy," or the endowment of subjective impressions to external things, a quality that Ruskin considered to be exceptionally strong in Keats.<sup>50</sup> If Keats's figures of speech have the apparent purpose of bridging a gap between the human and natural worlds, however, the speaker evinces an equally strong degree of self-consciousness about both the fallaciousness *and* the pathos of this "pathetic fallacy." For while on the one hand Keats attributes a range of human responses – of "sweet forgetting," for instance – to the tree and brook, the poem's thematic contrast between inanimate nature and sentient humankind negates the very figures of speech that would assign human traits to inhuman objects. The irony behind the conceit of a brook "never pet[s] / About the frozen time" is precisely that, in the freezing of the brook, time has already indicated its refusal to stop or "freeze" in a figurative sense. Unlike the tree and brook, then, which conform without complaint to a natural order, the human memory alone lives to register and lament "passed joy."

At once employing and rejecting conventions for representing natural objects in verse, Keats's lyric presents a pointed commentary on the legitimacy of these poetic figures of speech. Even prior to the poet's closing invocation of "rhyme," that is, the poem establishes itself as

substantially *about* a history of poetic representation to which the lyric speaker clearly intends to make a contribution. It is in this sense that the first two stanzas of the poem anticipate its concluding theme in the third stanza, namely the idea that poets have so far been incapable of giving expression to a form of experience that is evident only in its absence. The condition of the tree or brook is impossible to express in rhyme because, having no feeling, the “experience” of these objects – the quality of what it is like to *be* a tree or a brook, or to be *this* tree and *this* brook – is incapable of being described in human terms at all. Thus while these natural objects remain oblivious of the changes they undergo, the predicament of poetry is persistently to fail to register an experience of not-feeling which, because of humankind’s own excess of feeling, it is deprived access. Indeed, the very effort to “say” this experience in rhyme would require the poet to eschew or otherwise move beyond the sentience that characterizes the “gentle girl and boy.” Only through such renunciation of feeling could poetry approximate the condition of the tree or brook, and then not the objects themselves but the agent of time that “freezes” them in place – by which, Keats intimates in a submerged pun, the poet would transmute “rhyme” into cold and inanimate “rime.”<sup>51</sup> The apprehension of distance between the human and natural worlds thus occasions a program of poetic labor which, in its endeavor to close this gap, would aspire to a similarly inanimate condition.

If Keats’s lyric thus laments the plight of poetry as both compelled to imagine a condition of insentience and yet unable to give adequate expression to this experience, his poem also implicitly engages with specimens from recent literary history that had similarly sought to “say” this experience in rhyme. One obvious source for Keats’s poem is that most celebrated recollection of “passed joy,” Wordsworth’s *Intimations Ode*, to which Keats alludes openly and often in his writing.<sup>52</sup> Wordsworth’s eulogy for the visionary promise of infancy describes an apprehension of lost sublimity figured most pointedly in its opening stanzas by a failure of perception: “The things which I have seen I now can see no more” (WW, 1:524). In a contemporaneous poem long considered to be a response to Wordsworth’s *Ode*, the verse-letter later published as “*Dejection: An Ode*” (and republished in the *Sybilline Leaves* of 1817, the same year in which Keats writes his lyric), Coleridge described a similarly anaesthetized experience – “A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear, / A stifled, drowsy, unimpassion’d grief, / Which finds no natural outlet” (STC, 364).<sup>53</sup> As Cameron rightly notes, however, Keats is the first to turn such paradoxically negative affects – “A grief without a pang” – into

the boldly self-negating contradiction of that pivotal line, “The feel of not to feel it” – a contradiction even more decisive than the “frozen thawings” of the first stanza.<sup>54</sup>

Keats’s self-conscious reference to the history of rhyme, and his pointed revision of odes by Wordsworth and Coleridge, underscore the contribution of his lyric to this emergent literary tradition. In contrast to its literary precedents, however, Keats’s lyric refuses the consolations that Wordsworth and Coleridge conceive as following from the loss of feeling. Whereas both of these poets conclude by describing the unexpected blessings that arise as restitution or compensation for the waning of feeling, Keats indicates no such compensatory benefit for the poet who undertakes to “say” this experience “in rhyme”; by negations as striking as those in the first two stanzas, Keats describes in the final lines of the poem a form of negative sensory experience as much beyond cure (“none to heal it”) as beyond care (“Nor numbed sense to steel it”). Establishing this experience as a hitherto unexplored province of rhyme, Keats’s lyric claims a significant, if singularly bleak, variation on this signature Romantic theme.

In claiming, then, that “The feel of not to feel it . . . *was* never said in rhyme” (emphasis mine), Keats indicates the status of his lyric – and of his own place in the history of rhyme – as assisting in or itself successfully effecting a broad and paradoxical extension of poetic feeling into the domain of its absence. When Keats refers to the “gentle girl and boy” defined by their sensitivity, his remark makes common cause with the eighteenth-century authors who had identified an acute susceptibility to feeling as the hallmark of civilized, polite humanity. In an important modification of this popular idea, Wordsworth claimed for the poet an especially refined form of inner sensitivity that enabled its possessor “to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they are present,” and defined this elevated sensibility as both an aesthetic ideal and as a basis for moral distinction (Preface, LB, 256). If Keats’s lyric gestures towards a privileged role for the poet’s ability to feel (and feel in) the absence of feeling, however, it just as clearly presents a *reductio ad absurdum* and parody of Wordsworth’s position, revealing that ideal to be not only impossible but self-negating (Preface, LB, 256). Keats’s lyric thus anticipates a later and better-known account of an aesthetic experience that would similarly entail the naturalization, through death, of the speaker: “Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain – / To thy high requiem become a sod” (“Ode to a Nightingale,” JK, 281). To emulate those natural objects – or the figures on a Grecian urn similarly “happy,

happy” in their blissful ignorance of time (JK, 282) – is to assume a self-canceling standpoint in the interest of embodying a “quantum of aesthetic value” for posterity.

“The feel of not to feel it” can therefore said to be the subject of Keats’s rhyme in more than one sense. If this experience represents an unexplored theme in poetry, it also represents the predicament of poetry itself as paradoxically divided between the sensuous conditions of its production and the abstraction constitutive of its value. Calling attention to the unsustainability of that relationship, Keats describes an irreconcilable conflict between the sentient poet and the naturalized, “rime”-like poetic object. Signifying at once the intensification and renunciation of sensation, Keats’s “feel of not to feel it” represents both the sign of the poet’s refinement and the symptom of a literary culture that estranges the principle of aesthetic value from its origins and basis in physical sensation.

#### ABSTRACTION AND AESTHETIC VALUE

I began this chapter by proposing that we might understand Keats’s phenomenology of literary valuation along lines suggested by Marx’s later analysis of the commodity-form: that is, as the critique of a process by which, in the emergence of the commodity, the sensuous properties of the object and of the labor that produced it are alike “extinguished.” As Marx describes this process, the paradoxically abstract appearance of the commodity-form derives from the contradictory core of social labor as consisting both of sensuous material activity and of an expenditure of abstract labor time. This contradictory laboring process thus congeals in the commodity itself, which assumes a “dual nature” that Marx identifies in calling commodities “sensuous things which are at the same time supra-sensuous or social” – a “sensuous non-sensuous thing” (*ein sinnlich über-sinnliches Ding*) whose material, sensuous dimensions are partly eclipsed by its abstract, quasi-supernatural appearance.<sup>55</sup>

In making the case that Keats’s critique of the mechanisms of literary valuation can be read in relation to Marx’s critique of commodification, it is certainly not my intention to conflate the commodity and the literary commodity; nor would I wish to equate the forms of labor required to produce these objects.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, I do wish to argue that Keats reveals a similarly paradoxical status for the literary commodity as an object whose sensuous and abstract qualities are embodied in a contradictory, oppositional relationship – a “feel of not to feel it” – in which the value of the work of art is estranged from the sensuous basis of its

composition. The paradoxically sensuous non-sensuous character of the literary object is not, as is the commodity for Marx, the outcome of a process by which objects are abstracted from their use-values, but rather results from the estrangement of the poet from the “poetical” and the singularly incommensurable quality of the poet’s creations (viz. Keats on the “camelion Poet”: “a Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence” [JKL, 1:387]). In his conception of poetry as an internally divided product, Keats conceives this contradiction between the sensuous/concrete and abstract/general properties of the literary text as immanent to its form, and thus crucial to understanding the further expression of that contradiction as it manifests in a divided form of aesthetic experience.

Keats’s famous appeal “for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts” is most often understood as expressing a resistance to the hegemony of what Keats calls “consequitive reasoning” as well as to the dominant social class that defines its exercise (JKL, 1:185); to this extent, his appeal might be compared to Marx and Engels’s later call, in *The German Ideology*, “to revolt against the rule of thoughts.”<sup>57</sup> Just as prominent in Keats’s appeal, however, is an opposition to the subordination of “Sensations” to “Thoughts” as terms both operative within the category of the aesthetic itself. As Romanticism’s most famously sensuous poet, Keats refuses any aesthetic morality that would entail the refusal or suppression of *aisthesis*. Despite Keats’s obvious resistance to the violence of abstraction, however, it is worth remembering that the poet who aimed to reorganize the relationship of sensations to thoughts is the same who reported to Reynolds that “My sensations are sometimes deadened for weeks together” (JKL, 1:325), and who frequently describes his fits of poetic labor as involving a lapse into a state of profound abstraction which, he observes, could easily be mistaken for heartlessness.<sup>58</sup> It is true that Keats is often critical of a tendency to establish as an aesthetic or ethical ideal a mental standpoint beyond the immediacy of the bodily senses; with John Dewey, in other words, he plainly shares the conviction that “One great defect of what passes as morality is its anesthetic quality.”<sup>59</sup> Through his critical engagement with Wordsworthian aesthetics, however, Keats sets the condition for the relief of abstraction in the direction of an intensified abstraction, and not generally in a sentimentalized or nostalgic return to a lost sensuous immediacy. In a contemporary response to the denigration of *aisthesis* in contemporary literary culture, Shelley’s *Defence of Poetry* declaimed against the tendency of social corruption to “destroy all sensibility to pleasure,” and championed the

power of poetry to counteract these anaestheticizing effects (SPP, 522). Yet while Wordsworth prescribes an aesthetic experience raised above mere animal gratification, and Shelley conversely imagines poetry as mobilizing the senses against the forces that conspire to suppress them, Keats exposes the contradictory nature of the poet's effort to elevate sensation into sentiment, or physical into moral feeling. Depicting a form of negative poetic experience with "none to heal it," Keats unites the extremes of sensation and abstraction not in a spurious harmony but rather in their utmost contradiction.<sup>60</sup>

Far from effacing a relationship between conceptions of economic and aesthetic value, moreover, Keats's writing frequently posits a fundamental analogy between the discourses of aesthetics and political economy and between the properties of cultural and economic commodities. Keats's depiction of poetic activity as entailing the deferral or denial of sensation, and his frequent demand that the poet approximate this impossible and even self-canceling standpoint, can therefore be seen as a self-conscious reflection on prevailing conceptions of literary value as well as on the social forms of valuation more generally. Consider Keats's 13 May 1818 letter to Bailey, in which the poet advances his famous taxonomy of poetic value:

As Tradesmen say every thing is worth what it will fetch, so probably every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from the ardour of the pursuer – being in itself a nothing – Ethereal thing[s] may at least be thus real, divided under three heads – Things real – things semireal – and no things – Things real – such as existences of Sun Moon and Stars and passages of Shakspeare – Things semireal such as Love, the Clouds &c which require a greeting of the Spirit to make them wholly exist – and Nothings which are made Great and dignified by an ardent pursuit – Which by the by stamps the burgundy mark on the bottles of our Minds insomuch as they are able to "*consec[r]ate whate'er they look upon.*" (JKL, 1:242–3)

Keats's comparison of literary to economic commodities, of which the former's worth is determined by "the ardour of the pursuer," teeters precariously between an economics of demand and an economics of production. That "the pursuer" refers equally to the producer of such objects as well as to its audience is by no means incidental to Keats's implicit account of transformations to the criteria of valuation by which the literary object "takes its reality and worth." Presenting a hierarchy of aesthetic objects corresponding to indentifiable phases in English literary history (albeit a partial and foreshortened version thereof), Keats first imputes to "passages of Shakspeare" an unproblematic objecthood that he

elsewhere attributes to the Elizabethan poets generally. Those works are deemed “real,” we may suppose, on account of the fact that their “ethereal” existence is not felt to be in conflict with their obviously sensuous properties. By contrast, those “Things semireal” lack the substantiality of the former class, and thus “require a greeting of the Spirit” for their actualization. In his account of this second class of “mental pursuit,” Keats sketches a theory of intersubjectively-realized value that closely resembles Wordsworth’s insistence, in the “Essay, Supplementary” to the 1815 edition of his work, that his poetry is dependent for its realization upon a “co-operating *power* in the mind of the Reader” (WWP, 3:81).

Keats’s third class of mental pursuit – corresponding to the sphere of contemporary literary production, if we are to judge from the quotation from Shelley’s “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” with which he describes it – are those “Nothings” that take their “reality and worth” only in proportion to the ardency of the pursuit that is required to produce them. Like the “mad pursuit” of the figure on the Grecian urn, such works are characterized by a deferred or denied sensuous immediacy, lacking even in the endlessly-renewed promise of gratification that sustains the lover depicted on the urn (JK, 282). Not only, though, are these works of “pure” abstraction capable of exploiting the arbitrariness of modern exchange-value (“every thing is worth what it will fetch”). More significantly, Keats suggests that the eventual reality that they assume is more profound – and more profoundly material – for having been at one point “Nothings” (no-things). In his account of how poets receive the imprimatur of value “on the bottles of our Minds,” Keats imagines a kind of self-commodification easily figurable as the extreme of what Levinson calls the poet’s “suffered objectivity.”<sup>61</sup> Yet the appropriation of this “stamp” – whether understood in Lockean terms as the imprinting of the mind by sensation, or in Marxian terms as “the stamp of history” on our intellectual categories of analysis<sup>62</sup> – is a first and necessary step towards its transformation. Keats thereby indicates how through an extreme of self-objectification one might bring new forms of “consecration” into the world.

#### CONCLUSION: THE IMMINENCE OF THE AESTHETIC

I have argued that Keats’s frequent inhabitation of a standpoint beyond bodily sensation – whether through an appeal to the afterlife or to a self-canceling “feel of not to feel it” – represents a critical reflection on the

divided character of literary production in this period. It will be evident that in building this argument I have focused on the early texts and contexts of Keats's career. Keats's formal medical training came to an end in 1816; his first volume of poems was published in the following year; and the latest of the poems I discuss at length here ("In drear-nighted December"), though written in the last days of 1817, was not published in Keats's lifetime at all. Consequently, I have given no more than a passing glance to the odes and longer narrative poems on which, for all of Keats's early appeals, the poet's actual posterity is now founded.

My reason for focusing on these particular poems, however, has not been to counter Arnold's judgment by making a case for the value of this early work. Rather, I have wished to demonstrate that Keats's purposeful and critical approach to the internally conflicted character of literary production was in place long before Keats wrote the poetry on which his reputation is now based. Reviewing the poet's development in his canon-making essay, Arnold supposed that Keats, had he lived long enough, would have finally overcome his dependency on "mere" sensuousness. Such characterizations of Keats's development are simply misleading in most forms, but are especially unacceptable when, as in Levinson's study of Keats, the narrative is translated into more explicitly political categories. In concentrating on Keats's earliest poetry, then, as well as on his earliest chosen profession of medicine, I mean to assert that an account of Keats's poetry that sees the poet only in his final work as achieving a critical and not merely reflexive stance towards his own "alienated access to the canon" simply inverts the judgment of Arnold's humanist reading while accepting its terms. From the very beginning of his literary career, Keats conceived poetry as mutually dependent for its unique power on both sensation and abstraction, and lamented the division of these faculties in terms acquired from his exposure to the new science of the nerves. It is thus as the "merely sensuous man" that Keats forged his critical account of how abstraction became the central criterion of aesthetic value.

Though Keats's understanding of poetic labor as a contradictory and self-canceling task is evident from the earliest years of his poetic career, it is certainly true that in his later work Keats extends and refines this critique. It is arguably in "Lamia," published in the volume of 1820, that Keats most extensively dramatizes an antagonism between the sensuous and abstract character of literary production. The central narrative of that poem – the love affair between the serpent Lamia and the student Lycius, and of the destruction of their illusory paradise by the sage



Apollonius – consists of an obvious meditation on the theme of disenchantment, a term that Max Weber, the most distinguished theorist of this phenomenon, characterizes as “a fundamental antagonism to sensuous culture of all kinds.”<sup>63</sup> It is not simply the case, however, that in the character of Lamia Keats personifies a richly sensuous existence that Lycius and especially Apollonius, the avatar of “cold philosophy” (JK, 2:240), will destroy. Critics have long identified Keats’s poem as an extremely ambivalent depiction of that process, neither as sympathetic to Lamia nor (to speak anachronistically) as patently Weberian in its critique of rationality as the central narrative may suggest.<sup>64</sup> In the brisk couplets and ironic narrative style that Keats self-consciously patterned after Dryden’s fables, “Lamia” indeed appears at one level to repudiate the Spenserianism of his earliest work. Thus, while obviously lamenting the effects of disenchantment, in form and style Keats’s poem participates in the very disenchantment that it describes, signaling – as in “The Eve of St. Agnes” and the sonnet “On Sitting Down to Read *King Lear* Once Again” – the poet’s departure from the “mere” sensuousness of the romance genre.

With “Lamia,” then, Keats provides the most elaborate treatment of a theme that his work has pursued throughout: namely, the lamentable tendency to rend, often indeed by force, the entangled properties of sensation and abstraction in the making of the literary work itself. Suggesting Bell’s influential distinction between the sensory and motor nerves, the poem tests the resiliency of those entanglements which, like the “knotty problem” that Apollonius construes Lamia herself to be, do not “thaw, / And solve, and melt” without significant damage to the whole (JK, 2:160–2). Of course, one associates the desire to “solve” or dis-solve knotty problems with the figure of Apollonius, the philosopher whose “cold” analytic Keats savagely criticizes. Yet Lamia is just as desirous as Apollonius to distinguish and (in the recurring idiom of the poem) “unperplex” mutually entangled faculties and experiences: following her transformation, Lamia’s “sciential brain” holds forth a promise to “unperplex bliss from its neighbour pain, / Define their pettish limits, and estrange / Their points of contact, and swift counterchange” (JK, 1:191–4). The beguiling serpent purports to distinguish fully between pleasure and pain so as to eliminate what Wordsworth calls their “infinite complexity” (Preface, LB, 258). As Keats’s poem shows, however, the effort to eradicate such “perplexity” is fruitless at best and fatal at worst; after all, it is a version of the same desire that results in the mutual destruction of Lycius and Lamia by Apollonius. Thus the allegorical

referent of Keats's poem may not be "the evolution of value forms and their corresponding social forms," as Levinson has argued,<sup>65</sup> nor even in the first instance the relation between the writer, readers, and critics who comprise the key circuits of literary culture. Rather, I would suggest that Keats's allegory refers principally to the internally antagonistic character of literary production itself, as Lamian sensation and Apollonian thought come into violent conflict over the soul of Lycius and the production of the spectacular entertainment that lies at the poem's center.<sup>66</sup>

When, in the final lines of the poem, Apollonius does at last "unperplex" the knotty problem posed by Lamia herself, the result is of course disastrous; and we would be wrong to read as thoroughly ironic the opprobrium that Keats heaps on this figure. If as I have suggested, however, the allegory of "Lamia" refers to nothing so much as the process of poetic labor itself, we might ask whether Keats imagines a use for the Apollonian destruction of sensation that has so far gone unexplored. I mean to raise a question that no reading of "Lamia" can rightly ignore: namely why Keats would record of this poem in particular his ambition to stir and vitalize the sensations of the reader. "I am certain there is that sort of fire in it which must take hold of people in some way – give them either pleasant or unpleasant sensation. What they want is a sensation of some sort" (JKL, 2:189). The reader "wants" sensation, of course, in that double-sense of desire and lack that we have come to associate with Lacan. We might read this "want" as an expression of consumer desire, and accordingly construe Keats's ambition to supply "sensation" as an aim, in the manner of Byron, to cater however ambivalently to those tastes. More plausibly, though, we can understand Keats's wish to deliver "either pleasant or unpleasant sensation" (in contrast to Lamia, Keats makes no distinction) as the poet's final act of critical negation – as Keats's resistance, that is to say, to an abstraction represented within and by the poem itself. In the narrative of disenchantment that "Lamia" clearly presents, Keats sacrifices sensation only to remind us of its "want."

While vigorously opposed to a utopian resolution of conflict, then, "Lamia" may be understood as an effort to reinvoke sensation from a moment beyond its imagined extinction. More explicitly than any of Keats's other poems, this late work explores how through the future-perfect tense of posterity – by imagining what we will have been – one rediscovers a basis and a faculty for feelings otherwise lost to the present. In the concluding image of Lycius's corpse, animated by "no pulse, or breath" (JK, 2:310), Keats anticipates the re-animation of this figure through an act of readerly sensation.<sup>67</sup> Of course, "Lamia" is not the only

poem of Keats's career to posit a restitution of feeling from a condition of its apparent negation. This contrastive movement informs a central stanza of the "Ode to a Nightingale," where an experience of sensory deprivation ("here there is no light") provokes an instance of what Hartman calls "surmise" in some of the most gorgeously sensuous lines of English poetry:

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,  
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,  
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet  
Wherewith the seasonable month endows  
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;  
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;  
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;  
And mid-May's eldest child,  
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,  
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves. (JK, 280-1)

In an "embalmed darkness" at once deprived of sense and lushly suggestive of it, the speaker not only "guess[es]" the flowers that surround him, but – in the last two, most richly sensuous lines of the stanza – anticipates a further range of sensation for the future. As in "Lamia," then, the Ode posits a return of feeling from beyond the moment of its cancellation in the present.

In his conception of a sense experience that survives beyond the scene of its extinction, Keats anticipates Guillory's hypothesis, in the final pages of *Cultural Capital*, that "sensuousness" might be the inassimilable remainder of literary commodification, and thus that aesthetic experience, in the "impure" sense described by Bourdieu, might survive its sublimation into forms of "higher" feeling. Though Guillory attributes this conception to Marx, we can as easily perceive a similar understanding in the work of nineteenth-century authors, including, not least, Marx's contemporary George Eliot. Like Keats, and with a similar precision of scientific metaphor, Eliot likens the mutual dependence of the experiential and rational properties of language to the physical entanglement of the sensory and motor nerves of the body.<sup>68</sup> In her 1856 essay "The Natural History of German Life," Eliot cautions on grounds shared by Keats against hasty efforts to dissolve the "necessary and delicate union" between the two spheres, and further argues that the impulse to excise the "anomalies and inconveniences" of human experience from language would involve sacrifices far exceeding the gains that could be achieved through such a separation.<sup>69</sup> Eliot later addresses the probable consequence of one such sacrifice of feeling in *Middlemarch*, which famously

historicizes the years just prior to the Reform Bill of 1832, and indirectly the final years of Romanticism as well. In a crucial episode of the novel, the banker Bulstrode, who, having suppressed his relation to his son-in-law for the last thirty years, is suddenly forced by the reappearance of his persecutor Raffles to come to terms with a past that he has long denied. It is the revelation of Ladislaw's identity, we will recall, that helps propel the novel towards its denouement:

... now, when this respectability had lasted undisturbed for nearly thirty years – when all that preceded it had long lain benumbed in the consciousness – that past had risen and immersed his thought as if with the terrible irruption of a new sense overburthening the feeble being.<sup>70</sup>

We know from Eliot's extensive notes in preparation for the novel that Raffles's return is dated to July 1831, which in turn dates the origins of Bulstrode's "respectability" to a moment close to the turn of the century.<sup>71</sup> Beyond marking the years conventionally understood to encompass the period of British Romanticism, Eliot strikingly revisits and revises a theme born in this period. The relentlessly practical Bulstrode is of course the negation of the Romantic type, though it is precisely in this regard that he represents the future of a Romanticism as Keats in "Lamia" negatively imagines it. Do we even commit too much violence against the text to read the banker Bulstrode as a figure for the posthumous life of this negative Romanticism, reborn, ironically enough, as a guardian not of cultural but of economic capital? In her account of Bulstrode's awakening as a particularly cataclysmic return of the repressed whereby the recovery of a forgotten reality could be perceived as "a new sense," Eliot imagines the next stage of a process that Keats leaves for posterity to complete. Through writing resolutely committed to the afterlife, Keats projects for the future – for Eliot's, for ours – a re-emergence of sense from beyond its cancellation in the text itself. We can at least be assured that the continued public reception of that writing, like Lamia's exposure to the Corinthians, ensures that this process is not soon likely to end.

## CHAPTER 6

### *More than a feeling? Walter Pater, Wilkie Collins, and the legacies of Wordsworthian aesthetics*

In discussions of the division between high art and mass culture, few notions have secured more consensus than that concerning the basis upon which we generally make such distinctions in the first place. In an argument that has proved exceedingly influential for our theoretical understanding of the so-called cultural divide, Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction* described as the defining characteristic of bourgeois aesthetics “a refusal of ‘impure’ taste and of *aisthesis* (sensation), the simple, primitive form of pleasure reduced to a pleasure of the senses.”<sup>1</sup> On this (widely shared) account, the refusal of sensation represents not merely a site but rather the primary source of the cultural divide, which has both its origin and its strongest basis in the rupture between sensuous and reflective aesthetic experience.

If the distinction between elite and popular culture is now commonly regarded having its theoretical basis in the refusal of sensation, critics are just as united in dating this refusal to the period of European Romanticism. In the widely cited “Postscript” to *Distinction*, Bourdieu finds the theoretical grounding for “high” literary aesthetics in the *Critique of Judgment*, particularly in Kant’s insistence that the basis for the subjective universal validity of aesthetic experience resides not in bodily sense but rather in the higher cognitive faculties.<sup>2</sup> Kant is thereby understood as having introduced a gulf between embodied aesthetic experience and the formal character of the reflective judgment – between “the taste of reflection” and “the taste of sense” – that would become the basis for all subsequent formulations of elite literary aesthetics.<sup>3</sup> Of course, Bourdieu is fully capable of observing how often “high” as well as popular literary genres do in fact make *aisthesis* integral to aesthetic response. While qualifying the notion that the distinction of “high” culture rests exclusively in the refusal of sensation, however, Bourdieu still views the aesthetics of disinterest as a normative model for how the products of high

culture displace the sensuous content of art for the rarefied pleasures of its form. To the degree that the “high” literary aesthetics of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries seeks to promote a reflective response that undermines (if not altogether precludes) the pleasures of sense, Bourdieu concludes, it serves an essentially ideological function as an instrument of social distinction.

On the basis of Bourdieu’s thesis, we should not be surprised that of all writers associated with this divide in English poetry, Wordsworth is generally agreed to be its first major architect. Wordsworth’s role as a consolidator of high culture is most frequently associated with the poet’s notorious tirade, in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, against a print public sphere that reduced aesthetic experience to mere sensation, providing violent stimuli at the seeming expense of the reader’s powers of thought and judgment. Readers of Wordsworth’s Preface are familiar with that poet’s invective against the “degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation” which he believed characterized his age. So, too, we are well acquainted with the poet’s diatribe on the popular literary genres – “frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse” – that catered to and provoked this thirst (LB, 249). If these popular genres are primarily associated with the body and particularly with sensory experience, such accounts in Wordsworth’s poetry of being “laid asleep / In body” are often read as efforts on the poet’s part to impose a distinction between high art and mass culture (LB, 46–7).

For over a decade now, Wordsworth’s powerful antipathy towards sensationalist literary aesthetics has occasioned an impressive body of scholarship on the poet’s role in the cultural divide, most of it explicitly beholden to Bourdieu’s critique. Literary historians have persuasively established the indebtedness of Wordsworth’s “high” Romantic utterance to popular literary forms, such as the gothic novel, whose power is at once appropriated and marginalized by the poet. Overwhelmingly, these studies have focused on Wordsworth’s “uneasy collusion with the nascent mass culture of the late 1790s,” characterized most succinctly by Karen Swann as the poet’s ambition to elicit a “meditated” rather than “stimulated” response from his reader – an aim, in other words, to supplant or “correct” the sensational effects of the gothic by appealing to an act of readerly reflection.<sup>4</sup> Such work has shed valuable light on Romanticism’s often tacitly parasitical relationship to these popular genres. Just as significantly for our theoretical approach to the cultural divide, these sociological analyses have tended to confirm Bourdieu’s

understanding of high culture as based in large part upon the vilification, suppression, or outright refusal of popular literary forms and pleasures.

Following the example of these critics, I wish in this concluding chapter to re-open the case of Wordsworth's role in the formation of the nineteenth-century cultural divide. Whereas existing approaches to this topic have emphasized Wordsworth's status as an author of this divide, however, I want to show how the poet might complicate our understanding of a distinction most often attributed to him. More broadly, then, I want to begin to rethink the protocol for approaching the sociological problem of the cultural divide through a consideration of its aesthetic basis. There is no doubt that Bourdieu's work represents one of the most persuasive efforts to expose the discourse of aesthetics (and of aesthetic experience in particular) to rigorous sociological critique. Without diminishing the force of Bourdieu's insight, however, we might ask what it means to make aesthetic experience the basis for distinguishing between high art and popular culture in the first place. More pointedly, we can ask whether such endeavors might as plausibly reveal a critical role for aesthetic experience that Bourdieu's own study, and more recent applications of his work to the field of British Romanticism, neglect to take into account.<sup>5</sup> Bourdieu is entirely right, of course, to point to the distinction between "the taste of reflection" and "the taste of sense" as crucial to any understanding of the cultural divide. As carried out under Bourdieu's authority, however, the sociological critique of the aesthetic often only goes so far as to conceive aesthetic experience as either the instrument or the symptom of this divide. If such studies have foregrounded the importance of aesthetic experience as an expression of the cultural divide, that is, they have also neglected to explore the reverse possibility of an aesthetic experience that might contest or complicate the distinction between "high" and popular literary genres. Indeed, one might ask whether the conception of "high" literary aesthetics as entailing a refusal of *aisthesis* has not itself served as a justification for the critical refusal to see early Romantic literature as engaging in any meaningful way with the problem of the cultural divide.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to Bourdieu, then, I want to show how attending to the status of sensation in Wordsworth's conception of aesthetic experience – and in the work of some nineteenth-century authors who can be read as responding to it – might complicate our sense of an antagonism between the modes of sensuous and reflective aesthetic response, as well as between the genres to which these responses are thought to correspond. Thus I mean to assert a dialectical function for aesthetic experience on both sides of this

divide – one which, through the depiction and appeal to embodied response, disrupts as fully as it supports existing distinctions between privileged and popular literary forms.

The effort among nineteenth-century authors to restore *aisthesis* to aesthetic experience have lately been described as signaling an evolution in the history of the cultural divide, and a movement towards its explicit critique.<sup>7</sup> In this chapter, however, I locate a source for this conception not in the critique of the cultural divide, but rather in the work of one of its principal founders. It's no secret that Wordsworth frequently expresses a wish to supplement or elevate sensation through the exertion of the reflective judgment. Far from having divorced sensation from aesthetic response, however, or reflection from its basis in sensation, Wordsworth's conception of poetry as a "science of feelings" reserved a vital role for the senses in aesthetic experience, even while committing readerly response more thoroughly than ever before to the rigorous demands of reflection. From this effort to accommodate bodily sensation within reflective mental activity, I will argue, Wordsworth inaugurates a dialectical conception of aesthetic response that survives as an ambivalent legacy not only, as shown in the previous chapter, for Keats, but for Victorian authors on both sides of the cultural divide. Indeed, despite the poet's frequent efforts to reassert a distinction between bodily affection and "higher" feeling, Wordsworth's poetry blurs even as it attempts to enforce this distinction, thus paving the way for the further erosion of this antinomy in Victorian literary culture.

Focusing on attempts among Victorian authors to negotiate this distinction between the forms of popular and elite readerly enjoyment, I want to call attention to an ambivalence that marks the cultural divide in the period of its emergence, and which is most plainly visible in literature that engages, often critically, with a broadly Wordsworthian conception of aesthetic experience. My central exhibits include an unlikely pair of mid-nineteenth century authors, Walter Pater and Wilkie Collins, and the genres – of aesthetic criticism and sensation fiction, respectively – associated with them. While most obviously emblematic of a cultural divide just beginning to come into full view in mid-century, Pater and Collins have in common at least one important trait beyond their contemporaneity: for both authors strenuously endeavored to make *aisthesis* newly central to aesthetic experience. Nor is it only in hindsight that we may see aestheticism and sensationalism as "torn halves of an integral whole," to invoke a famous phrase of Adorno's;<sup>8</sup> in fact, Victorian readers



clearly perceived a kinship between these genres, and were often acutely conscious of the difficulties that this similarity presented for any straightforward distinction between “high” and “low” literary pleasures. While revisiting the sources of the cultural divide, then, the work of Pater and Collins frequently reveals a counter-history that shows this distinction as having been from its inception ambivalent, open to contesting readings and applications from within as well as between the categories of “high” and popular literature.

My argument begins with Wordsworth’s formulation, in *The Prelude*, of an issue that will structure debates on the cultural divide for the century to come: namely, the question of whether sense-experience is principally conceived as a stimulus to reflection or as an end in itself. While the central role of sensation in Wordsworth’s conception of aesthetic experience has been of all topics the most frequently addressed in this book, this chapter returns to that topic in order to consider how Wordsworth explicitly, albeit equivocally, accommodates experiences of vivid sensation to a reflective literary aesthetics, thereby establishing an ambivalent legacy for a number of nineteenth-century writers who also reflect – in terms both critical of and strongly indebted to Wordsworth – on the relationship between *aisthesis* and aesthetic value. In sections following, and beginning with the chronologically later example of Pater as the more obviously accepted author of Wordsworthian descent, I attempt to show how both Pater’s aesthetic criticism and Collins’s sensation novel engages with this central concern of Wordsworth’s aesthetics, each reflecting in very different ways an indeterminate relationship between the forms of privileged and popular aesthetic experience. That Pater’s aesthetic criticism finds its inspiration in Romantic literature is hardly revelatory, especially in view of Pater’s lifelong interest in Wordsworth’s poetry. Yet far from seeing Wordsworth as a predominantly reflective poet, Pater identifies in Wordsworth’s poetry a quality of sensuousness unrecoverable within his own theory of embodied aesthetic experience. In addition to serving as an ambivalent model for Pater, I will argue, the poet’s account of how moments of vivid sense-experience assume significance and value furnishes a background for Collins’s ironic revisitation of this theme in a central episode of his sensation novel *The Moonstone* (1868). In what, after Harold Bloom, we might call *The Moonstone*’s “strong” reading of Wordsworthian aesthetics, Collins asserts an embodied basis for aesthetic experience that is at once modeled after the “high” literary aesthetics of the previous generation and sharply critical of it.

## WORDSWORTH, AISTHESIS, AND AESTHETIC VALUE

Wordsworth's status as a poet of reflection has been a well-established topic of criticism at least since Arthur Hallam's famous characterization of the poet in his 1831 essay. Far from dismissing altogether such experiences, however, Wordsworth's most characteristic work has been shown, especially in recent years, to celebrate the centrality of sensation even within the most purely reflective acts of mind. It is true that Wordsworth repeatedly warns against enslaving the mind to the bodily senses and, in a related, reactionary critique, condemns popular literary genres such as the gothic for "blunt[ing] the discriminating powers of the mind" through an exclusive appeal to sensation (LB, 249). By reading Wordsworth as a primarily reflective poet, however, we simply forget or ignore how the poet explicitly conceived his work as an experiment in embodied aesthetic response – a project, as he wrote in the Preface, in fitting to poetry "the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation" so as to impart pleasure to the reader (LB, 241). Wordsworth's aesthetics therefore represents an attempt to realize, in the comparatively abstract medium of print, the material, sensuous basis of poetic language. Such statements obviously belie the familiar portrait of Wordsworth as a poet of reflection *tout court*.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, critics of Wordsworth's role in the formation of the cultural divide have demonstrated how persistently the poet intends for his work to produce an embodied response in the reader. These critics have generally interpreted the most patently sensational elements of Wordsworth's poetry in the context of an effort to appropriate a pre-existing audience for the gothic while distancing his own work from the violent sensationalism of these popular fictions.<sup>10</sup> Inasmuch as this criticism neglects to consider the interdependence of "high" and "low" as anything but the occulted content of Romantic poetry, however, these approaches have tended to reify the very distinctions that they are intended to get beyond. Not only is Wordsworth's poetry almost ritually invoked as the source of a cultural divide, but the relationship between the modes of aesthetic response corresponding to that divide – between "stimulation" and "meditation," in Swann's terms – is discussed only in the context of the poet's appropriation of these popular literary genres.

Given how often Wordsworth denigrates the sensationalism of popular literary forms, and how frequently he describes elevated moments of sublime mood as marking a watershed in his own mental development, we might be surprised to observe how persistently the poet testifies to the

value of experiences that seem to have nothing at all to do with reflection. As even a cursory glance at *The Prelude* will show, Wordsworth frequently attests to the vital importance of such experiences, celebrating their power to stimulate and cultivate the mind's powers even without a conscious act of reflection on the child's part. Thematizing the relative value of sensuous and reflective experience, *The Prelude* raises in an epistemological register questions emerging in this period as central to the theoretical determination of the cultural divide. In an important passage of Book 1, for instance, Wordsworth claims to have enjoyed moments of vivid sensory experience which, despite their unreflective character, remained important to his mental development. "Often, in those fits of vulgar joy," Wordsworth writes,

. . . I felt  
Gleams like the flashing of a shield. The earth  
And common face of Nature spake to me  
Rememberable things . . .

. . . yet not vain,  
Nor profitless, if haply they impressed  
Collateral objects and appearances,  
Albeit lifeless then, and doomed to sleep  
Until maturer seasons called them forth  
To impregnate and to elevate the mind.  
– And if the vulgar joy by its own weight  
Wearied itself out of the memory,  
The scenes which were a witness of that joy  
Remained, in their substantial lineaments  
Depicted on the brain, and to the eye  
Were visible, a daily sight.

(P, 1.609–30)

Here and throughout *The Prelude*, such episodes of "vulgar joy" (a phrase Wordsworth twice repeats in the passage) are closely associated with moments of vivid sensory experience and the power that such moments hold over the human mind.<sup>11</sup> By virtue of being strongly felt, these experiences leave impressions in the mind even after the actual content of the experience is forgotten. These impressions survive as scenes "depicted on the brain" whose "substantial lineaments" are, as the phrase suggests, at once formal and substantive. While a common reading of the cultural divide is to see "high" literary aesthetics as entailing a displacement from the sensuous content of art to its form, Wordsworth here admits of no such distinction; on the contrary, he pays tribute to sensory experience as a form-giving medium in the mind. Nor at this stage in the child's development is this process of formalization conceived as the result of

any purposeful or reflective activity on the child's part. Rather, as Wordsworth tells us, the senses have "impressed" upon the child experiences which in turn will eventually imbue his mind with more powerful meaning. In lines following, the poet explains how these experiences might at last be credited with elevating the mind:

And thus  
 By the impressive discipline of fear,  
 By pleasure and repeated happiness,  
 So frequently repeated, and by force  
 Of obscure feelings representative  
 Of joys that were forgotten, these same scenes,  
 So beauteous and majestic in themselves,  
 Though yet the day was distant, did at length  
 Become habitually dear, and all  
 Their hues and forms were by invisible links  
 Allied to the affections. (P, 1.630–40)

Wordsworth's claim, of course, is that these non-reflective experiences are nevertheless capable of laying the foundations for the eventual elevation of "vulgar joy." Here as elsewhere in his poetry, Wordsworth reveals his deep indebtedness to the associationist philosophy of the eighteenth century, particularly to its account of how general ideas develop out of the elementary data of sensation. In Wordsworth's account of this process, scenes once immediately and powerfully experienced come to be associated with meanings more profound and permanent. Wordsworth thereby foregrounds the process by which those scenes once visible to the eye are ineffably dematerialized, to complete the process of their maturation as "invisible links" to the affections. To this extent, we might see in this early passage an anticipation of those elevated moods when Wordsworth claims, in the penultimate book of *The Prelude*, to have "exercised / Upon the vulgar forms of present things . . . / A higher power" (P, 12.360–3).

I have previously noted how such claims for the poet as capable of formally abstracting from the immediacy of sense-experience have been read as the signature proposition of Wordsworthian aesthetics, and a crucial expression of its ideological character. Over the last two decades, historicist critics have frequently read the openly associationist trajectory of Wordsworth's most characteristic poetry – the passage from particular sensations to general ideas – as a figure for the ideological work of aesthetic culture.<sup>12</sup> In a similar vein, historians of the cultural divide have shown how Wordsworth, distancing the contemplative intent of his poetic tales from

their sensational content, maintains a distinction between his own work and the genres of sensationist literature. By imposing a reflective distance from the disorderly welter of sensory experience, these critics argue, Wordsworth attests to the poet's capacity to formally contain or purge such experiences of "vulgar joy" through an act of reflection.

As a closer look at this passage will show, however, Wordsworth takes pains to establish that the elevation of these joys is not exclusively the work of the reflective judgment. Indeed, such moments of "vulgar joy" are transfigured not in the first instance through reflection but rather through the process of their own repetition. Through pointed verbal repetitions – "By pleasure and repeated happiness, / So frequently repeated" – Wordsworth enacts as well as describes the process by which "feeling comes in aid / Of feeling," as the poet memorably asserts in a later book of *The Prelude* (P, 11.326–7). As Wordsworth claims throughout the poetry of this period, perhaps most famously in "Tintern Abbey," such primary experiences of powerful feeling can be revisited, renewed in memory and imagination, and made the basis of more profound conditions of mind. Wordsworth's passage therefore extols the virtue of experiences which both are their own reward and which, by virtue of their replication, make possible higher forms of experience altogether.<sup>13</sup> These are unreflective experiences not purified of their vulgar content through reflection, but rather by being repeated, as Keats later writes, "in a finer tone." For all their formal character, that is, these "forms . . . [a]llied to the affections" retain throughout the process of their maturation a close relationship to the immediacy of the senses.

By considering the value of vivid sensory experiences, Wordsworth's passage takes up an issue closely associated in this period with the distinction between elite and popular literary pleasures, and which, in more explicit calculations of the relationship between *aisthesis* and aesthetic value, will emerge as increasingly central to the determination of the cultural divide. In fact, *The Prelude* is far from the only poem of Wordsworth's to address the process by which experiences of vivid sensation become, in the poet's economic phrase, "habitually dear." Wordsworth's account in the passage above-quoted anticipates a still more famous reckoning of the value of sensation in the celebrated daffodils poem of 1804 (first published 1807), where the speaker's recollection of his experience is again described in explicitly fiduciary terms:

I gaz'd – and gaz'd – but little thought  
 What wealth the show to me had brought. (P2V, 208)

This well-known couplet from the penultimate stanza of Wordsworth's lyric constructs in its first line a clear opposition between simple sense perception (gazing) and advanced cognitive activity (thinking), only to complicate that opposition in the speaker's subsequent attempt to calculate the worth of that experience, or "[w]hat wealth the show to me *had brought*" (my emphasis). Is this a reward tendered at the moment of perception, or only at a later moment of retrospection and blissful solitude? While surely the fullest experience of this reward is reserved for moments of "pensive mood" (P2V, 208), Wordsworth suggests a complementary relationship between the initial act of gazing upon the sight and the recreation of this image in memory, and intimates that both experiences are expressions of the "wealth" that he feels himself to have gained.<sup>14</sup> As in the passage from Book 1 of *The Prelude*, then, Wordsworth gestures towards an understanding of such experiences of primary *aisthesis* as valuable – "beauteous and majestic," the poet writes – "in themselves."

By paying tribute to these moments of vivid sensation both for their intrinsic value as well as for the elevated moods that they will later enable, Wordsworth artfully evades the question of whether these experiences are valuable in themselves or only to the extent that they serve to enable reflection. Such moments of "vulgar joy" thus bear a close resemblance to experiences that Wordsworth, earlier in the same book of *The Prelude*, calls "Those hallowed and pure motions of the sense / Which seem, in their simplicity, to own / An intellectual charm" (P, 1.578–80). While clearly those episodes of "vulgar joy" assume their greatest worth only in relation to the more profound meanings that they will eventually assume, the agency of their transfiguration is not substantially different than that of their inception. Such experiences can be considered ends in themselves inasmuch as they are also agents of their own eventual transformation.

#### PATER'S WORDSWORTH AND THE PROBLEM OF FEELING

Far from privileging reflection at the expense of sensation, then, Wordsworth attests at once to the necessity of raising lofty thoughts out of "vulgar" sense and to the continued importance of sensation as furnishing both the occasion to and the substance of reflection. Wordsworth's strong faith in the persistence of primary feelings within reflective habits of mind reminds us, should any further reminder be needed, that it was precisely as a poet of feeling that Wordsworth was marked out for posterity by his Victorian readers. It is Arnold, of course, who most famously celebrates the poet's capacity to "make us feel." As in

Arnold's 1879 essay on the poet, however, Wordsworth's capacity to "make us feel" is described not primarily as evidence of the poet's close connection to the life of the senses, but rather of his standing as a moral instructor. Moreover, while identifying Wordsworth as the century's foremost poet of feeling, Arnold's testimony is marked by considerable ambiguity as to what it means for the poet to "make us feel" in the first place. In that same poem, we'll recall, Arnold pointedly distinguishes Wordsworth's "healing power" from Byron's powerful capacity to shock or stimulate the reader, though he leaves open the question of how precisely to distinguish between these modes of feeling. Of course, "feeling" is a word with an exceedingly wide range of meanings in Wordsworth's poetry; like "sense," a term that Empson long ago revealed to be among the most complex in Wordsworth's poetic vocabulary, it is used variously to signify forms of somatic, emotional, imaginative, or moral response, often indeed at once. In what, then, did Wordsworthian feeling consist to his Victorian readers? Was Wordsworth capable of being read as a poet of sensation in anything more than a figurative sense?

In fact, Wordsworth was hailed as a vitally sensuous poet by one of the foremost Victorian advocates of sensation in aesthetic experience. For a later effort to renew Wordsworth's commitment to the sensuous foundations of aesthetic response, we need only consult Walter Pater's reading of the poet in work that established Pater's reputation as the first and most celebrated "aesthetic" critic. If there is one nineteenth-century figure who most influentially asserted the centrality of sensation to aesthetic experience, of course, it is Pater. "All art has a sensuous element," Pater proclaimed in the *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), a book widely regarded to be the founding text of British aestheticism.<sup>15</sup> Throughout that seminal text, Pater rings countless changes on this theme. In the Preface to *The Renaissance*, Pater put the determination of (and differentiation between) varied pleasures of sense – the act of knowing "one's own impression as it really is" – at the center of the critic's task: "The aesthetic critic," he writes, "regards all the objects with which he has to do . . . as powers or forces producing pleasurable sensations, each of a more or less peculiar or unique kind."<sup>16</sup> So central is the sensuous dimension of aesthetic response to Pater's criticism, in fact, that one critic has characterized the overarching project of Paterian aestheticism as the effort to effect "the social transformation of Victorian life through an enlarged and emboldened sensuousness."<sup>17</sup> Far from being the suppressed element of aesthetic experience, that is, *aisthesis* emerges in Pater's work as its defining feature.

Beyond merely declaring a sympathy with the poet's occasional praise for "the mighty world of eye and ear," Pater found Wordsworth's poetry to be a model for his own critical endeavor. Of course, Pater's deep indebtedness to British Romanticism is considerable and unmistakable, and has been a familiar topic of criticism at least since Graham Hough's study of late nineteenth-century literary culture, *The Last Romantics*.<sup>18</sup> After all, Pater's first-published essay, "Coleridge's Writings," appeared in print just two years before he wrote the paragraphs eventually incorporated into the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance*. Though that inaugural essay is notable for containing Pater's first insistence that "art is the triumph of the senses and the emotions," in the same essay Pater criticizes the excessively abstract character of Coleridge's thought, arguing that "[he] withdraws us too far from what we can see, hear, and feel."<sup>19</sup> Only a few years later, however, Pater would find the perfection of sensuousness in Coleridge's fellow poet Wordsworth, whom he praises in his famous essay of 1874, later revised and published along with the Coleridge essay in *Appreciations* (1889):

in Wordsworth, such power of seeing life, such perception of a soul, in inanimate things, came of an exceptional susceptibility to the impressions of eye and ear, and was, in its essence, a kind of sensuousness. At least, it is only in a temperament exceptionally susceptible on the sensuous side, that this sense of the expressiveness of outward things comes to be so large a part of life.<sup>20</sup>

Pater's praise of Wordsworth's sensuousness is most readily understood in the context of his critique of aesthetic theorists who define "beauty in the abstract."<sup>21</sup> More pointedly, though, Pater speaks on behalf of a specific "kind of sensuousness" in Wordsworth that perceives a source of imaginative interest in the "inanimate things" – the rocks and stones and trees – of his poetry, and so is ultimately more congenial to the task of the aesthetic critic. His characterization of Wordsworth's sensuousness recalls one of the more striking claims in the Preface for the material agency of poetry to shape "the impressions which we habitually receive": this is Wordsworth's claim for the priority of the poet's work over that of the "Man of Science" on the basis of the poet's commitment to "carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the Science itself" (LB, 259–60). Because Wordsworth views experiences of vivid sensation not only as an anticipation of more elevated thoughts to come, but also as vitally significant in themselves, his poetry serves as a model for Pater's attempt to re-assert the importance of embodied aesthetic experience. Thus Pater purports to share with Wordsworth not only a preoccupation with the



“inward world of thought and feeling,” but – in seeming contrast to Arnold’s appreciation of the poet – with the specifically physical modes of “feeling” made possible through aesthetic experience.<sup>22</sup>

Given the obvious importance of *aisthesis* to Pater’s aesthetic criticism, however, it is all the more surprising to observe the tendency in Pater’s writings to problematize, and indeed at times to denigrate, the sensuous character of Wordsworth’s poetry. Pater’s ambivalent response to Wordsworth’s sensuousness first becomes evident in the context of his discussion of an internal division in the poet’s *oeuvre*. Reflecting in his essay on the Romantic distinction between fancy and imagination, Pater speculated that this distinction between lower and higher orders of imaginative power might be applied to the estimation of Wordsworth’s poetry as well, namely in the manner in which that poetry combines elements of the beautiful and profound with something of the “tedious and prosaic” (40). It is on the basis of this duality in Wordsworth’s work that Pater sees the poet as the ideal pedagogical case for the aspiring aesthetic critic, for whom the reading of Wordsworth would constitute “an excellent sort of training” towards the delineation of and distinction between different orders of aesthetic experience (41).<sup>23</sup>

I think that no reader of Wordsworth will have difficulty relating to Pater’s discovery of something “tedious and prosaic” in the poet’s work. Yet Pater locates a further source for what he calls Wordsworth’s “absolute duality between higher and lower moods” in a conflict or discrepancy between “higher and lower degrees of intensity” in the poet’s work (41) – degrees that Pater most clearly identifies with moments of sensualized reflection and of “mere” sensation, respectively. In a later passage of the essay, Pater returns to the analysis of this duality in the poet’s work, describing it as an alternation between “moments of profound, imaginative power” and “periods of intense susceptibility, in which he appeared to himself as but the passive recipient of external influences” (55–6). Though ostensibly praising Wordsworth’s sensuousness, Pater is compelled to acknowledge that in giving itself to these “periods of intense susceptibility” Wordsworth’s poetry is estranged from the source of the highest literary value. Accordingly, Wordsworth’s “exceptional susceptibility to the impressions of eye and ear” is rejected in favor of those moments of “sudden passage from lowly thoughts and places to the majestic forms of philosophical imagination” (57).<sup>24</sup> Pater’s obvious intention in making this distinction is to defend the autonomy of aesthetic experience; like Keats, he demands that works of art retain their formal freedom from the determinant character of reason or morality.

Yet while Keats perceives in Wordsworth an aesthetic morality that encroaches on and compromises the particularity of physical sensation, Pater discerns in the poet's work an excessive attachment to the senses that compromises its aesthetic interest. Far from being read as a poet of reflection, in other words, Wordsworth is seen as a poet of excessive sensibility even by such a forceful defender of sensuous experience as Pater. In Hegelian terms with which the critic was intimately familiar, Pater conceives the aesthetic as at once the perfection and the sublime cancellation of sensation, and sees Wordsworth's excessive reliance on "the impressions of eye and ear" as unrecuperable within this scheme.<sup>25</sup>

Though purporting to find in Wordsworth's poetry the model for a sensuous aesthetic experience, Pater's tendency to find an "absolute duality" in Wordsworth's poetry has the effect of placing Wordsworth's susceptibility to the impressions of eye and ear at a remove from the sources of "true aesthetic value" in his work (40). Surprisingly, then, the nineteenth-century apostle of literary sensuousness finds in Wordsworth's commitment to sensuous detail something inimical to "true" poetry. In a further irony, Pater associates Wordsworth with an excessive attachment to the senses that Wordsworth himself associates with those popular literary forms from which he seeks to distance his work. Though Pater posits the aesthetic as the site of reconciliation between matter/body and form/soul, and sees the best moments of Wordsworth's verse as effecting such a reconciliation, his analysis tends as much to aggravate as to diminish a conflict between the sensuous and reflective dimensions of aesthetic experience. While seeking to overcome a distinction between "the taste of reflection" and "the taste of sense," Pater just as clearly reinforces these antagonisms. For Pater, that is, Wordsworthian "feeling" is but an ambivalent property of aesthetic experience, at once a stimulus and an obstacle to the work of reflection.

#### THE PULSATION PHILOSOPHY

Thus seeking to get beyond the conflict between sensation and reflection and reinscribing that conflict in his own work, Pater's aesthetic criticism supplies an important precedent for the phenomenon to which Andreas Huyssen drew our attention some time ago: namely the tendency of the cultural divide to survive, often indeed to be reinforced by, opposition from within high culture itself.<sup>26</sup> To his contemporary readers, however, Pater's emphasis on the centrality of sensation to aesthetic experience could be read as a significant threat to the orderly distinctions of the

cultural divide; indeed, the critic's advocacy of embodied aesthetic experience was on occasion described as a scandalous blurring of the lines between elite and popular readerly activity. Pater's critique of Wordsworthian sensuousness is therefore ironic not only because of the prominent role of *aisthesis* in his aesthetic criticism, but also because Pater's own work was often described as appealing to the same forms of embodied aesthetic experience as did the popular literary genres of the same period.

Of course, no popular genre seemed more fully to promote embodied aesthetic experience as an end in itself than did the wildly successful sensation novels of the 1860s. Similarly insisting on the centrality of sensation to aesthetic experience, that genre must be seen as a dialectical twin to Pater's aesthetic criticism, a popular counterpart to Pater's vision of refined aesthetic experience. In fact, the kinship of Paterian aestheticism with the sensation novel did not go unnoticed by early readers of Pater's work. In 1873, a reviewer for the *Examiner* writing under the pseudonym "Z" dissected Pater's advocacy of a garden-variety hedonism whose ultimate inspiration was the skeptical philosophy of the Greeks, but whose more immediate kinship, as the reviewer perceived, was with the sensation novel:

Get your self-contained pleasure, cried Aristippus; get your 'pulsation,' cries Mr. Pater. Yet, but we surely need a criterion of 'pulsations.' The housemaid who revels in the sensation novels of the 'London Journal' holds with Mr. Pater – only less consciously – that it is the pulsations that make life worth the living; and the question is whether the pulsation philosophy is not as fully realised by the housemaid with her Miss Braddon, as by Mr. Pater with his Winckelmann.<sup>27</sup>

Espousing the pursuit of sensation as the foremost end of the aesthetic critic, Pater – that "apostle of the artistic apotheosis of lotus-eating" – reduces aesthetic enjoyment to a mere "pulsation" or vivid sensory experience unmoored from any foundation in moral thought and conduct.<sup>28</sup> In addition to designating Pater as a decadent aesthete (an increasingly common characterization of British authors of the aestheticist movement), the author of this review just as clearly identifies Pater's "pulsation philosophy" with middle-class – and conspicuously feminized – forms of popular aesthetic enjoyment: not only are the readers of these novels female, but Mary Elizabeth Braddon is identified as the representative producer of such fictions. In calling attention to a secret kinship between these "high" and "low" literary pleasures, then, the review also illustrates the gendered terms in which the cultural divide has long been asserted.<sup>29</sup>

By equating Pater's aestheticism with sensation fiction, "Z" ironically effaces the distinctions that one might make between these genres, conflating the critic's elevated sensuousness with a voguish, violent sensationalism, and Pater's rarefied model of aesthetic enjoyment with the mass-cultural aesthetics of shock.

Though not all of Pater's reviewers went so far as did "Z" in identifying the logic of aesthetic criticism with the founding impulse of the sensation novel, early responses to *The Renaissance* persistently reflected the difficulty of drawing any firm distinctions between a sensationalized popular culture and a sensualized cultural elite. On the one hand, critics certainly did not shrink from attacking Pater's lapidary prose style and ethos of refined aesthetic sensitivity as clear signs of cultural elitism; to J. A. Symonds, for instance, Pater appeared a man "indifferent to common tastes and sympathies, careless of maintaining at any cost a vital connection with the universal instincts of humanity."<sup>30</sup> While readers thus routinely criticized Pater's snobbery and social withdrawal, however, this was felt to be a tendency not opposed to but rather derived from Pater's emphasis upon the pursuit of intensified sensuous experience. In a 1874 essay published in the *Quarterly Review*, W. J. Courthope characterized Pater as one among a number of "critics who reject the natural standards of common sense in favor of private perceptions derived from books."<sup>31</sup> As Courthope asserts, this critical school of thought – a school whose origins in England he provocatively attributes to Wordsworth – confounds the dictates of right reason by "plac[ing] the value and true nature of external objects in the states of feeling that these produce in the individual."<sup>32</sup> According to his critics, then, Pater's philosophy of aesthetic impression was grounded in a doctrine of refined hedonism that put the author at once in clear opposition to "the vulgar doctrine that 'life is all beer and skittles'" and implicitly in league with it.<sup>33</sup> Pater's tendency to make criticism, in Courthope's words, "a matter of feeling and not judgment," could consequently be described as both opposed and strangely akin to the sensation novel, which was equally liable to be read as an effort to reduce all of human experience to the pursuit of mere "pulsation."<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, the idea that sensation fiction elicits a "self-contained pleasure" inimical to readerly reflection has proved resilient since "Z"'s review. In many recent critical accounts of the sensation novel, cultural historians have described this genre as defined by a tendency to substitute an extreme somatic response for any sort of purposeful reflection on the reader's part. As one recent critic has argued, Wilkie Collins's immensely popular fictions

of the 1860s made possible a mode of aesthetic experience that virtually bypassed reflection altogether, encouraging instead “a direct physiological response that was prior to, and perhaps in many cases more powerful than, self-conscious thought.”<sup>35</sup> If Pater’s aestheticism is characterized both by the pursuit of exquisite sensations and by their rigorous “discrimination and analysis,”<sup>36</sup> the principal characteristic of sensation fiction is taken to be the reduction of mental experience to its basis in sheer physiological response. Thus both past and present readers of the sensation novel see the genre as promoting modes of aesthetic experience that are exclusively, aggressively “sensational.”

Ironically, however, this understanding of sensation fiction as demanding a pre- or even non-reflective aesthetic response misses or ignores how often readers have seen this genre as reflecting on its own sensational devices. Take, for instance, the well-known scene of Anne Catherick’s appearance in Collins’s *The Woman in White* (1859–60), often regarded as the first novel in the sensation genre. In her 1862 review essay on the sensation novel phenomenon, Margaret Oliphant read this episode as the first and most effective “sensation-scene” of the novel.<sup>37</sup> As Oliphant shrewdly perceived, Collins’s depiction of Walter Hartright’s encounter with the Woman in White – “every drop of blood in my body was brought to a stop by the touch of a hand laid lightly and suddenly on my shoulder from behind me” – epitomizes the way in which the sensation genre itself aims, as Collins put it in his preface to the novel, to “lay a strong hold on the attention of readers.”<sup>38</sup>

What makes this episode, for Oliphant, “a sensation-scene of the most delicate and skilful kind” is its purposeful externalization of the novel’s own sensationalist mechanics. While epitomizing the sensationalism of the genre, such episodes just as clearly draw attention to the formal qualities of their own sensationalism, and thus demand to be read as both a sensational scene and as an advertisement for the medium that produces such effects. That countless readers since Oliphant have cited this episode as uniquely representative of the sensation genre testifies to Collins’s success in this endeavor. Collins’s interest in making the sensational content of his fiction at least minimally a subject of readerly reflection must in this respect be seen as an effort, like Pater’s, to isolate and dilate upon those transitory moments of sensory experience. Without explicitly inviting the “discrimination and analysis” of such sensational effects, in other words, Collins’s metacommentary on his own artistic practice does clearly raise questions in terms similar to those of Pater’s aesthetic criticism: “What is this song or picture . . . to me? What effect does it really

produce on me?"<sup>39</sup> This similarity between the modes of popular and refined aesthetic experience suggests a basis for "Z"'s perception of an underlying kinship between Pater's work and that of the sensation novel. For such ambiguities trouble the very distinctions that this reviewer would wish to preserve. If the architects of elite aesthetic experience frequently drew power and interest from the immediacy of physical sensation, it is equally the case that popular literary authors such as Collins define the sensational effects of their art in terms (Wordsworthian in theory if not in practice) that suggest the mutually supportive relationship between the forms of sensuous and reflective aesthetic response.

In comparing aestheticism's "pulsation philosophy" to the literary sensationalism of the 1860s, my aim is not solely to demonstrate, with "Z," Pater's unwitting complicity in the popular literary aesthetics of his age. Rather, by attending to how elite as well as popular literary authors negotiate the fluid distinctions between simple *aisthesis* and refined response, either policing or exploiting the borders between them, I wish to demonstrate how fully both Pater and Collins engage with the "high" literary aesthetics of the previous generation. Of course, it would be foolish to regard Wordsworth – a friend of Wilkie's father William, the painter and (from 1814) member of the Royal Academy<sup>40</sup> – as an explicit inspiration to Collins in the way that he obviously is to Pater; in fact, Collins's writing on the subject often suggests a wish to maintain the very distinctions that Wordsworth, from the other side of this divide, helps to instantiate. Though discussion of sensationalism's contexts generally extends no further than to its sources in gothic fiction, however, Collins's sensation fiction reflects a powerful engagement with the "high" literary aesthetics of the late eighteenth century as with the popular genres of the same period. Indeed, while exploiting far more thoroughly than Wordsworth and Pater the notion of sensation as an end in itself, Collins's strong critique of elite literary aesthetics draws to a surprising extent on a Wordsworthian conception of aesthetic response.

To find in Collins's work an approach to the topic of aesthetic experience that exploits the increasingly porous borders between bodily affection and "higher" feeling, we can look no further than to a central episode of another of Collins's novels, *The Moonstone* (1868). The episode to which I refer concerns the physiological experiment conducted by the physician's assistant Ezra Jennings on the protagonist Franklin Blake. Having learned that Blake stole the diamond known as the Moonstone on the evening that he was unwittingly drugged, Jennings proposes a "bold experiment" designed to replicate the conditions that gave rise to Blake's unconscious

act, thereby producing a repetition of the result.<sup>41</sup> As the main purpose of Jennings's experiment is a success, and Blake's innocence is established as a result, the episode marks the first significant resolution to the plot of detection; thus, as Collins asserts in the preface, the experiment "occupies a prominent place in the closing scenes" of the novel (xxxii).

It is on account of this episode's obvious prominence in *The Moonstone* that critics have often identified Jennings's character not only as the most profound figure of detection in the novel, but as a figure for its author as well.<sup>42</sup> While identifying Jennings as an authorial figure within the novel, though, critics have been unaccountably silent on the subject of how Jennings's most significant act, the staging of his physiological experiment, might reflect upon Collins's own authorial practice. For if Jennings occupies an authorial role within the novel, his experiment must surely be understood as a figure for the author's own experiment in aesthetic response. Like the celebrated sensation-scene of *The Woman in White*, Jennings's experiment is meant to be uniquely representative of the sensation genre itself, offering a figure for how such narrative experiments affect their readers. Numbering among those effects which, as Collins asserted in a letter of 1868, "have never been tried in fiction before," the scene of Jennings's experiment is therefore "experimental" in more than one sense.<sup>43</sup>

While readily suggesting Collins's familiarity with Romantic accounts of opium use, Jennings's experiment is clearly about as far-removed from the stuff of Wordsworth's poetry as is the mixed-race, opium-addicted Jennings from the rusticated, teetotaling poet himself.<sup>44</sup> Though Jennings pointedly refers Blake to De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, even this "far-famed" Romantic text is regarded less as an imaginative work than as a medical primer for the experience that Blake is to undergo (434).<sup>45</sup> Indeed, though in a letter to the *Fortnightly Review* he boasted of having "what is called 'a Catholic taste' in literature," and counted Byron, Scott, and "the illustrious Shelley" among his favorite nineteenth-century poets, Collins professed no great love for Wordsworth's poetry.<sup>46</sup> Writing in 1850, the year of Wordsworth's death, Collins acknowledged that he considered him "greater . . . as a moral teacher than as a poet" – an opinion suggesting how far the novelist, like Hallam, regarded Wordsworth as a poet of reflection rather than of sensation.<sup>47</sup> As a reader who, also like Hallam, favored "[t]he *suggestion*, rather than the expression, of feeling," Collins's tastes in poetry were most deeply congenial to the sensationalism of the genre he popularized.<sup>48</sup> "[The poet] *must* please me," Collins asserts in a letter of 1884, "he *must* excite some feeling in me, at a first reading, or I will have nothing to do with



him.<sup>49</sup> While in that same letter Collins strikes an Arnoldian note in demanding a poetry which “makes me feel,” he just as clearly rejects Arnold’s claim to find this resource of feeling in Wordsworth, the poet who repeatedly distances his own work from a “vulgar” sensationalism by insisting upon the reader’s cooperating exertion of thought.<sup>50</sup>

There is little to surprise us in Collins’s preference for poetry that achieves immediate sensational effects, or in his antagonism towards a poet who is widely remembered for having decried such sensationalism. Given Collins’s commitment to the immediacy of sensation in aesthetic experience, however, it is striking to observe how significantly the experimental scene of *The Moonstone* deviates from that logic. Indeed, Collins depicts this sensational episode in terms strongly suggestive of the “high” literary aesthetics that he otherwise rejects. While offering a figure for the sensational effects of the genre, for instance, Collins’s episode just as conspicuously foregrounds the pivotal agency of reflection in re-eliciting a vivid sensory response.<sup>51</sup> Whereas Blake’s first use of opium is experienced purely as an unconscious physiological response (though secretly administered by Dr. Candy), the experimental episode, plotted in both senses – i.e. planned and narrated – by Jennings, is more consciously intended to serve the purposes of detection. Thus, Collins renders Blake’s experience first as a criminal act (though unseen by the reader) and secondly as an act calculated to prove his innocence – first as an unconscious, purely somatic experience, and then in the context of a controlled experiment in which Blake is himself a willing participant. Deriving its inspiration from the delirious ramblings of Dr. Candy, Jennings’s experiment converts the circumstances of Blake’s first opium experience into a useable and intelligible form, and thus proves to be the basis for illuminating the mystery that has shrouded the theft of the Moonstone.

Depicting the scene of Jennings’s experiment as an experiment in aesthetic response, Collins offers more than a figure for the sensation novelist’s own task; his climactic episode also enacts a distinctly Wordsworthian logic. In a gesture that amounts to nothing so much as a travesty of Wordsworthian aesthetics, Collins at once revisits and parodies the poet’s account of the process by which moments of vivid sensory experience assume significance and value. Describing the rationale for his experiment, Jennings refers Blake to William Carpenter’s hypothesis that every sensory impression, once perceived, remains in the subconscious and is capable of being revived at a later date (432–3). Yet Jennings’s account of memories forgotten but not altogether absent from the mind recalls nothing so much as those scenes which, as Wordsworth writes in



*The Prelude*, “[r]emained, in their substantial lineaments / Depicted on the brain.” Like those “feelings . . . of unremembered pleasure” that sustain and enrich the speaker in the intervals of his visits to Tintern Abbey, these are experiences both capable of being renewed in the present and of eliciting more profound experiences in the future.<sup>52</sup>

If the reproduction of Blake’s opium experience suggests the process by which vivid sensory experiences are revisited and redeemed, however, Collins’s episode just as clearly subverts that logic. Indeed, his account of Blake’s redoubled opium experience offers a sharp parody of Wordsworthian aesthetics, a “spot of time” accessed not as an occasion for sublime meditation but rather as sheer physiological affect. As in De Quincey’s famously ambivalent homage to Wordsworth, the “far-famed” *Confessions* that Jennings commends as the best account of the refined sensations of the opium-eater, Collins’s narrative experiment represents both a materialist recontextualization of Wordsworthian aesthetics and an account that capitalizes on the ambivalence of the poet’s conception of embodied aesthetic experience. Wordsworth’s “science of feelings,” and his self-identified experimental literary practice, thus finds an unlikely inheritor and keen antagonist in the figure of the mysterious physician’s assistant.<sup>53</sup>

I have so far sought to characterize *The Moonstone*’s experiment in aesthetic response as at once an ironic revisitation of Wordsworthian poetics and a pointed commentary on the inability of “high” literary aesthetics to contain the distinction between simple *aisthesis* and refined aesthetic feeling. In reading Jennings’s experiment as a parody of the Wordsworthian process by which vivid sensory experiences are purged of their “vulgar” content, however, I do not mean to overlook how Collins’s metafiction introduces a very different understanding of aesthetic repetition, namely that suggested by the serialized form of the sensation novel itself. While on the one hand Jennings’s experiment offers a wry parody of the Wordsworthian process by which “feeling comes in aid / Of feeling,” it draws as well on a strikingly serial logic, represented by Jennings’s aim to revive Blake’s physical and mental condition from exactly one year prior. Conceiving readerly sensation not principally, in Wordsworthian terms, as a prop to reflection, but rather as an end in itself, the experimental scene of *The Moonstone* thus revisits the formal logic of “high” literary aesthetics only to support the “gross and violent stimulants” that Wordsworth deplored.

Writing *The Moonstone* in 1868, Collins surely would have been aware of charges that the repetitive shocks of sensation fiction would damage the

sensibilities and stultify the minds of its readers. If much of Wordsworth's poetry explains how experiences of powerful feeling are capable of being revisited and thereby enabling more profoundly tranquil habits of mind, readers such as Mrs. Oliphant very differently perceived the effects of serial fiction on the reading public. While otherwise praising Collins's fiction, Oliphant thus strongly cautioned against the malevolent effects of its serialization: "The violent stimulant of serial publication – of *weekly* publication, with its necessity for frequent and rapid recurrence of piquant situation and startling incident – is the thing of all others most likely to develop the germ, and bring it to fuller and darker bearing."<sup>54</sup> As Oliphant insisted, the danger of serialization arises both from its incessant repetitiveness and from the tendency of the novelist to provide ever-greater stimulants to the story, which "naturally increases in excitement as it goes on."<sup>55</sup> It is in reference to this tendency of sensation fiction to provide increasing sources of shock that we might read the fact that Jennings, though frequently emphasizing the necessity of exactly reproducing the conditions of Blake's surroundings, confesses to having slightly increased the dose of opium administered to Blake (432, 434, 459). Conceived as an experiment in aesthetic response, that is, Jennings's experiment suggests both the Wordsworthian purification of vulgar experience and the popular aesthetics of shock.

Thus calling at once on a logic associated both with "high" literary aesthetics and a popular reading practice, Collins parodically blurs the distinction between bodily affection and refined feeling while criticizing the privileged role of the latter within elite literary culture. In Jennings's assessment of the books approved for placement at Blake's bedside – a host of eighteenth-century texts calculated rather to sedate than to excite their reader – Collins reflects powerfully on the denigration of *aisthesis* in prevailing conceptions of aesthetic value. Jennings's assessment of these books, written in his journal in the moments before his experiment is tried, provides as well a fitting commentary on the relation of these "classical works" to the popular literary aesthetics of the present (464). For while "(of course) immeasurably superior to anything produced in later times," Jennings remarks sardonically, these texts most importantly share "the one great merit of enchaining nobody's interest, and exciting nobody's brain" (464). As the authorial figure within *The Moonstone*, Jennings might well be expected to hail novels such as Richardson's *Pamela* (1740–1) and Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) – paradigmatic texts from the age of sensibility – as works uniquely congenial to his own experiment in sensation; indeed, Wordsworth himself identified in

Richardson's *Clarissa* and other works of its kind a dangerous tendency to carry readerly sensation "beyond its proper bounds" (LB, 264). Yet Jennings significantly reverses Wordsworth's judgment, emphasizing instead the sedative, even anaesthetic properties of these aesthetic texts. The obvious effect of his appraisal is to draw a contrast between those "classical works" and texts with a still greater capacity to excite their readership. Collins's ironic eulogy for "the composing influence of Standard Literature" (464) must therefore be seen not only as a way of distancing his work from that of his precursors, but of radically redefining what it means for literature to "make us feel."

#### CONCLUSION

"I tell you, we shall be wasting our time, and cudgelling our brains to no purpose, if we attempt to try back, and unravel this frightful complication from the beginning . . ."

"Surely you forget," I said, "that the whole thing is essentially a matter of the past – so far as I am concerned?" (395)

Thus Franklin Blake to the lawyer Mr. Bruff, rejecting the latter's advice not to trouble themselves with the past in their pursuit of the missing Moonstone. Blake's insistence on the necessity of attending to the remote origins of this mystery anticipates his subsequent dealings with Jennings, the character most fully capable of perceiving that the mystery surrounding the missing diamond is indeed, and more than simply for Blake, "a matter of the past." As Jenny Bourne Taylor has suggested in reference to this passage, Collins repeatedly poses questions about how information and experiences from the past can be read, reclaimed, and handed down to posterity.<sup>56</sup> Beyond expressing a central theme of the novel, Blake's response suggests as well the manner in which Collins, with as much self-consciousness as Keats, situates his own work in relation to British literary precedents. In this sense, Blake's rejoinder might be read as reflecting on the problem of the cultural divide, at least as far as this issue persisted as a "frightful complication" in the Victorian era and as an issue with origins in an earlier period of literary history. In his metafictional account of how Jennings eventually retrieves and makes sense of this hidden history, Collins demonstrates a keen awareness of how his experimental fictional practice has its origins in, and engages powerfully with, the English literary past.

I have sought to show how fully a few nineteenth-century authors on both sides of the cultural divide negotiate, with reference to the Romantic

past, an increasingly unstable antinomy between bodily affection and refined aesthetic response. Moreover, I have suggested that this dialectical antagonism between “high” and popular literary aesthetics might be understood as the legacy of an equally dialectical conception of aesthetic experience that has its origins in British Romanticism. For while conceiving sensation as more properly a stimulus to reflection than as an end in itself, Wordsworth’s example blurs as fully as it enforces distinctions between the genres to which these responses are thought to correspond, disclosing alternative legacies that the poet himself could not have foreseen. Nor is this solely a claim on behalf of the radical political potential of high culture to undermine the ideological positions attributed to it; as I have shown, authors on both sides of this divide frequently complicate ready-made distinctions between popular and elite culture, often indeed despite their explicit statements in defense of such distinctions. Thus in both Pater’s qualified allegiance to Wordsworthian sensuousness and in Collins’s revisitation and strong critique of the “high” literary aesthetics of a previous generation, we are able to track how fluid were the lines that separated “high” from “low” literary forms and pleasures.

In this, at least, we might find a reason to take seriously aesthetic experience as a category of critical analysis. Though this is a topic much in vogue in these days of the “aesthetic turn,” historians of the cultural divide have been slow to ascribe anything more than a symptomatic function to the topic of how works of art make us feel and think the way we do. By the same token, recent efforts to foreground the phenomenology of aesthetic experience have so far neglected to investigate the fraught relationship between elite and popular forms of readerly enjoyment, thereby missing an opportunity to put this distinction in a new light. At a time when debates over the priority of aesthetic and sociological approaches to literature threaten to divide the field of literary studies, it seems more than ever necessary to reconcile sensation and reflection in our own critical practice, bringing ideology critique into a productive relationship with the more patently “aesthetic” registers of literary texts. Our sociological analyses of the cultural divide neglect this dimension at risk of losing what might be the strongest basis for overcoming this divide in the first place. In our engagements with art, it may be well worth bearing in mind a lesson that the Romantics themselves offer, and which every critic must, at heart, already know: that the way we think about aesthetic objects reflects, though often imperfectly, the way we felt – and feel – about them.

## Notes

### INTRODUCTION: LYRICAL FORMS AND EMPIRICAL REALITIES

- 1 G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on the Fine Arts*, trans. T. M. Knox, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 1:1.
- 2 Marc Redfield, *The Politics of Aesthetics: Nationalism, Gender, Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 10.
- 3 See, most influentially, Philippe Lacoue Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Buffalo: State University of New York, 1988).
- 4 Paul Hamilton, *Metaromanticism: Aesthetics, Literature, Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 15. Hamilton distinguishes between an immanent critique that “aestheticizes itself out of its obligations to any further discursive sphere” and one which, in refusing such limitations, “perpetuates the liberality of artistic conception elsewhere” in other spheres (17–8). Robert Kaufman similarly distinguishes between “aestheticization” and “the aesthetic” as two conceivable alternatives for immanent critique. Kaufman, “Red Kant: The Persistence of the Third Critique” in Jameson and Adorno, *Critical Inquiry* 26 (Summer 2000): 682–724.
- 5 Georg Lukács, “The Romantic Philosophy of Life,” in *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974), 50.
- 6 On the physiologization of metaphysical inquiry into the mind, see Karl M. Figlio, “Theories of Perception and the Physiology of Mind in the Late Eighteenth Century,” *History of Science* 12 (1975): 177–212; Roy Porter, “Medical Science and Human Science in the Enlightenment,” in *Inventing Human Science: Eighteenth-Century Domains*, ed. Christopher Fox, Roy Porter, and Robert Wokler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 53–87; John P. Wright, “Metaphysics and Physiology: Mind, Body, and the Animal Economy in Eighteenth-Century Scotland,” in *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. M. A. Stewart (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 251–301.
- 7 Romanticism’s preoccupation with the poet’s capacity to cleanse the doors of perception or to widen the sphere of sensibility has long been a focus of scholars interested in the epistemological and psychological contexts of this

- literature, who have traditionally read these themes in relation to the empiricist philosophies of John Locke and David Hartley. For the most comprehensive account to date of Romanticism's engagement with the contemporary medical sciences, and the most explicit effort to modify our received ideas about the sources for its models of mind, see Alan Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- 8 Jennifer Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming: Romanticism, Dreams and the Medical Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6. On the close and often critical engagement of Romantic poets with the project of the human sciences, see Alan Bewell, *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment: Nature, Man, and Society in the Experimental Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Maureen N. McLane, *Romanticism and the Human Sciences: Poetry, Population, and the Discourse of the Species* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
  - 9 Erasmus Darwin, *The Temple of Nature; or, The Origin of Society* (3.41–6), in *The Golden Age and The Temple of Nature* (1803; rpt. New York: Garland, 1978), 86.
  - 10 Humphry Davy, MS Notebook 20a (1799–1800), The Royal Institution of Great Britain; quotation from 81.
  - 11 Thomas Beddoes, *Contributions to Physical and Moral Knowledge, Principally from the West of England, Collected by Thomas Beddoes, M.D.* (Bristol: Biggs and Cottle, 1799), 9, 3–4.
  - 12 *Ibid.*, 3–4.
  - 13 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Analysis of an ‘Essay on the Public Merits of Mr. Pitt, By Thomas Beddoes, M.D.’,” in *The Watchman*, ed. Lewis Patton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 310.
  - 14 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 20.
  - 15 William Godwin, “Of Health, and the Prolongation of Human Life,” *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., 2 vols. (1798; rpt. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1946), 2: 519–29. On medicine as a methodological foundation of Bentham's utilitarianism, see Elie Halévy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*, trans. Mary Morris (Boston: Beacon, 1955), 29. In a recent book Catherine Gallagher has called attention to how persistently both political economists and novelists of the period “disseminated the idea that the felicity of the multitude – the question of how they *feel* – as a collection of sensitive individuals . . . was the purpose of civil arrangements” (Gallagher, *The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006], 16).
  - 16 I am alluding here to several of Wordsworth's claims for the operation of poetry on the reader's senses. See, in order of their presentation here, the “Essay, Supplementary” to the Preface of 1815 (WWP, 3: 82); Wordsworth's 7 June 1802 letter to John Wilson (LEY, 355); and (again) the “Essay, Supplementary” (WWP, 3:80).

- 17 Coleridge's "prophesy" regarding the shape of his friend's epic work was indeed prophetic: in the Preface to *The Excursion*, Wordsworth describes his verse-epic in similar terms as "having for its principal subject the sensations and opinions of a Poet living in retirement" (WW, 2:36).
- 18 Of many efforts to complicate and modify the image of Wordsworthian autonomy, see David Simpson, *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination: The Poetry of Displacement* (New York: Methuen, 1987); Theresa M. Kelley, *Wordsworth's Revisionary Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Frances Ferguson, *Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individuation* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Anne Janowitz, *Lyric and Labor in the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1–61; Nancy Yousef, *Isolated Cases: The Anxieties of Autonomy in Enlightenment Philosophy and Romantic Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 114–48. Among efforts to arrive at models of Romantic subjectivity that depart altogether from the Wordsworthian model, see, for instance, Anne Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993); and Andrea Henderson, *Romantic Identities: Varieties of Subjectivity, 1774–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- 19 On the political uses of medical knowledge in Romantic poetry, see for instance Nicholas Roe, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), esp. 160–81; Alan Bewell, *Romanticism and Colonial Disease* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); and Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind*, esp. 151–80.
- 20 Despite the Leavisite connotations that have somewhat damaged its reputation in the present, "tradition" remains, I believe, the best term to describe the continuity between writers as diverse (and diversely "Wordsworthian") as those discussed in the present study, including Wordsworth's creative and intellectual partners, his acolytes and interlocutors among the second generation of British Romantics, and a few Victorian authors whose literary or critical practices reflect an open or implicit engagement with Wordsworth's conception of embodied aesthetic experience. As I hope will be evident, the figures I examine here constitute a heterogeneous group marked by difference within as well as between the work of individual authors – a tradition, that is to say, in which a reader and interpreter of Wordsworth such as Wilkie Collins keeps company with his contemporary Matthew Arnold.
- 21 Kenneth Johnston, *The Hidden Wordsworth* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), 13.
- 22 William Wordsworth, *Ruined Cottage* MS B, in *The Ruined Cottage and The Peddler*, ed. James Butler (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 271, 263.
- 23 Lamb to Wordsworth, 30 January 1801, *Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. Edwin W. Marris, Jr., 3 vols. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 1:265; Lamb's emphasis. Lamb's remark identifies the continuity of Romantic structures of feeling with the late eighteenth-century literature of sensibility, in which authors from a variety of fields defined sentiment or feeling as the



- basis of moral conduct and the bedrock of civil society. On the eighteenth-century contexts of Romantic sensibility, see for instance Northrop Frye, "Towards Defining the Age of Sensibility," *ELH* 23 (1956): 144–52; *From Sensibility to Romanticism*, ed. Harold Bloom and Frederick W. Hillis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965); Marshall Brown, *Preromanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Jerome J. McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).
- 24 Thomas Love Peacock, "The Four Ages of Poetry," in *Prose of The British Romantic Movement*, ed. John Nabholz (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 659.
- 25 J. G. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
- 26 I refer to Chris Jones's *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London: Routledge, 1993), and to an oft-quoted passage of Coleridge's letter to Wordsworth, 10 September 1799 (STCL 1:289).
- 27 See E. J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Michael Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- 28 Joseph Addison, no. 411 of *The Spectator*, 12 vols. (Philadelphia: Crissy and Markley, 1853), 8:199.
- 29 I am referring to Kittler's argument that poetic works circa 1800 were conceived as "media for the hallucinatory substitution of realms of the senses." Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer, with Chris Cullens (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), esp. 108–23, quotation from 109.
- 30 Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 11. In an essay published shortly after the appearance of *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson offered valuable notes towards an historical-materialist understanding of the category of pleasure. Jameson's "Pleasure: A Political Issue" called for a rigorously historicist method that would not be limited to a micro-politics of pleasure (whether particularized in terms of Lionel Trilling's category of sensuous sincerity or as Barthesian *jouissance*), but that would rather situate these locally contested formations of pleasure within the larger horizon of collective political praxis and its goals of social transformation (Jameson, "Pleasure: A Political Issue," in *Formations of Pleasure* [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983], 1–14). More than two decades since the appearance of Jameson's essay, few would now fail to recognize that pleasure is indeed "a political issue" in the broad sense in which Jameson urged readers to regard it; my claim is rather that Romantic authors invoke the categories of embodied aesthetic experience in full consciousness of what Jameson would call their "allegorical" significance.



- 31 I am referring to work such as John Ellis's polemical tale of "literature lost" to what is described as a relentless siege upon it by cultural critics. Ellis, *Literature Lost: Social Agendas and the Corruption of the Humanities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997). See also the sole book-length study of Romantic literary "sensuousness," Kerry McSweeney's *The Language of the Senses: Sensory-Perceptual Dynamics in Wordsworth, Coleridge, Thoreau, Whitman, and Dickinson* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), which introduces its subject as a corrective to historicist criticism.
- 32 Of many recent contributions to new aestheticism, see for instance Elaine Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998) and *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Isobel Armstrong, *The Radical Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), esp. 85–148; Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Charles Altieri, *The Particulars of Rapture: An Aesthetics of the Affects* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003). The phrase "revenge of the aesthetic" appears as the title of a volume of essays, *Revenge of the Aesthetic: The Place of Literature in Theory Today*, ed. Michael Clark (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). See also two edited collections of 2003, *The New Aestheticism*, ed. John J. Joughin and Simon Maplas (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), and *Aesthetic Subjects*, ed. Pamela R. Matthews and David McWhirter (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), which the editors describe as a project "committed to rediscovering not only the specificity of aesthetic experience, but also its profound and various sociality" (xix).
- 33 Peter de Bolla, *Art Matters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2001), 17. On several occasions in this fine book, de Bolla declares his intention to "put to one side non-aesthetic considerations" of historical and social context so as to isolate and foreground the specific affective responses made possible through contact with the work of art (133). de Bolla's work has elsewhere shown an exceptionally keen sensitivity to the role of historical context in defining categories of aesthetic perception; see, most recently, *The Education of the Eye: Painting, Landscape, and Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003). In his most ambitious effort to legitimize aesthetic experience as a category of critical analysis, however, de Bolla provisionally accepts an opposition between the socio-political contexts of art and the possibility of a genuinely affective encounter with it.
- 34 Among important reevaluations of Romantic literary form, all more or less in response to the new historicism in Romantic studies, see Susan Wolfson, *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Thomas Pfau, *Wordsworth's Profession: Form, Class, and the Logic of Early Romantic Cultural Production* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); James K. Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). It is worth recalling, though, that the serious historicist

engagement by Romantic scholars with the problem of form began with the new historicism itself; see, for instance, Alan Liu's self-reflexive critique of the new historicism as a struggle with and partial return to the literary formalism of a previous generation. Liu, "The Power of Formalism: The New Historicism," *ELH* 56 (1989): 721–71.

- 35 In a welcome sign that this work is already underway, see Kevis Goodman's *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Mediation of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), which attends to the historicity of the senses in eighteenth-century and Romantic poetry, particularly in regard to moments of discomfort or affective dissonance that resist assimilation into idea or achieved narrative form (4). While the emphasis of my study falls more obviously than does Goodman's on the side of aesthetic pleasure, and thus speaks of affects more immediately relevant to a tradition of philosophical aesthetics as such, I hope that *Science and Sensation* will be read as both a complement to Goodman's splendid study and as an examination in reverse of what she calls "the element of external risk and historical inundation that intervenes at the genesis of a full-fledged account of aesthetic perception" (105). To put most plainly the distinction between my project and Goodman's: while I share her commitment to regarding pleasure and discomfort as terms dialectically defined and mutually implicated in this period, I am primarily interested in how this understanding is reflected in conceptualizations of aesthetic pleasure by the Romantics themselves.
- 36 Theodor Adorno, "Valéry's Deviations," in *Notes to Literature*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 1:138.
- 37 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 193.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 193; and see of course Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
- 39 Robert Kaufman, "Legislators of the Post-Everything World: Shelley's Defence of Adorno," *ELH* 63.3 (1996): 707–33; and "Negatively Capable Dialectics: Keats, Vendler, Adorno, and the Theory of the Avant-Garde," *Critical Inquiry* 27.2 (Winter 2001): 354–84.
- 40 Adorno, "Valéry's Deviations," 138.
- 41 On the "naïveté" of Romantic aesthetics and the need to retain theoretical vigilance in the face of it, see Labarthe and Nancy, *Literary Absolute*, 17.
- 42 "The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism . . . is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of *contemplation*, but not as *human sensuous activity, practice*, not subjectively . . . Feuerbach, not satisfied with *abstract thinking*, appeals to *sensuous contemplation*; but he does not conceive sensuousness as practical, human-sensuous activity" (Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker [New York: W. W. Norton, 1978], 143–4).
- 43 Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, in *Early Writings*, ed. T. B. Bottomore (New York: McGraw Hill, 1963), 161.

- 44 Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, 16; also 293–4. See also Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 42; Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (London: Blackwell, 1990), 196–233.
- 45 John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1924), 104; for discussion, see chapter 4.

## POWERS OF SUGGESTION

- 1 Of numerous Romantic testimonies to the defamiliarizing function of poetry, see, for instance, Coleridge's well-known account in the *Biographia Literaria* (BL, 2:7) and Shelley's re-writing of Coleridge's account in the *Defence of Poetry* (SPP, 533).
- 2 Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 14. In a similar vein, see the following statement from Alan Liu: "Difference is especially desirable in the field of Wordsworth studies, which has tended to be extremely familiar with its object of study" (Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989], 36). Kenneth Johnston has more recently used Liu's remark as an epigraph to his revisionist biography of the poet (Johnston, *Hidden Wordsworth*, 1).
- 3 See, among many contributions to the history of the feelings in this period, the following fine studies: Jerome McGann, *Poetics of Sensibility*; Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion*; Julie Ellison, *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Goodman, *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism*; Andrew M. Stauffer, *Anger, Revolution, and Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Though its focus is not on Romanticism proper, Rei Terada's *Feeling in Theory: Emotion After the "Death of the Subject"* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001) can be mentioned here as it shares with many of the works above an emphasis on emotion as trans-subjective experience, its history consequently irreducible to the narrative of the sovereign autonomous "subject."
- 4 See, for instance, Bourdieu, "Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception," in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 215–37; *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), esp. 285–321.
- 5 Bourdieu, *Rules of Art*, 309–12.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 288.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 288.
- 8 Howard Caygill, *Art of Judgement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 38–102; Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 13–69.
- 9 Caygill, *Art of Judgement*, 43.

- 10 On the possibility of human pleasures and energies as radical ends in themselves, see Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 8–9, 64–6; and on Marx’s valorization of the sensory life of individuals, see 196–233. For a skillful critique of Eagleton’s argument, see Isobel Armstrong, “The Aesthetic and the Polis: Marxist Deconstruction,” in *Radical Aesthetic*, 27–44.
- 11 Chris Jones’s *Radical Sensibility* reads the politicization of sensibility in this decade as having been only peripherally (and belatedly) an aesthetic concern – a struggle for the political soul of sensibility before these issues are abandoned in preference for the postures of “neurasthenic navel-gazing or transcendental reverie” (6). As a corrective to this view, Mee’s *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation* has attended to a persistent dialectic of emotional release and restraint in early Romantic writing, showing these categories of aesthetic experience to have been closely tied to contemporary political debates.
- 12 “The prime virtue for the romanticist is to have fresh and spontaneous sensations, or else to revive in memory the freshness and vividness of past sensations and then convey them suggestively to others” (Irving Babbitt, *The New Laokoon: An Essay On the Confusion of the Arts* [Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1910], 131).
- 13 *Ibid.*, 145; see also Babbitt’s later essay, “The Primitivism of Wordsworth,” which describes Wordsworth as writing under a condition of “hyperaesthesia” that amounted at times to a thoroughgoing “abdication of thought” (*On Being Creative and Other Essays* [New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1968], 48, 61). Clement Greenberg’s “Towards a Newer Laocoon” builds on and partially qualifies Babbitt’s critique of suggestion as characterized by a desire “to affect the reader or listener with more immediate and more powerful sensations” (Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Volume I: Perceptions and Judgments, 1939–1944*, ed. John O’Brian [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986], 23–38, quotation from 31).
- 14 T. S. Eliot, “The Metaphysical Poets,” in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1960), 247.
- 15 See W. J. Bate, *From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961); M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Norton, 1953); Ernest Lee Tuveson, *The Imagination as a Means of Grace: Locke and the Aesthetics of Romanticism* (Berkeley: University California Press, 1960). The study of literary “synaesthesia” can be understood as a sub-set of these problems, emerging initially in response to Babbitt’s critique and fortified by Bate’s defense. See Erika von Erhardt-Siebold, “Harmony of the Senses in English, German, and French Romanticism,” *PMLA* 47 (1932): 577–92; Stephen de Ullman, “Romanticism and Synaesthesia: A Comparative Study of Sense Transfer in Keats and Byron,” *PMLA* 15 (1945): 811–27; A. G. Engstrom, “In Defense of Synaesthesia in Literature,” *Philological Quarterly* 25 (1946): 1–19; Glenn O’Malley, *Shelley and Synaesthesia* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964).

- 16 M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), esp. 377–84, 412–18.
- 17 Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 94, 326–35.
- 18 Babbitt, *New Laokoon*, 73.
- 19 See, for example, *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970).
- 20 Marjorie Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 14–57, quotations from 18, 47. Levinson's reading of "Tintern Abbey" builds on an earlier essay of Kenneth Johnston, "The Politics of 'Tintern Abbey,'" *The Wordsworth Circle* 14.1 (Winter 1983): 6–14; see also McGann, *Romantic Ideology*, 85–8. Theresa Kelley responds to these earlier historicist analyses in her sensitive reading of "Tintern Abbey" as a poem that celebrates "the acts of invention and enclosure by which the beautiful makes sublime places safe for human habitation" (*Wordsworth's Revolutionary Aesthetics*, 57–62, quotation from 58).
- 21 For the foundational version of this argument, see M. H. Abrams's landmark essay, "English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age," in *Romanticism and Consciousness*, 91–119. Quotations from Blake's "Jerusalem" in the preface to *Milton* (WB, 95) and from the 1805 *Prelude* (6.542).
- 22 Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems*, 48, 50.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 57.
- 24 Among several insightful analyses of "Tintern Abbey," which in responding to Levinson's influential polemic reveal a greater degree of self-consciousness and ambivalence in Wordsworth's effort to generate a coherent identity from the imaginative revisitation of his radical youth, see David Bromwich, *Disowned by Memory: Wordsworth's Poetry of the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 69–91; Pfau, *Wordsworth's Profession*, 114–39; Sarah M. Zimmerman, *Romanticism, Lyricism, and History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 94–108.
- 25 Eliot, "Andrew Marvell," in *Selected Essays*, 259.
- 26 Krishna "Suggestiveness and Suggestion," *Essays in Criticism* 19 (1969): 318. See also David Perkins's brief account of poetic "suggestion" in his *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Sincerity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 98–101.
- 27 Edgar Allan Poe, *Poems and Essays on Poetry*, ed. C. H. Sisson (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995), 149.
- 28 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (3.129; 1.685), in *Complete Poems and Selected Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 261, 228.
- 29 Milton, *Paradise Lost* (9.90), in *Complete Poems and Selected Prose*, 380.
- 30 William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (II.i.288), in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 1621.
- 31 Babbitt's source for this concept is Paul Souriau's *La Suggestion dans l'art* (1893); see *New Laokoon*, 129.
- 32 George Berkeley, *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* (1709), in *The Works of George Berkeley*, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1901), 1:134.

- 33 Erasmus Darwin, *The Temple of Nature; or, The Origin of Society* (3.85–6), in *The Golden Age and The Temple of Nature*, 90.
- 34 See, for instance, Berkeley's remark that "[t]hings are suggested and perceived by Sense." George Berkeley, *The Theory of Vision*, in *The Works of George Berkeley*, 2:399.
- 35 Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind*, ed. Timothy Duggan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 38; see also the chapter "Of perception" in Reid's 1785 *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969), 111–18. For commentary, see P. G. Winch, "The Notion of 'Suggestion' in Thomas Reid's Theory of Perception," *Philosophical Quarterly* 3 (1953): 327–41; Timothy Duggan, Introduction to Reid's *Inquiry*, xxxv–xli. On the dialectical relationship of an "experimental" Romantic aesthetics to the principles of common sense, see chapter 3.
- 36 Thomas Brown, *Sketch of a System of the Philosophy of the Human Mind, Part First: Comprehending the Physiology of the Mind* (Edinburgh: Bell and Bradfute, 1820), 181.
- 37 On Brown's theory of suggestion, see James Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 167–170; John A. Mills, "Thomas Brown on the Philosophy and Psychology of Perception," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 23 (1987): 37–49. Critics have speculated that Brown's theory of suggestion anticipates the use of this term in the science of hypnosis. See Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 367 n.41; Graham Richards, *Mental Machinery: The Origins and Consequences of Psychological Ideas, Part 1: 1600–1850* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 334.
- 38 Brown, *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: W. and C. Tait, 1820), 2:202–3.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 2:239–251.
- 40 Hartley Coleridge, sonnet 8, in *Poems by Hartley Coleridge*, 2 vols. (London: Edward Moxon, 1851), 1:12.
- 41 In the first chapter of his landmark study of Wordsworth, Geoffrey Hartman adapted Milton's term "surmise" to describe the conjectural mode and "middle-ground of imaginative activity" of Romantic poetry. In sketching the career of "suggestion" in late eighteenth-century psychology and aesthetics, my wish is not so much to propose a competing name for this literary practice as to shed light on a densely specified psychological category by means of which Romantic poets advance "through the solitary to the social" in a more historically self-conscious manner than Hartman ascribes to the category of Romantic "surmise." Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787–1814* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 8–18, quotations from 11, 8.
- 42 Wordsworth's "Elegiac Stanzas, Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle in a Storm" (published 1807) represents a rare early instance in which the poet alludes to an art object that "suggests" an event (the death of the poet's brother John at sea), the recollection of which prompts the composition of



the poem itself. See also the “Sonnet suggested by the efforts of the Tyrolese” (first published in *The Friend* in 1809), which celebrates the doomed resistance of a few “herdsmen of the Alps” to Napoleon’s armies, and criticizes Germany’s failure to mount a similarly fierce defense against French aggression (WW, 826). Among later works, see the poems “Suggested by a Beautiful Ruin upon one of the Islands of Loch Lomond” (published 1820), “The Gleaner (Suggested by a Picture)” (1828), and the “Lines Suggested by a Portrait of F. Stone” (1835). On Wordsworth’s classificatory system for the 1815 *Poems* and beyond, see Arnold, “Wordsworth” (1879), in *Essays on Criticism: Second Series* (London: Macmillan, 1913), 137.

- 43 Francis Jeffrey, review of Wordsworth’s *Poems, in Two Volumes*, in *Edinburgh Review* 11 (October 1807): 218.
- 44 Francis Jeffrey, *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review*, 4 vols. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1844), 1:10; Jeffrey’s emphasis.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 1:61.
- 46 Jeffrey, review of Wordsworth’s *Poems, in Two Volumes*, 218.
- 47 Jeffrey, *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review*, 1:78.
- 48 Wordsworth is not, of course, the first author to attest to the superior sensory powers of the poet. See, for instance, Addison’s identification of the poet with the capacity “to receive lively ideas from outward objects” (no. 417 of *The Spectator*, 8:231).
- 49 The subject matter of Bourdieu’s *Distinction*. On the limitations of efforts to apply to Romantic poetry the categories of Bourdieu’s critique of aesthetic value, see chapters 5 and 6.
- 50 That the traditional sense of suggestion was still current in this period is indicated by the adoption of Milton’s phrase, “dark suggestions,” in a poem by the prolific author, revolutionary sympathizer, and the subject of Wordsworth’s first published poem, Helen Maria Williams (Wordsworth’s sonnet is “On Seeing Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress” [WW, 47]). See Williams’s “Paraphrases from Scripture”: “The impious tongue of falshood then would cease / To blast, with dark suggestions, virtue’s peace” (Williams, *Poems (1786)* [Oxford: Woodstock, 1994], 114).
- 51 Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, ed. Miranda L. Brooks (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 2000), 61, 181.
- 52 Reid, *Inquiry*, 95.
- 53 Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 148.
- 54 Humphry Davy, MS Notebook 20b., 38; Notebook 20a., 268, The Royal Institution of Great Britain.
- 55 Davy, MS Notebook 20a., 268.
- 56 I am paraphrasing a well-known line from Edmund Burke’s *Reflections*, hereafter cited by page number within the text: “Writers, especially when they act in a body and with one direction, have great influence on the public mind” (98).
- 57 Frances Burney, *Diary and Letters of Madame d’Arblay*, quoted in Ida Macalpine and Richard Hunter, *George III and the Mad-Business* (New York:

- Pantheon, 1969), 22. My thoughts on the medicalization of late eighteenth-century British political discourse are indebted to the work of Roy Porter; see, for instance, his essay “Medicine, Politics, and the Body in Late Georgian England,” in *Refiguring Revolutions: Aesthetics and Politics from the English Revolution to the French Revolution*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 217–37.
- 58 James Mackintosh, *Vindicae Gallicae*, in *Political Writings of the 1790s, vol. I: Radicalism and Reform: Responses to Burke, 1790–91*, ed. Gregory Claeys (London: Pickering, 1995), 319; Burke, “A Letter to a Noble Lord,” in *Selected Writings and Speeches*, ed. Peter J. Stanlis (Washington, DC: Gateway, 1963), 558.
- 59 Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, ed. Henry Collins (New York: Penguin, 1984), 118.
- 60 Mackintosh, *Vindicae Gallicae*, 331.
- 61 I am referring to the well-known chapter “Of Personal Identity” in David Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, 2nd edn., ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 252–3.
- 62 Burke, *The Writings and Speeches*, quoted in Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 91. In the *Letters Written in France* (1790), Helen Maria Williams sought in similar terms though with different political sympathies to convey to her English readers the “electric communication” of sentiment in revolutionary Paris; the first of her letters vividly evokes the excitement of the Festival of Federation, where the martial music “had the power of electrifying the hearers” (*Letters Written in France*, ed. Neil Fraistat and Susan S. Lanser [Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 2001], 63).
- 63 See Maurice Crosland, “The Image of Science as a Threat: Burke Versus Priestley and the ‘Philosophic Revolution’,” *British Journal for the History of Science* 20 (1987): 277–307; Jessica Riskin, *Science in the Age of Sensibility: The Sentimental Empiricists of the French Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 268–81; Tim Fulford, Debbie Lee, and Peter Kitson, “‘Man electrified man’: Romantic Revolution and the Legacy of Benjamin Franklin,” in *Literature, Science, and Exploration in the Romantic Era: Bodies of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 179–97.
- 64 Anna Letitia Barbauld, “An Inventory of the Furniture in Dr. Priestley’s Study,” in *Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld*, ed. William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 38–9.
- 65 Christopher Wyvill, *Political Papers*, quoted in E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Penguin, 1968), 93.
- 66 Paine, *Rights of Man*, 175. Wordsworth alludes directly to this passage in the “Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff” (1793): “Political convulsions have been said particularly to call forth concealed abilities; but it has been seldom observed how vast is their consumption of them” (WWP, 1:49).
- 67 Paine, *Rights of Man*, 175–176.



- 68 For a skilful reading of Burke's appropriation (and masculinization) of the conventions of sensibility, see Claudia L. Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 1–14.
- 69 As a cursory review of the English Short-Title Catalog is sufficient to indicate, suggestion is a term in heavy circulation in the political writing of the eighteenth century, where it undergoes a transformation from being mainly associated with factious or nefarious insinuation to name a genre of political writing intended to make a practical and timely social contribution. For a schematic illustration of this shift, we can compare the title of a treatise published in 1700 – *An answer to the insinuations and suggestions of the commissioners, for receiving the duties on glass-wares* – with the titles of two late eighteenth-century publications, Jeremiah Fitzpatrick's *Suggestions on the Slave Trade* (London, 1797) and Edward Robson's *Suggestion for the Improvement of the Poor-Laws* (London, 1797).
- 70 Armstrong offers a similar reading of the poem, arguing that “the sense sublime made out of ‘something’ is impelled by, made out of, persecutory violence” (*Radical Aesthetic*, 100).
- 71 Jon Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790–1832* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 18–46. On similar transformations occurring in the rhetoric of sensibility in the Revolution debates of the 1790s, see Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 351–95; Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (New York: Methuen, 1986), 129–41; Johnson, *Equivocal Beings*, 1–46. Klancher finds a late figure for the model of “circulatory” literary culture in a passage from Arthur Young's *Travels in France* (1792), where in an extended physiological metaphor the journalist and agriculturalist describes a “universal circulation of intelligence,” propagated through the print public sphere, “which in England transmits the least vibration of feeling or alarm, with electric sensibility, from one end of the kingdom to another, and which unites in bands of connection men of similar interests and situations” (Young, *Travels in France*, quoted in Klancher, 31).
- 72 Klancher, *Making of English Reading Audiences*, 35.
- 73 John Thelwall, *The Rights of Nature*, in *The Politics of English Jacobinism: Writings of John Thelwall*, ed. Gregory Claeys (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1995), 426.
- 74 *Ibid.*, 391.
- 75 Thelwall, quoted in Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 155.
- 76 David Hume, *History of England*, 5 vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983), 1:36.
- 77 In August 1798, following the initial composition of “Tintern Abbey” in the previous month, Wordsworth and Coleridge visited Thelwall at his retreat in Llyswen; see Johnston, *Hidden Wordsworth*, 380–1, 438–9.
- 78 Thelwall's forced retreat from political life, and his ambivalent relationship to Coleridge and Wordsworth in this period, has been well documented by

- Nicholas Roe among others. See Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years*, 234–75; and “Coleridge and John Thelwall: The Road to Nether Stowey,” in *The Coleridge Connection*, ed. Richard Gravil and Molly Lefebure (New York: St. Martins, 1990), 60–80. On the politics of Thelwall’s 1801 *Poems*, see Michael Scrivener, *Seditious Allegories: John Thelwall and Jacobin Writing* (Penn State University Press, 2001), 253–54.
- 79 The full title of Thelwall’s poem is “To the Infant Hampden. – Written during a sleepless night. Derby. Oct. 1797” (PWR, 140–1). For an essay that persuasively reads Coleridge’s “Frost at Midnight” in dialogue with Thelwall’s poem, see Judith Thompson, “An Autumnal Blast, A Killing Frost: Coleridge’s Poetic Conversation with John Thelwall,” *Studies in Romanticism* 36 (Fall 1997): 427–56.
- 80 Milton, *Paradise Lost* (2. 636–43), in *Complete Poems and Selected Prose*, 247.
- 81 On early scientific analogies between nervous and electrical energy, see Mary A. B. Brazier, *The Electrical Activity of the Nervous System* (London: Pitman, 1960); Iwan Rhys Morus, *Frankenstein’s Children: Electricity, Exhibition, and Experiment in Early Nineteenth-Century London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 125–52; Laura Otis, *Networking: Communicating With Bodies and Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 11–48.
- 82 John Thelwall, *Essay, Towards a Definition of Animal Vitality: Read at the Theatre, Guy’s Hospital, January 26, 1793; in which Several of the Opinions of the Celebrated John Hunter are Examined and Controverted* (London, 1793), 40. On Thelwall’s medical education and the 1793 *Essay* in particular, see Nicholas Roe, “‘Atmospheric Air Itself: Medical Science, Politics and Poetry in Thelwall, Coleridge, and Wordsworth’,” in *1798: The Year of the Lyrical Ballads*, ed. Richard Cronin (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1998), 185–202; Roe, *The Politics of Nature: William Wordsworth and Some Contemporaries* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002), 87–93; James Robert Allard, “John Thelwall and the Politics of Medicine,” *European Romantic Review* 15, no. 1 (March 2004): 73–87.
- 83 Public Minutes of the Physical Society of Guy’s Hospital, 2 March 1793, MS volume G/s4/M5, King’s College, London.
- 84 Thelwall’s essay is recorded in the minutes of the Physical Society as “his Paper on the Origin of mental action, explain’d on the System of Materialism.” Private Minutes of the Physical Society, 14 December 1793.
- 85 Private Minutes of the Physical Society, 25 January 1794.
- 86 As a youth Shelley is reported to have disseminated his poems and pamphlets by sealing them in bottles dropped into the water, and this practice is celebrated by a companion sonnet of the same period, “On launching some bottles filled with *Knowledge* into the Bristol Channel.” In that poem, Shelley addresses these objects as “Vessels of Heavenly medicine,” referring perhaps to the bottles in which medicines were distributed, and which Shelley might well have recycled for the purposes of literary dissemination. *The Complete*

*Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 2:66.

- 87 For an incisive reading of the tension between political and aesthetic ends in Shelley's poetry, see Susan Wolfson, "Social Form: Shelley and the Determination of Reading," in *Formal Charges*, 193–206.
- 88 See, for instance, William Butler Yeats's tribute to Hallam's influence in the essay "Art and Ideas," in *Essays and Introductions* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 347–8. In his 1893 edition of Hallam's poetry, Richard Le Gallienne refers to Hallam's review-essay as "one of the early examples in England of that aesthetic criticism which is now so generally accepted among us." Le Gallienne, Introduction to *The Poems of Arthur Henry Hallam* (London: E. Mathews and J. Lane, 1893), xxxiv. I am grateful to Eric Iidsvoog for calling this text to my attention.
- 89 Arthur Henry Hallam, "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry, and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson," in *The Writings of Arthur Henry Hallam*, T. H. Vail Motter (New York: Modern Language Association, 1943), 188.
- 90 *Ibid.*, 190.
- 91 For two provocative if somewhat divergent perspectives on Hallam's politicized aesthetics, both of which read Hallam's review-essay in relation to Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott," see Isobel Armstrong, "Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott': Victorian Mythography and the Politics of Narcissism," in *The Sun is God: Painting, Literature, and Mythology in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. J. B. Bullen (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 49–107; and James K. Chandler, "Hallam's Poetry of Sensation: Aestheticist Allegories of a Counter-Public Sphere," *Studies in Romanticism* 33 (Winter 1994): 527–37.
- 92 Georg Lukács, "The New Solitude and its Poetry," in *Soul and Form*, 80.
- 93 Hallam, "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry," 190. See Adorno's claim in his famous radio address on the lyric: "in every lyric poem the historical relationship of the subject to objectivity, of the individual to society, must have found its precipitate in the medium of a subjective spirit thrown back upon itself" (Adorno, "On Lyric Poetry and Society," in *Notes to Literature*, 1:42).
- 94 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 138; see also, from the same source, the following: "[Artworks] are not only the other of the empirical world: Everything in them becomes other" (81). For commentary, see Christoph Menke, *The Sovereignty of Art: Aesthetic Negativity in Adorno and Derrida* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998); Anthony Cascardi, *Consequences of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Kaufman, "Red Kant."
- 95 See James K. Chandler, *England in 1819*, 525–54; Robert Kaufman, "Legislators of the Post-Everything World" and "Negatively Capable Dialectics"; Marc Redfield, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 148–71; Forest Pyle, "Kindling and Ash: Radical Aestheticism in Keats and Shelley," *Studies in Romanticism* 42 (Winter 2003): 427–59. Pyle establishes in the beginning a fundamental

contrast between the “radical aestheticism” of Keats and Shelley and the poetics of Coleridge and Wordsworth (433).

- 96 “Poetry represents forms chiefly as they suggest other forms; feelings, as they suggest other forms or other feelings” (Hazlitt, “On Poetry in General,” WH, 5:3). Oscar Wilde, “The Critic as Artist – Part I,” *The Soul of Man Under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose*, ed. Linda Dowling (New York: Penguin, 2001), 242. On suggestiveness in Hazlitt, see Engell, *The Creative Imagination*, 206–8.

#### THE “SENSE OF HISTORY” AND THE HISTORY OF THE SENSES

- 1 Epigraphs from Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage, 1970), 319; William Blake, *Milton*, WB, 251.
- 2 Alain Corbin, “A History and Anthropology of the Senses,” in *Time, Desire, and Horror: Towards a History of the Senses*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 182. Corbin’s most influential work on this subject is *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination*, trans. Miriam L. Kochan with assistance from Roy Porter and Christopher Prendergast (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1986); see also his notes toward a history of sound in *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the Nineteenth-Century French Countryside*, trans. Martin Thom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).
- 3 Lucien Febvre, “History and Psychology” and “Sensibility and History: How to Reconstitute the Emotional Life of the Past,” in *A New Kind of History and Other Essays*, ed. Peter Burke, trans. K. Folca (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 1–11, 12–26.
- 4 See, among other studies, Donald M. Lowe, *A History of Bourgeois Perception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Jean Starobinski, “A Short History of Bodily Sensation,” in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. Michael Feher, Ramona Nadaff, and Nadia Tazi, 3 vols. (New York: Zone, 1989), 2:353–370; Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990); Barbara Stafford, *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), esp. ch. 6, “Sensing,” 401–63; Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Constance Classen, *Worlds of Sense: Exploring the Senses in History and Across Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Sara Danius, *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Robert Jütte, *A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace*, trans. James Lynn (Cambridge: Polity, 2005). More recent work in the history of perception has focused on historical mutations in specific bodily senses; see, for instance, *Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Elizabeth Harvey (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press,

- 2003); John Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); de Bolla, *Education of the Eye*.
- 5 Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage, 1975).
  - 6 Foucault, *Order of Things*, 312.
  - 7 See, for instance, Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, 70–2.
  - 8 For the first study to raise these questions, and to consider their relevance to eighteenth-century and Romantic literary scholarship, see Goodman, *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism*. Susan Stewart returns to Vico's argument "that poetry cannot be the *subject* of history, for poetry is necessarily *prior* to history" in support of a more general case "for considering poetry within the general history of our anthropomorphization of the human" (*Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, 245, 248). In Romantic studies, Maureen McLane has undertaken just such a reconsideration of poetry's relationship to the sciences of "the human" in her *Romanticism and the Human Sciences*.
  - 9 William Wordsworth, "Prospectus" to *The Recluse* (WW, 39); William Blake, "Annotations to Wordsworth's Preface to *The Excursion*" (WB, 656).
  - 10 Don Gifford, *The Farther Shore: A Natural History of Perception, 1798–1984* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1990).
  - 11 Foucault, *Order of Things*, 319.
  - 12 See, for instance, James K. Chandler, *England in 1819*; Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing, 1740–1820* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism*, ed. Leith Davis, Ian Duncan, and Janet Sorensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Ian Duncan, "Edinburgh, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," in *Romantic Metropolis: The Urban Scene of British Culture, 1780–1840*, ed. James Chandler and Kevin Gilmartin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 45–64.
  - 13 Chandler, "Altering the Case: The Invention of the Historical Situation," in *England in 1819*, 203–64.
  - 14 Corbin, "History and Anthropology of the Senses," 183.
  - 15 Febvre, "History and Psychology," 9.
  - 16 In a response to Sartre, Foucault cites the work of the *Annales* school as a positive example of how the history of affect might avoid the pitfalls of a Sartrean "metaphysical" history. See "Foucault Responds to Sartre," in *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1966–84)*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. John Johnston (New York: Semiotexte, 1989), 41. For an account of Foucault's eschewal of a Hegelian (and also Sartrean) *sens d'histoire* for a Nietzschean *sens historique*, see Michael S. Roth, *Knowing and History: Appropriations of Hegel in Twentieth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 202–21; and Thomas R. Flynn, *Sartre, Foucault, and Historical Reason, Vol. I: Toward an Existentialist Theory of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), esp. 237–61.
  - 17 See Georg Simmel, "Metropolis and Mental Life," in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. Donald N. Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

- 1971), 324–39, and “Sociology of the Senses,” in *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, ed. David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1997), 109–20. For Benjamin on the historicity of sensation, see especially “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” and “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 155–200, 217–51. For commentary, see Susan Buck-Morss, “Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin’s Artwork Essay Reconsidered,” *October* 62.3 (1992): 3–41; and Miriam Hansen, “Benjamin and Cinema: Not a One-Way Street,” *Critical Inquiry* 25.2 (Winter 1999): 306–43.
- 18 On Raymond Williams’s central conception of the “structure of feeling,” see, for instance, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 128–35. On the concept of “historic sensibilities,” see Frederick Pottle, *The Idiom of Poetry* (1946; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), and “The Case of Shelley,” in *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. M. H. Abrams (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 289–306.
- 19 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (New York: Verso, 1974), 235–6.
- 20 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser, 2 vols. (1894; New York: Dover, 1959), 1:127. On the emergence of epistemology as a self-reflexive and genetic problem of how we come to receive the ideas we have – that is, as a broadly “historical” rather than a metaphysical question – see Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 93.
- 21 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 74–5.
- 22 Keith M. Baker, *Condorcet: From Natural Philosophy to Social Mathematics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 87. Baker attributes the first use of this term to Henri Gouhier’s *La Jeunesse d’Auguste Comte et la formation du positivisme* (1933–41).
- 23 William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, 1:114. Godwin explicitly acknowledges his debt to Helvétius in the Preface (1:ix).
- 24 See, for instance, F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (London: Faber, 1936), 160.
- 25 I refer to Blake’s famous couplet from “Auguries of Innocence”: “We are led to Believe a Lie / When we see not Thro the Eye” (WB, 492; my emphasis).
- 26 On Wordsworth’s strong antagonism to the political and philosophical program of French *Idéologie*, the science of ideas, which Destutt de Tracy founded largely on the authority of Condillac, and on the poet’s conservative and implicitly Burkean conception of custom or habit as a “second nature” derived from tradition, see Chandler, *Wordsworth’s Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), esp. 216–34.
- 27 Burke, “Letter to a Noble Lord,” 576.



- 28 Sergio Moravia, “From *Homme Machine* to *Homme Sensible*: Changing Eighteenth-Century Models of Man’s Image,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 39.1 (January–March 1978): 45–60. See also Theodore M. Brown, “From Mechanism to Vitalism in Eighteenth-Century English Physiology,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 7:2 (Fall 1974): 179–216.
- 29 Ann Rowland similarly reads this passage in relation to the French books of *The Prelude*. Rowland, “Wordsworth’s Children of the Revolution,” *SEL* 41.4 (Autumn 2001): 677–94.
- 30 On Wordsworth’s account of the infant babe as a powerful depiction of how the infant’s connection to the world, and to itself as an autonomous individual, originates in its earliest relationship to others, see for instance Richard Onorato, *The Character of the Poet: William Wordsworth’s The Prelude* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 61–76; Jonathan Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: The Borders of Vision* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 73–87; Yousef, *Isolated Cases*, 120–8. In departing somewhat from the premises at work in these characterizations, I am primarily interested in showing how Wordsworth’s rejection of the fiction of autonomy structures, in an historiographical as well as a more openly psychological vein, his account of how the infant accommodates its “existence to existing things.” For an account of the infant babe that emphasizes its freedom from impure external influence, see Onorato, 62–3.
- 31 Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, 44. This is ironically a lesson that Hays derives from Helvétius, a figure with whom Wordsworth would otherwise appear to have very little in common.
- 32 For readings that differently emphasize this problematic in Wordsworth’s account of the infant babe, see Jonathan Arac, “Bounding Lines: *The Prelude* and Critical Revision,” in *Post-Structuralist Readings of English Poetry*, ed. Richard Machin and Christopher Norris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 235–6; and David S. Miall, “Wordsworth and *The Prelude*: the Problematics of Feeling,” *Studies in Romanticism* 31 (Summer 1992): 234–41. See also Paul de Man’s “Wordsworth and the Victorians,” a text with which both of these essays are in dialogue, which reads the passage as exemplifying “the dependence of any perception or ‘eye’ on the totalizing power of language” (de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1984], 91).
- 33 Alan Richardson has pointed to the infant babe passage as evidence of Wordsworth’s investment in “the new naturalistic and biological approach to mind then prominent in scientific and radical circles” (*British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind*, 67). More generally, Paul Youngquist has claimed that Wordsworth’s “poetry and poetics are both indebted to Scottish medicine” (*Monstrosities: Bodies and British Romanticism* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003], 30).
- 34 See, for instance, Roy Porter, Introduction to George Cheyne, *The English Malady* (1733; rpt. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1990); and Porter, “Consumption: Disease of the Consumer Society?,” in *Consumption and the*

- World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993), 58–83.
- 35 John Millar, *Observations on the Prevailing Diseases in Great Britain, Together with a Review of the History of Those of Former Periods, and in Other Countries. To Which are Now Prefixed Observations on the Conduct of the War, In an Appeal to the People of Great Britain on the State of Medicine in England; And of Military Medical Arrangements in the Army and Navy* (London, 1798), 4.
- 36 Of a substantial body of historical scholarship on the eighteenth-century science of nervous sensibility, particularly as developed within the Scottish medical establishment, see especially Christopher Lawrence, “The Nervous System and Society in the Scottish Enlightenment,” in *Natural Order: Historical Studies of Scientific Culture*, ed. Barry Barnes and Steven Shapin (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979), 19–40; John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 201–40; G. J. Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, 1–36; Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel*.
- 37 On Hume’s “historical epistemology,” in which perceptions are never tenseless and remain intelligible only in the temporal frame in which they were first perceived, see Donald Livingston, *Hume’s Philosophy of Common Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
- 38 “Lectures on the institutes of medicine by Dr. Cullen, 1770–71,” quoted in John P. Wright, “Metaphysics and Physiology,” 294. In lecture notes recorded a few years earlier, Cullen similarly defines sensation as “the Mind’s being conscious of the Changes which happen in the Nervous System.” Cullen, “Text to the Nervous System, 1768–9, by Dr. Cullen, Edinburgh,” MS 42. a.14. Royal College of Surgeons of England, p. 12.
- 39 Abraham Rees, *Cyclopaedia; or, Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Literature*, vol. 32 (London, 1819), s.v. “sensation.”
- 40 Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?,” in *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954–1984, Vol. I: Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley and others (New York: New Press, 1997), 304.
- 41 Of Cullen’s work on nervous physiology and pathology, see W. F. Bynum, “Cullen and the Nervous System,” in *William Cullen and the Eighteenth-Century Medical World: a Bicentenary Exhibition and Symposium Arranged by the Royal College of Physicians at Edinburgh in 1990*, ed. A. Doig et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 152–62; Inci Altug Bowman, “William Cullen (1710–1790) and the Primacy of the Nervous System,” unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Indiana University (1975).
- 42 Cullen, “An Essay on Custom,” MS Cullen 342, University of Glasgow Library. See also Cullen’s “Notes for an Essay on Custom,” MS Cullen 343, University of Glasgow Library.
- 43 For Darwin on the psycho-physiological effects of repetition, see, for instance, “Of Repeated Stimulus,” (*Z*, 1:80–6); on “associate ideas,” or ideas of suggestion, see *Z*, 1:133.
- 44 Cullen, “An Essay on Custom,” MS Cullen 342.



- 45 Millar, *Observations on the Prevailing Diseases*, 382.
- 46 Mary Shelley similarly refers to the “period” as the term of tyrannical power. See the creature’s admonition to Frankenstein: “The hour of my weakness is past, and the period of your power is arrived” (Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. Marilyn Butler [New York: Oxford University Press, 1994], 140).
- 47 See, most extensively, Sharon Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2005).
- 48 While Foucault generally refers to Cullen as an inhabitant of a fundamentally classical, taxonomic episteme (see, e.g. *The Birth of the Clinic*, 5, 6), more detailed studies have shown how fully Cullen’s medical teaching was indebted to the stadialist historiography of the Scottish enlightenment. See Michael Barfoot, “Philosophy and Method in Cullen’s Medical Teaching,” in *William Cullen and the Eighteenth-Century Medical World*, 118–9; and on stadialism as a guiding principle within the Scottish medical schools generally, see Barfoot, “Brunonianism Under the Bed: An Alternative to University Medicine in Edinburgh in the 1780s,” in *Brunonianism in Britain and Europe*, ed. W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter (London: Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 1988), 28–32.
- 49 For a reading that sensitively examines this passage as a self-reflexive “crossing between past and present relations” – between the “mute dialogues” of the child and the “conjectures” of the adult poet – see Cathy Caruth, *Empirical Truths and Critical Fictions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 44–57, quotation from 50.
- 50 Sir Philip Sidney, “An Apology for Poetry,” in *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. T. W. Craik (London: Methuen, 1965), 33.
- 51 Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History*, 395; see also 47–8. For a powerful reading of Liu’s argument and an account that extends and modifies it in terms similar to those I develop in this chapter, see Goodman, *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism*.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 53 Hartman, *Wordsworth’s Poetry, 1787–1814* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 31–69; Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History*, 3–31.
- 54 Milton, *Paradise Lost* (5.468–503), in *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*, 313.
- 55 William Empson, “Sense in *The Prelude*,” in *The Structure of Complex Words* (New York: New Directions, 1951), 296.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 305.
- 57 Hartman, *Wordsworth’s Poetry*, 234.
- 58 Corbin, “History and Anthropology of the Senses,” 186.
- 59 *Ibid.*, 186–7.
- 60 Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, 2nd edn., 3 vols. (Edinburgh: A. Kincaid and J. Bell, 1763), 1:114.
- 61 For a similar account of imagination as both supplement and corrective to sensation, see Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which in its first page explains how, through imaginative sympathy, “we enter as it were into” the body of another, “and thence form some idea of his sensations” (*The*

*Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie [Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982], 9).

- 62 Erasmus Darwin was one reader of Kames's *Elements* who described this phenomenon in terms of what he called "reveries of sensation" that have their primary source in the imagination (Z, 1:131). While conceiving ideal presence as a property of both memory and imagination, Kames too emphasizes the imaginative and especially literary uses of this effect, as evidenced by his citation of illustrative passages from Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, etc.
- 63 Mark Salber Phillips, "Relocating Inwardness: Historical Distance and the Transition from Enlightenment to Romantic Historiography," *PMLA* 118.3 (May 2003): 436–49, quotation from 445. See also Phillips, "Distance and Historical Representation," *History Workshop Journal* 57 (2004): 123–41. On "literature" as a privileged sub-genre of historiographical writing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Phillips, "Literary History and Literary Historicism," in *A Concise Companion to the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*, ed. Cynthia Wall (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 247–65.
- 64 In a letter written in February or March 1798, Wordsworth asked his publisher Joseph Cottle to "send me Dr Darwin's *Zoönomia by the first carrier*" (LEY, 199; Wordsworth's italics). On the Darwinian contexts of Wordsworth's poetry, see Richard Matlak, "Wordsworth's Reading of *Zoonomia* in Early Spring," *The Wordsworth Circle* 21 (1990): 76–81, quotation from 78; see also James H. Averill, "Wordsworth and 'Natural Science': The Poetry of 1798," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 77, no. 2 (April 1978): 232–246; and Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind*, 14–15, 71–2.
- 65 Phillips, "Relocating Inwardness," 444.
- 66 William Cullen, "Lectures on Physiology," MS 16, Royal College of Physicians at Edinburgh, n.p.
- 67 Cullen, *Institutions of Medicine*, in *The Works of William Cullen*, ed. John Thomson, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1827), 1:50.
- 68 *Ibid.*, 50.
- 69 Neil Vickers has given the name "medical mentalism" to a species of "soft" materialism (often vitalist in character) in eighteenth-century medical thought, which, "while granting that all the phenomena of animal life had a material basis, effectively treated mental content as a special unit of analysis in its own right." Among British adherents to this view he counts Robert Whytt, Cullen's colleague at Edinburgh, as well as Thomas Beddoes and Coleridge (Vickers, *Coleridge and the Doctors, 1795–1806* [Oxford: Clarendon, 2004], 62–78, quotation from 68).
- 70 Cullen, *Lectures on Physiology*, MS 16, n.p., quoting from Milton, *Samson Agonistes*, in *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*, 588.
- 71 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (New York: Penguin, 1968), 88.

- 72 I am referring to John Haygarth's *Of the imagination, as a cause and as a cure of disorders in the body; exemplified by fictitious tractors, and epidemical convulsions* (Bath, 1800), a treatise written against hypochondriacal disorders and the quack medical remedies employed to treat them. Haygarth was, perhaps not coincidentally, a pupil of Cullen at Edinburgh.
- 73 In the French books of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth frequently describes his role as that of a messenger bearing witness to traumatic historical events. In the opening lines of Book 11, for instance, Wordsworth records in language reminiscent of Milton's messenger his compulsion to linger over "dismal sights beset / For the outward view" (P, 11.2–3); in terms still closer to Milton's, he describes these sights in the 1850 *Prelude* as "spectacles of woe" on which he has been "[c]ompelled to look" (P, 1850, 11.2–3).
- 74 On the relationship between the indolence of mind associated with newspaper reading and the vacuity of thought associated with "high" aesthetic experience, see Goodman, "Cowper's Georgic of the News: The 'Loophole' in the Retreat," in *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism*, 67–105.
- 75 See, for instance, Gayatri Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 46–7; and Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History*, 377.
- 76 Phillips, "Distance and Historical Representation," 132; see also Phillips, "Relocating Inwardness," 446–7.
- 77 Thomas De Quincey, "William Wordsworth," in *Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets*, ed. David Wright (New York: Penguin, 1986), 179–80.
- 78 Though my immediate reference here is to the subtitle of Liu's book – *The Sense of History* – I refer more generally to the Hegelian philosophy of history on which his and many other accounts of the historical consciousness of British Romanticism are largely based. For a summary of the Sartre–Lévi-Strauss exchange in part over the commitment of the former to the idea of a "sense of history," and an account of that debate's profound consequences for current thinking about such topics in literary historicism, see Chandler, *England in 1819*, 51–74.
- 79 Thomas R. Frosch, *The Awakening of Albion: The Renovation of the Body in William Blake* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 177–83.
- 80 Mark Schorer, *William Blake: The Politics of Vision* (New York: Doubleday, 1946). Abrams (*Natural Supernaturalism*, 356–72) uses this phrase to characterize Romanticism's politics of perception generally, and Jon Klancher invokes it to characterize the critical paradigm associated with Abrams's name ("English Romanticism and Cultural Production," in *The New Historicism: A Reader*, ed. H. Aram Veeseer [London: Routledge, 1989], 79).
- 81 I quote from Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (WB, plate 14). For commentary, see for instance Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947); Robert Gleckner, "Blake and the Senses," *Studies in Romanticism*, 5.1 (1965): 1–15.

- 82 Compare Blake's qualifying statement in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul *in this age*" (WB, plate 4, my emphasis).
- 83 On the genesis of Blake's project, see G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Vala, or The Four Zoas: A Facsimile of the Manuscript, a Transcript of the Poem, and a Study of Its Growth and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963); Morton D. Paley, "Blake's *Night Thoughts*: An Exploration of the Fallen World," in *William Blake: Essays for S. Foster Damon*, ed. Alvin H. Rosenfeld (Providence: Brown University Press, 1969), 131–57. Among recent readings of Urizenic history in Blake's work, see Andrew Lincoln, *Spiritual History: A Reading of William Blake's Vala; or The Four Zoas* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995); Nicholas Williams, *Ideology and Utopia in the Poetry of William Blake* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Saree Makdisi, *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 260–80.
- 84 Blake, *The Four Zoas*, page 48, lines 4–6. Further references cited in the text by plate and line number.
- 85 Williams, *Ideology and Utopia in the Poetry of William Blake*, 133.
- 86 Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, 253–64.
- 87 In lines from *Night Thoughts* that would surely have appealed to Blake, Edward Young characterized the senses as a source of dull repetition associated with a condition of worldly attachment: "A languid, leaden Iteration reigns, / And ever must o'er Those, whose joys are joys / Of Sight, Smell, Taste" (Young, *The Complaint; or, Night Thoughts*, ed. Stephen Cornford [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989], 82–3).
- 88 In a similar vein, see Williams: "The periodization of history not only allows for the possibility of change; it virtually insures change" (*Ideology and Utopia in Blake's Poetry*, 138).
- 89 On the critical project of a "history of the present," see Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979), 31; for commentary, see Michael S. Roth, "Foucault's 'History of the Present,'" *History and Theory* 20.1 (1981): 32–46.

#### CRITICAL CONDITIONS

- 1 Coleridge: "a Common Sense not preceded by Metaphysics is no very enviable Concern . . . Without Metaphysics Science could have no language, and Common Sense no materials" (*Aids to Reflection*, ed. John Beer [Princeton: Bollingen, 1993], 261).
- 2 On the pairing of "genius" and "common sense," see the linked sonnets xxviii and xxix in Anna Seward, *Original Sonnets on Various Subjects; and Odes Paraphrased from Horace*, 2nd ed. (London: G. Sael, 1799), 30–1, and Hazlitt's pair of essays (originally published in *Table Talk*) "On Genius and Common Sense" (WH, 8:31–50).

- 3 Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International, 1971), 330–1.
- 4 Thus Hazlitt: “His genius is the effect of his individual character . . . If there had been no other being in the universe, Mr. Wordsworth’s poetry would have been just what it is” (WH, 8:44).
- 5 Harold Bloom, “The Internalization of Quest-Romance,” in *Romanticism and Consciousness*, 8. In his “Romanticism and ‘Anti-Self-Consciousness,’” Geoffrey Hartman puts the matter in similar terms: “Subjectivity – even solipsism – becomes the subject of poems which *qua* poetry seek to transmute it” (*Romanticism and Consciousness*, 53).
- 6 Jerome McGann’s tart pronouncement that, in Wordsworth’s most memorable lyrics, the poet “lost the world merely to gain his own immortal soul” stands as an exemplary instance of the dichotomous logic that underwrites much of this criticism (*The Romantic Ideology*, 88).
- 7 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins and Foundations of Inequality among Men*, in *The First and Second Discourses*, trans. Roger D. Masters and Judith R. Masters (New York: St. Martin’s, 1964), 93.
- 8 I refer to the famous opening sentence of Descartes’s third *Meditation*: “I shall now close my eyes, stop up my ears, turn away all my senses . . . and thus communing with my inner self, I shall try to make myself, little by little, better known and more familiar to myself” (René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and The Meditations*, trans. F.E. Sutcliffe [New York: Penguin, 1968], 113). In an appendix to *On the Constitution of the Church and State*, revised from a 27 July 1826 letter to Edward Coleridge (CL, 6:593–601), Coleridge puns on the German word for sensation or feeling (*Empfindung*, “i.e. an *inward finding*”), insisting that “all sensibility is a self-finding” (*On the Constitution of the Church and State*, ed. John Colmer [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976], 180; see also CN, 3:3605 and n.).
- 9 Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth’s Lyrical Ballads (1798)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).
- 10 Alan Bewell’s *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment* explores in similar terms the affinities between Romantic poetry and human science, focusing, however, on the role of the literary experiment as an inquiry designed to yield knowledge about others. On human experimentation in the context of the eighteenth-century human sciences, see Julia V. Douthwaite, *The Wild Girl, Natural Man, and the Monster: Dangerous Experiments in the Age of Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
- 11 For a critical approach that sees Romanticism as getting beyond lyric solipsism, see Tilottama Rajan, “Romanticism and the Death of Lyrical Consciousness,” in *Lyrical Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*, ed. Chaviva Hosek and Patricia Parker (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 194–207.
- 12 Michel Foucault, *Order of Things*, 318–28.
- 13 Christine M. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, ed. Onora O’Neill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

- 14 In fact, Korsgaard argues that Kant’s moral theory does not depart from so much as reformulate the “reflective” model from the perspective of the autonomous moral agent. On “reflective endorsement” in Hume, see Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, 49–66.
- 15 On the philosophical origins of autonomy in this period, see J. B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. 483–507, and “Autonomy, Obligation, and Virtue: an Overview of Kant’s Moral Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 309–41; Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 363–90. On autonomy in Romantic-period literature, see especially Frederick Garber, *The Autonomy of the Self from Richardson to Huysmans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 92–149; William Jewett, *Fatal Autonomy: Romantic Drama and the Rhetoric of Agency* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Yousef, *Isolated Cases*.
- 16 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner, 1951), 149.
- 17 Though Nietzsche was surely among the first to raise such an objection, the most influential variations on this theme have come from the writings of the Frankfurt school and those influenced by it. See, for instance, Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 9–15, 90–2. For similar views, see Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 13–28, 70–100; and Buck-Morss, “Aesthetics and Anaesthetics,” 3–41. For a useful resistance to this by now commonplace view, however, see Anthony J. Cascardi’s insistence that Kant “remains unwaveringly committed to the idea that feeling is anchored in the organism” (*Consequences of Enlightenment*, 253).
- 18 In the *Notebooks*, for instance, Coleridge averred that Kant was “a wretched Psychologist” (CN, 1:1717). It is not, however, likely that Kant – no friend to psychology – would have objected to this characterization. For the classic account of Coleridge’s reading of Kant, see René Wellek, *Immanuel Kant in England, 1793–1838* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1931), esp. 65–135.
- 19 Not surprisingly, Coleridge has been central to this critical work. See, for instance, Ford, *Coleridge and Dreaming*; David Vallins, *Coleridge and the Psychology of Imagination* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2000); Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of Mind*, 39–65. Neil Vickers situates Coleridge’s thought in more qualified terms between “the British quasi-materialist version and the German Kantian transcendental idealist version” of John Brown’s medical system (Vickers, *Coleridge and the Doctors*, 43–62, quotation from 43). Of course, the embodied basis of thought has long been a topic in criticism on the influence of David Hartley on Coleridge, of which the best account remains Jerome Christensen, *Coleridge’s Blessed Machine of Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).
- 20 Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 49.



- 21 Ibid., 135–8.
- 22 Ibid., 28.
- 23 Edmund Burke, “Introduction on Taste,” *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. James T. Boulton (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1968), 23.
- 24 See Kant on the inadequacy of psychological explanations of aesthetic judgment (*Critique of Judgment*, 18–19), and Frances Ferguson’s provocative critique of empiricist aesthetics in *Solitude and the Sublime*, esp. 55–96. Luc Ferry, in *Homo Aestheticus: The Invention of Taste in the Democratic Age*, trans. Robert Loiza (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), describes the particular problem well: “Among the empiricists . . . intersubjectivity is reduced to a purely material principle, to the idea of a psychic and organic structure common to a species of individuals” (85).
- 25 Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 74.
- 26 For an account of Coleridge which, like mine, stresses the poet’s mutual indebtedness to Kant and Reid, see Paul Hamilton, *Coleridge’s Poetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), 27–57.
- 27 I take this definition of “experiment” from Peter Dear, *Discipline and Experience: The Mathematical Way in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 21. On the social foundations of modern experimental practice, see also Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), esp. 22–79; and Shapin, “The House of Experiment in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Isis* 79 (1988): 373–404.
- 28 On the “literary technologies” of experimental practice, see Shapin and Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*, 25; and Geoffrey Cantor, “The Rhetoric of Experiment,” in *The Uses of Experiment: Studies in the Natural Sciences*, ed. David Gooding, Trevor Pinch, and Simon Schaffer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 159–81.
- 29 Simon Schaffer, “Self-Evidence,” in *Questions of Evidence: Proof, Practice, and Persuasion Across the Disciplines*, ed. James Chandler, Arnold I. Davidson, and Harry Harootunian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 56–91.
- 30 Ibid., 57. Though he makes no mention of the fact, Schaffer’s account of the evidential context of vividness attributes to eighteenth-century natural philosophy a straightforward version of David Hume’s influential claim that “every kind of opinion or judgment, which amounts not to knowledge, is deriv’d entirely from the force and vivacity of the perception, and . . . these qualities constitute in the mind, what we call the BELIEF of the existence of any object” (Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, 153).
- 31 The literature on self-experimentation is generally confined to discussions of individual cases, but for general discussion see, in addition to Schaffer’s essay, Lawrence K. Altman, *Who Goes First? The Story of Self-Experimentation in Medicine* (New York: Random House, 1986), the sole book-length treatment of the topic.

- 32 On Davy and the activities of the Pneumatic Institute, see F. F. Cartwright, *The English Pioneers of Anaesthesia* (Bristol: John Wright and Sons, 1952), 181–240; Suzanne R. Hoover, “Coleridge, Humphry Davy, and Some Early Experiments with a Consciousness-Altering Drug,” *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities* 81 (1978): 9–27; and Jan Golinski, *Science as Public Culture: Chemistry and Enlightenment in Britain, 1780–1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 166–75. On Ritter, see Stuart Strickland, “The Ideology of Self-Knowledge and the Practice of Self-Experimentation,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 31.4 (1998): 453–71.
- 33 Editors’ introduction to *Romanticism and the Sciences*, ed. Andrew Cunningham and Nicholas Jardine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1.
- 34 Strickland, “Ideology of Self-Knowledge,” 453.
- 35 Coleridge, *Notebooks*, quoted in Trevor J. Levere, *Poetry Realized in Nature: Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Early Nineteenth-Century Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 87. See also *The Friend*, essay no. 9: “With [Bacon], therefore, as with us, an idea is an experiment proposed, an experiment is an idea realized” (Coleridge, *The Friend*, ed. Barbara E. Rooke, 2 vols. [Princeton: Bollingen, 1969], 1:489).
- 36 Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, quoted in Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 148. I refer in this sentence, of course, to Wordsworth’s famous comparison between analytical thinking and medical barbarism in “The Tables Turned”: “Our meddling intellect / Misshapes the beauteous form of things / – We murder to dissect” (LB, 106).
- 37 Jules Law, *The Rhetoric of Empiricism: Language and Perception from Locke to I. A. Richards* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 7.
- 38 Dugald Stewart, *Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Reid, D.D.*, in *The Collected Works of Dugald Stewart*, ed. William Hamilton, 11 vols. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1877), 10:258; L. L. Laudan, “Thomas Reid and the Newtonian Turn of British Methodological Thought,” in *The Methodological Heritage of Newton*, ed. Robert E. Butts and John W. David (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 106. See also Richard Olson, *Scottish Philosophy and British Physics, 1750–1880: A Study in the Foundations of the Victorian Scientific Style* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 26–54.
- 39 John Bender, “Enlightenment Fiction and the Scientific Hypothesis,” *Representations* 61 (Winter 1998), 7.
- 40 Reid, *Inquiry*, 155.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 151.
- 42 Reid supplies the strongest account of attention as an aid to memory when he remarks that “in proportion as the attention is more or less turned to a sensation, or diverted from it, that sensation is more or less perceived and remembered” (46). For an account of attention in its later emergence as at



- once a “socially useful” and a “dangerously absorbed or directed” act,” see Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 1–79, quotation from 47.
- 43 Timothy Duggan and Richard Taylor, “On Seeing Double,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 8.31 (1958), 271. See also Duggan’s “Introduction” to Reid’s *Inquiry*, pp. xiii–xvi; and Michael J. Morgan, *Molyneux’s Question: Vision, Touch, and the Philosophy of Perception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 118–24.
- 44 Peter J. Diamond discusses in somewhat similar terms as mine the tension between inductive, experimental principles and moral pedagogic ends in his “Rhetoric and Philosophy in the Social Thought of Thomas Reid,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 15.1–2 (February–May 1991): 57–80.
- 45 Reid, *Inquiry*, 96.
- 46 Alexander Monro, *Three Treatises on the Brain, the Eye, and the Ear* (Edinburgh: Bell and Bradfute; London: G. G. and J. Robinson, J. Johnson, 1797), 133–4. On the Monros, see Rex E. Wright St-Clair, *Doctors Monro: A Medical Saga* (London: Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1964). In *Zoonomia*, Erasmus Darwin similarly offers several reproducible experiments with books and typefaces in his discussion of “Ocular Spectra” (Z, 1:568–9).
- 47 Steven Shapin, “The Audience for Science in Eighteenth-Century Edinburgh,” *History of Science* 12 (1974): 95–121.
- 48 On Coleridge’s acquaintance with the work of Monro’s circle, see Ian Wylie, *Young Coleridge and the Philosophers of Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 128.
- 49 Two recent exceptions are Jennifer Ford, who emphasizes the depiction of “productive day-dreaming” in these lines (*Coleridge and Dreaming*, 89–90), and Rei Terada, who quotes the passage in the context of a suggestive discussion of Coleridge’s fascination with the “autonomous inalterable quality” of spectra (Terada, “Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction in Coleridge’s *Notebooks*,” *Studies in Romanticism* 43.2 [Summer 2004]: 257–81, quotation from 269).
- 50 Reeve Parker, *Coleridge’s Meditative Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 127.
- 51 See, for instance, Michael G. Sundell’s claim that the poem dramatizes the effort to “rise above self-consciousness,” in “The Theme of Self-Realization in ‘Frost at Midnight,’” *Studies in Romanticism* 7.1 (Autumn 1967), 37. Paul Magnuson, in *Coleridge’s Nightmare Poetry* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1974), emphasizes the speaker’s effort – ultimately unsuccessful – to “overcome his isolation” (29), and like Parker sees Coleridge as attempting to strike a diachronic resolution to this problem. David S. Miall’s “The Displacement of Emotions: The Case of ‘Frost at Midnight,’” *The Wordsworth Circle* 20 (Spring 1989): 97–102, adopts psychoanalytic language to similar effect, describing the action of the poem as “a turning away from the emotion of the self which is the central and motivating cause of the poem” (102).

- 52 Coleridge clearly shares with a long tradition of English religious poetry an emphasis on inwardness as the most effective means of being near God or of understanding God's purpose; to this extent his poem might usefully be compared to the work of a poet such as Herbert who similarly insisted on the necessity of spiritual self-reflection. Yet Coleridge's insistence upon the autonomous derivation of morality clearly distinguishes his own experimental narrative from, for instance, the record of God's "sad experiment" on human will in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (10.967), in *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, 429. While "Frost at Midnight" imagines for Hartley an upbringing in the light of God, it produces the conditions for this apprehension out of the speaker's own "self-watching" reflections.
- 53 The notion that "Frost at Midnight" is "metascientific" in the strong sense of that term is in keeping with Abrams's remark that Coleridge's philosophy of nature "was not science, nor anti-science, but metascience," an investigation into the procedures and aims of science in the first place (Abrams, "Coleridge's 'A Light in Sound': Science, Metascience, and Poetic Imagination," in *The Correspondent Breeze: Essays on English Romanticism* [New York: Norton, 1984], 190). See also Trevor Levere, "Coleridge and Metascience," in *Poetry Realized in Nature*, 82–121.
- 54 Oliver Goldsmith, "Dedication to Sir Joshua Reynolds," *The Deserted Village: A Poem* (London: W. Griffin, 1770; rpt. London: N. Douglas, 1927), vi. For Wordsworth's famous remarks on the necessity of an "exertion of a co-operating power in the mind of the Reader," see the "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" (WWP, 3:81). See also Keats's sonnet, "If by dull rhymes our English must be chain'd," which urges the reader to "see what may be gained / By ear industrious, and attention meet" (JK, 278).
- 55 I refer, of course, to the work of Harold Bloom, whose study of the psychology of literary influence, *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), supplies the title of this section.
- 56 Margaret Homans supplies the *locus classicus* for this interpretation in *Women Writers and Poetic Identity: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Brontë, and Emily Dickinson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 12–40. See also McGann, *Romantic Ideology*, 87–8; and John Barrell, "The Uses of Dorothy: 'The Language of the Sense' in 'Tintern Abbey,'" *Poetry, Language, and Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 137–67. My objection to this reading runs closely to Ferguson's argument in *Solitude and the Sublime* that Dorothy's appearance in the poem marks "the unraveling of the imposition of solitude on the scene," the moment the speaker acknowledges "that the self is already socialized" (126–7).
- 57 John Stuart Mill, "What is Poetry?" in *Essays on Poetry*, ed. F. Parvin Sharpless (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1976), 12, 14.
- 58 For commentary on this entry, see Kerry McSweeney, *Language of the Senses*, 8–9; and Neil Vickers, *Coleridge and the Doctors*, 122–5. Both critics are primarily interested in Coleridge's account of the priority of the sense of touch over hearing and sight, on which see also Raimonda Modiano,

- “Coleridge’s Views on Touch and Other Senses,” *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities* 81 (1978): 28–41.
- 59 In his essay on “The Politics of ‘Frost at Midnight,’” Paul Magnuson remarks provocatively on the political ambivalence of privacy in this period (*Reading Public Romanticism* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998], 67–94).
- 60 Stewart, *Account of the Life and Writings of Dr. Thomas Reid*, in *Collected Works*, 10:307. Of Reid’s principle of common sense Stewart further writes: “The standard to which he appeals is neither the creed of a particular sect, nor the inward light of enthusiastic presumption, but that constitution of human nature without which all the business of the world would immediately cease” (307).
- 61 Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, esp. 377–84, 412–18.
- 62 For two excellent discussions of how Romantic theories of meter bear on these claims, and accounts that emphasize in terms similar to mine a tension between the traditional and experimental effects of meter, see Susan J. Wolfson, “Romanticism and the Measures of Meter,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 16.3 (November 1992): 221–46; and Brennan O’Donnell, *The Passion of Meter: A Study of Wordsworth’s Metrical Art* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1995), esp. pp. 43–7.
- 63 David S. Miall, “The Body in Literature: Mark Johnson, Metaphor, and Feeling,” *Journal of Literary Semantics* 26.3 (October 1997): 191–210, quotation from 202. Miall makes these remarks in the context of a fine reading of Wordsworth’s “The World is Too Much With Us,” and more generally in distinguishing British Romantic poetry from Kantian aesthetics on what we are now prepared to see as familiar grounds – namely, that the imagination is embodied for Wordsworth and Coleridge in a way that it is not for Kant.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 208.
- 65 John Hollander, “Romantic Verse Form and the Metrical Contract,” in *Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 194.
- 66 See Coleridge’s oft-quoted remark in the “Essays on the Principles of Genial Criticism”: “Association in philosophy is like the term stimulus in medicine; explaining every thing it explains nothing; and above all, leaves itself unexplained” (Coleridge, *Shorter Works and Fragments*, ed. H. J. Jackson and J. R. de J. Jackson, 2 vols. [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995], 1:359–60).
- 67 Wolfson brilliantly examines the politicized terms of a dispute over whether meter is “the regulator of passion, or its enchancement,” and the self-conscious ambivalence with which the Romantics themselves approached this problem (Wolfson, “Romanticism and the Measures of Meter,” quotation from 233). I have been mainly interested in showing how Coleridge’s insistence that metrical language operates at a sub-conscious level not only dissociates meter from Wordsworth’s more explicitly political – if

equally ambivalent – discussion of poetic diction, but also (and related to this claim) sets the conditions for political agency in the deep structure of an embodied consciousness.

68 Jeffrey, *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review*, 3:325.

69 *Ibid.*, 3:323.

70 *Ibid.*, 3:334.

71 Stewart, “On Taste,” in *Philosophical Essays* (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, 1810), 452. For Jeffrey’s further rejoinder to Stewart, see his 1810 review of the *Philosophical Essays* in *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review*, 3:373–94.

72 *Ibid.*, 453–4.

73 Thus De Quincey: “on a subject so important to us all as happiness, we should listen with pleasure to any man’s experience or experiments . . . But I, who have taken happiness, both in a solid and a liquid shape . . . I (it will be admitted) must surely know what happiness is, if any body does” (*Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, ed. Alethea Hayter [New York: Penguin, 1972], 92–3; see also 75).

74 Shelley, *Defence of Poetry* (SPP, 517). But see Kaufman, who argues that Shelley “charts no endpoint to the going-out of self, no ultimate identification of self and other” (Kaufman, “Shelley’s Defence of Adorno,” 724).

75 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 42. I am particularly indebted to Seyla Benhabib’s account of autonomy in Adorno’s work as “the capacity of the subject to let itself go, to deliver itself over to that which is not itself” (*Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundation of Critical Theory* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986], 210). It should go without saying, however, that I do not share to the same extent Benhabib’s skepticism with regard to the possibility of the aesthetic to ground the normative standpoint of a critical theory; thus neither do I share her sense of Adorno’s failure in this regard.

#### SENSE AND CONSENSUS

1 Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 14. See also Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), and his entry on “culture” in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. edn. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 87–93.

2 *Ibid.*, 13.

3 See for instance Coleridge’s insistence that “civilization is not grounded in cultivation” (*On the Constitution of Church and State*, 42). On the opposition of German “Kultur” and French “civilisation,” see Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process, Vol. 1: The History of Manners*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon, 1982); and Geoffrey H. Hartman, *The Fateful Question of Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 205–24.

4 Matthew Arnold, “Memorial Verses” (line 63), in *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Kenneth Allott (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1965), 229. Hereafter cited by line number within the text.

- 5 For a skilled reading of literary “convention,” see Helen Small’s analysis of the love-mad woman in nineteenth-century England, a motif which, like that of the poet-physician, flourished on both literary and medical registers, in *Love’s Madness: Medicine, the Novel, and Female Insanity, 1800–1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Among essays attentive to the image of Wordsworth as a healer, see Beth Darlington, “Wordsworth and the Alchemy of Healing,” *The Wordsworth Circle* 29.1 (Winter 1998): 52–60; Youngquist, *Monstrosities*, 29–37.
- 6 Williams, *Culture and Society*, xvi. See also *Keywords*: “the idea of a general process of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development was applied and effectively transferred to the works and practices which represent and sustain it” (90–1).
- 7 Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830–1864* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
- 8 Clifford Siskin, *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); “Wordsworth’s Prescriptions: Romanticism and Professional Power,” *The Romantics and Us: Essays in Literature and Culture*, ed. Gene Ruoff (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 303–21; and *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700–1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).
- 9 Herbert Marcuse, “The Affirmative Character of Culture,” in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon, 1968), 90.
- 10 David Lloyd and Paul Thomas, *Culture and the State* (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), 15. On the relationship between the soul and the state-form, see also Marcuse, *Negations*, 128; and Derek Sayer, *The Violence of Abstraction: The Analytical Foundations of Historical Materialism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 102.
- 11 Elizabeth A. Bohls, “Disinterestedness and the Denial of the Particular: Locke, Adam Smith, and the Subject of Aesthetics,” in *Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics and the Reconstruction of Art*, ed. Paul Mattick, Jr. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 25.
- 12 Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. Samuel Lipman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 57.
- 13 Lloyd and Thomas, *Culture and the State*, 1; Marc Redfield, *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 22.
- 14 I allude, of course, to Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). On the status of the body as a necessary – and necessarily unstable – foundation for Arnold’s vision of aesthetic community, see Redfield, *Politics of Aesthetics*, 74–92.
- 15 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin, 1990), 99.
- 16 See, for instance, Clifford Siskin’s self-reflexively diagnostic analysis of “healing power” in *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse*, itself inspired by

- Foucault's description of his historical method as "diagnostic" in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 131.
- 17 Plato, *Republic X* (599.b–c), in *Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Bollingen, 1961), 824.
  - 18 See G. S. Rousseau, "Medicine and the Muses," in *Literature and Medicine During the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Roy Porter and Laura Mulvey Roberts (London: Routledge, 1993), 23–57. On the professionalization of English medical practice, see Ivan Waddington, *The Medical Profession in the Industrial Revolution* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1984), and Toby Gelfand, *Professionalizing Modern Medicine* (Westport: Greenwood, 1980).
  - 19 See, however, a letter of the same year in which Wordsworth asserts, "I venerate the profession of a Surgeon" – a statement that may either be read as expressing his respect for the practical art of surgery in preference to the more theoretical knowledge of the physician, or as a qualification of his own more strident claims in verse. William and Dorothy Wordsworth to Coleridge, 24 and 27 December 1799 (LEY, 1:276).
  - 20 Mill, *Autobiography*, 104. For a fuller account of Mill's conversion than I provide here, see Tapan Kumar Ghosh, "The Culture of the Feelings: A Study of Wordsworth and Mill," in *The Romantic Tradition*, ed. Visvanath Chatterjee (Calcutta: Jadavpur University Press, 1984), 106–15; and Wolf Lepenies, *Between Literature and Science: The Rise of Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 93–111.
  - 21 *Ibid.*, 108.
  - 22 Coleridge "On the Constitution of Church and State," 42–3.
  - 23 William Wordsworth, *The Excursion* (4.479), WW, 2:134. Cited hereafter by book and line number within the text. I allude here to the title of Book 4, "Despondency Corrected."
  - 24 Celeste Langan, *Romantic Vagrancy: Wordsworth and the Simulation of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 227.
  - 25 *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, ed. Jared Curtis (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1983), 80.
  - 26 Langan, *Romantic Vagrancy*, 226.
  - 27 See, most prominently, Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*.
  - 28 Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes, 3 vols. (New York: Vintage, 1976), 1:164.
  - 29 Thomas Gray, "The Alliance of Education and Government: A Fragment," in *Gray's Poems, Letters, and Essays* (London: Everyman's Library, 1912), 47–50.
  - 30 Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard," in *ibid.*, 30.
  - 31 Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, 402.
  - 32 For a sensitive reading of this passage in the context of Wordsworth's poem, see Alison Hickey, *Impure Conceits: Rhetoric and Ideology in Wordsworth's Excursion* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1997).
  - 33 Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, 1:6. For the Wanderer, the "culture of letters" is similarly imaginable as an organic extension of England's native resources.



It is in this spirit that he calls for the implementation of a system of national education in England, for whose children and subjects “her soil maintains / The rudiments of letters” (9.300–1).

- 34 For readings of this passage that emphasize Wordsworth’s indebtedness to the materialist life sciences of the eighteenth century, see Milton Wilson, “Bodies in Motion: Wordsworth’s Myths of Natural Philosophy,” in *Centre and Labyrinth: Essays in Honour of Northrop Frye*, ed. Chaviva Hosek, Jay Macpherson, Patricia Parker, and Julia Patrick (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 206–7; Roe, *Politics of Nature*, 87–95.
- 35 Home, *On the Influence of the Nerves upon the Actions of the Arteries* (London: W. Bulmer, 1814), 4.
- 36 Youngquist, *Monstrosities*, 29.
- 37 On the physiological origins of the concept of “consensus,” see Williams, *Keywords*, 76–7 (quotation from 76), and Françoise Gaillard, “The Terror of Consensus,” in *Terror and Consensus: Vicissitudes of French Thought*, ed. Jean-Joseph Goux and Philip R. Wood (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998), 65–74. See also Winter, “The Social Body and the Invention of Consensus,” in *Mesmerized*, 306–43.
- 38 Robert Whytt, *Observations on the Nature, Causes, and Cure of those Disorders which are commonly called Nervous, Hypochondriac, or Hysterick, To which are prefixed some Remarks on the Sympathy of the Nerves* (London, 1768), v–vi.
- 39 Whytt, *Observations*, quoted in Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Random House, 1965), 153.
- 40 M. J. Braddick, *The Nerves of State: Taxation and the Financing of the English State, 1558–1714* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1996); on images of the American postal service as a nervous system, see Richard John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 10.
- 41 R. K. French, *Robert Whytt, the Soul, and Medicine* (London: Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine, 1969).
- 42 W. Smith, *A Dissertation Upon the Nerves* (London, 1768), 42.
- 43 “I felt every vessel in my frame dilate – the arteries beat all chearily together, and every power which sustained life, performed it with so little friction, that ’twould have confounded the most *physical precieuse* in France: with all her materialism, she could scarce have called me a machine” (Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*, ed. Graham Petrie [New York: Penguin, 1986], 28).
- 44 Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa; or, The History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross (New York: Penguin, 1985), 184.
- 45 To my knowledge Jonathan Lamb is the only critic to point to how “consentaneousness” serves as a formal principle of Richardson’s novels, as he does briefly in his *Sterne’s Fiction and the Double Principle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), comparing Richardson’s work to Sterne’s (4).

- 46 Flosky says: “Sir, if you do not comply with my wishes, . . . I shall be under the necessity of disinheriting you, though I should do it with tears in my eyes” (Peacock, *Nightmare Abbey and Crotchet Castle*, ed. Raymond Wright [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969], 55).
- 47 Siskin, *Historicity of Romantic Discourse*, 84.
- 48 Eagleton, *Ideology of the Aesthetic*, 31–69.
- 49 Sterne, *Sentimental Journey*, 141. For commentary, see John Dussinger, “The Sensorium in the World of *A Sentimental Journey*,” *Ariel* 13 (1982): 3–16, and Van Sant, *Sensibility and the English Novel*.
- 50 Sterne refers in a letter to “my journey, which shall make you cry as much as it ever made me laugh – or I’ll give up the Business of sentimental writing altogether – and write to the Body” (quoted in A. Alvarez, Introduction to *Sentimental Journey*, 11).
- 51 Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, 1:112.
- 52 Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, 3:456–458.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 3:457.
- 54 James Makittrick Adair, *A Philosophical and Medical Sketch of the Natural History of the Human Body and Mind* (Bath: R. Cruttwell, 1783), 65.
- 55 On the tension in modern political discourse between the abstraction of the public citizen and its embodied habitus, see, for instance, Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), esp. 73–96; and “The Mass Public and the Mass Subject,” in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 234–56. On the workings of this tension in the latter books of *The Excursion*, see Langan: “the logic of equivalence upon which the concept of ‘man in general’ depends requires the abandonment of singularity . . . the achievement of the philosophical ‘essence’ of Man requires his release from somatic dependencies” (*Romantic Vagrancy*, 269).
- 56 Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 46.
- 57 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 6, 136.
- 58 For a useful account of leech-gathering and its cultural representations, see Robert N. Essick, “Wordsworth and Leech-Lore,” *The Wordsworth Circle* 12.2 (Spring 1981): 100–2.
- 59 *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Mary Moorman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 42.
- 60 See, for instance, Anthony E. M. Conran’s reading of the poem as “the comedy of a solipsist faced with something outside himself” (“The Dialectic of Experience: A Study of Wordsworth’s ‘Resolution and Independence,’” *PMLA* 75 [1960]: 66–74, quotation from 74). In his Bakhtinian reading of the poem, Don Bialostosky similarly examines how, through the dialogic relationships of the speaker to the leech-gatherer and between the younger poet and his more mature self, the speaker recovers “his capacity to see the



old man as he presented himself” (*Making Tales: The Poetics of Wordsworth’s Narrative Experiments* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984], 156). In a reading that more skeptically examines the effort of the lyric speaker to project a consolatory prop to his dejected consciousness, Peter Manning claims that “[t]he habitual vocabulary of abstraction which enlarges the scope of the poem distracts from the immediate circumstances” of the speaker’s situation and of his encounter with the old man, who registers only intermittently “as a positive example solidly outside the poet’s consciousness” (Manning, “‘My former thoughts returned’: Wordsworth’s ‘Resolution and Independence,’” *The Wordsworth Circle* 9.4 [Autumn 1978]: 398–405, quotations from 403).

- 61 Simpson, *Wordsworth’s Historical Imagination*, 164.
- 62 Siskin, *Work of Writing*, 29–38; Richard Bourke, *Romantic Discourse and Political Modernity: Wordsworth, the Intellectual and Cultural Critique* (London: St. Martin’s, 1993), 220–40.
- 63 Siskin, *Work of Writing*, 29–30; Bourke, *Romantic Discourse and Political Modernity*, 234. In his letter to the Hutchinsons, Wordsworth makes plain his wish for the reader to identify with the narrator of the poem, thereby implicitly placing the poet in the role of the consolatory leech-gatherer (LEY, 366).
- 64 As Bialostosky observes, “Wordsworth’s citation of the stone/sea-beast and the cloud similes in his 1815 Preface seems to verify their status as almost detachable evidences of his mind’s work, themselves of considerable interest apart from their narrative context” (*Making Tales*, 153).
- 65 Jared Curtis, *Wordsworth’s Experiments with Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), 186–94; John Worthen, *The Gang: Coleridge, the Hutchinsons, and the Wordsworths in 1802* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 180–201, 275–80.
- 66 Of the revised title of Wordsworth’s poem, Manning writes: “The two dogmatic assertions seek to predetermine interpretation of an ambiguous process” (“‘My former thoughts returned,’” 403).
- 67 In Dorothy’s version of the encounter with the leech-gatherer, the old man’s status as a social and possibly also ethnic outcast is precisely detailed: in addition to noting that the man was no longer a leech-gatherer and “lived by begging,” she records with characteristic precision his “dark eyes and [ ] long nose,” and remarks that “John who afterwards met him at Wythburn took him for a Jew” (*Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, 42).
- 68 Lloyd and Thomas, *Culture and the State*, 75.
- 69 On the shifting tenses of Wordsworth’s poem, see Hartman’s useful discussion in *Wordsworth’s Poetry*, 266–73. On the characteristically circular temporality of Wordsworth’s poetry more generally, see Chandler, *Wordsworth’s Second Nature*, 156–83.
- 70 In his reading of “Resolution and Independence,” Steven Knapp examines the interaction between the modes of literal and allegorical representation, noting that “Wordsworth’s figures are deprived of the full allegorical formality

that would locate them in a sharply delineated figurative space” (Knapp, *Personification and the Sublime: Milton to Coleridge* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985], 106). More apposite to the terms of my discussion, Derrida writes in reference to Marx that “there is no ghost, there is never any becoming-specter of the spirit without at least an appearance of flesh” (*Specters of Marx*, 126).

- 71 A passage from *The Prelude* captures well the political wish that underwrites Wordsworth’s conception of imaginative healing. Against fears that society may fall into a disorderly arrangement with no stronger unifying principle than that of self-interest, the poet objects that

It is not wholly so to him who looks  
In steadiness, who hath among least things  
An under-sense of greatest, sees the parts  
As parts, but with a feeling of the whole. (P, 7.710–13).

The hope expressed here is that one might retain “a feeling of the whole” without eclipsing the sensuous particulars of which it is composed. What distinguishes “Resolution and Independence” from the Schillerian claim of this passage is primarily the hesitancy with which Wordsworth approaches the task of such reconciliation, which remains for the most part an ideal only negatively expressed in the poem.

- 72 George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (canto 4, stanza 126), in *Byron: The Oxford Authors*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 184.
- 73 See, for instance, McGann, *Poetics of Sensibility*; Isobel Armstrong, “The Gush of the Feminine: How Can We Read Women’s Poetry of the Romantic Period?,” in *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices*, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelley (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1995), 13–32; Margaret Anne Doody, “Sensuousness in the Poetry of Eighteenth-Century Women Poets,” in *Women’s Poetry in the Enlightenment: The Making of a Canon, 1730–1820*, ed. Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blair (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1999), 3–31.

#### JOHN KEATS AND THE SENSE OF THE FUTURE

- 1 Matthew Arnold, “John Keats,” in *The English Poets*, 2nd edn., ed. Thomas Humphry Ward, 4 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1890), 4:428.
- 2 On Arnold’s involvement in the production of Ward’s anthology, see Darrel Mansell, “Matthew Arnold’s ‘The Study of Poetry’ in its Original Context,” *Modern Philology* 83.3 (February 1986): 279–85; and on Arnold as a reader of Keats generally, see Leon Gottfried, *Matthew Arnold and the Romantics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), 116–50; Helen E. Haworth, “Arnold’s Keats,” *Revue de l’Université d’Ottawa* 41 (1971): 245–52.
- 3 Arnold, “John Keats,” 429–30, 435.

- 4 Among studies attentive to (and generally appreciative of) the central importance of sensation in Keats's poetry, see Stuart M. Sperry, *Keats the Poet*, rev. edn. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3–29; John Jones, *John Keats's Dream of Truth* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1969), 32–68, 113–22; Christopher Ricks, *Keats and Embarrassment* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), 143–56; Donald C. Goellnicht, *The Poet-Physician: Keats and Medical Science* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984), 151–9.
- 5 John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), ix.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 287.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 292. On the “biophysiological” basis of aesthetic value, see Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1988), 15.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 322.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 327.
- 10 Matthews and McWhirter, Introduction to *Aesthetic Subjects*, xv.
- 11 Marx, *Capital*, 1:128.
- 12 See Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): “In its double-sidedness as concrete and abstract, qualitatively particular and qualitatively general-homogeneous, the commodity is the most elementary expression of capitalism's fundamental character” (155).
- 13 Marjorie Levinson, *Keats's Life of Allegory: The Origins of a Style* (New York: Blackwell, 1988), 2, 13. For an effort to situate Keats's sensuousness in the context of early nineteenth-century consumer culture, see Ayumi Miyoshi, *Keats, Hunt, and the Aesthetics of Pleasure* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001).
- 14 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 15 Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 139–57.
- 16 As befitting this former medical student, Keats's poetry is invoked in the context of what Smith calls I. A. Richards's “psychoneurological account of value” (*Contingencies of Value*, 21, referring to the chapter “Badness in Poetry” in Richards's *Principles of Literary Criticism* [1925; New York: Harcourt Brace, 1960], 199–206). Smith identifies Richards's (positive) assessment of Keats as an example of axiological thinking that spuriously grounds aesthetic judgment in certain objective and immutable criteria. My argument is rather that Keats himself produces a “psychoneurological account of value” in the context of a critique of literary commodification.
- 17 See, for instance, Franklin A. Court, *Institutionalizing English Literature: The Culture and Politics of Literary Study, 1750–1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); Jonathan Brody Kramnick, *Making the English Canon: Print-Capitalism and the Cultural Past, 1700–1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Trevor Ross, *The Making of the English Literary Canon: From the Middle Ages to the Late Eighteenth Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), esp. 247–91.

- 18 Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry from the Close of the Eleventh Century to the Opening of the Eighteenth Century*, 3 vols. (London, 1774–81); Robert Southey, *Specimens of the Later English Poets*, 3 vols. (London, 1807); Thomas Campbell, *Specimens of the British Poets, with Biographical and Critical Notices, and an Essay on English Poetry*, 7 vols. (London, 1819).
- 19 Kramnick, *Making the English Canon*, 4.
- 20 Warton, quoted in Greg Kucich, “Keats’s Literary Tradition and the Politics of Historiographical Invention,” in *Keats and History*, ed. Nicholas Roe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 238–61.
- 21 W. Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (New York: Norton, 1970); Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford, 1973).
- 22 Keats’s reading of the Elizabethan poets and especially Spenser has been well documented. See, for instance, Joan Grundy, “Keats and the Elizabethans,” in Kenneth Muir, ed., *John Keats: A Reassessment* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1969), 1–19; and Greg Kucich, *Keats, Shelley, and Romantic Spenserianism* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1991).
- 23 In his biography of the poet, Andrew Motion reads the “unsteady risings and fallings” of “To My Brother George” as expressive of Keats’s ambivalence about his vocational identity: in August 1816 Keats had only recently and after more than five years of apprenticeship and formal training passed the examination granting him the Apothecaries’ Certificate (Motion, *John Keats* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997], 103).
- 24 In a similar vein, see Steven Knapp’s discussion of Keatsian “speculation” as entailing “a suspension of gratification in the service of an uncertain but possibly greater profit” (Knapp, *Literary Interest: The Limits of Anti-Formalism* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993], 38–9).
- 25 Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity*, 39.
- 26 Levinson, *Keats’s Life of Allegory*, 244.
- 27 Arnold, “John Keats,” 428. In her account of Keats’s poetic maturation Helen Vendler silently and in a finer tone repeats the premise of Arnold’s judgment, applying it to Keats’s own thoughts on his poetic development: “The language of Sensation did not seem adequate to Keats as a vehicle either for tragedy or for heroism. His powerful association of the language of Sensation with the language of lyric led him to think that maturity of mind would have to entail a forsaking of lyric for the epic or dramatic . . . the language of Thought (or even the language of Deed) might then supersede the language of Sensation” (Vendler, *The Odes of John Keats* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983], 151).
- 28 Raymond Martin and John Barresi, “Hazlitt on the Future of the Self,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56.3 (July 1995), 468. See also Deborah Elise White’s suggestive discussion of the *Essay* in her *Romantic Returns: Superstition, Imagination, History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 61–100.
- 29 Regarding Hazlitt’s influence on Keats, see especially the work of W. Jackson Bate, including *From Classic to Romantic*; “The Sympathetic Imagination in Eighteenth-Century English Criticism,” *ELH* 12 (1945): 144–64, and *John*

- Keats (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 233–63. Other useful studies include Engell, *Creative Imagination*, and David Bromwich, *William Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 362–401.
- 30 Bromwich, *William Hazlitt*, 87.
  - 31 *Ibid.*, 88–91.
  - 32 Uttara Natarajan's aptly titled *Hazlitt and the Reach of Sense* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) similarly observes of Hazlitt's *Essay* that "voluntary action springs solely from the mind, never the senses, and the separation of mind and senses itself constitutes the metaphysical and polemical end towards which the *Essay* is directed" (81).
  - 33 Keats refers to "poetical Sensation" as one of the many topics that Coleridge raised in his first meeting with the younger poet, in a journal-letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 14 February–3 May 1819 (JKL, 2:88).
  - 34 From an 1829 article in the *London Medical and Physical Journal*, quoted in *The Way In and the Way Out: François Magendie, Charles Bell, and the Roots of the Spinal Nerves*, ed. Paul Cranefeld (Mt. Kisco, NY: Futura, 1974), n.p.
  - 35 Thus the so-called Bell-Magendie principle, named after its two founders. On the protracted dispute between Charles Bell and François Magendie over the priority of their discoveries, see *The Way In and the Way Out*, and, for a concise summary, Edwin Clarke and L. S. Jacyna, *Nineteenth-Century Origins of Neuroscientific Concepts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 110–11.
  - 36 Anne Harrington, *Medicine, Mind, and the Double-Brain: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 32. For an essay that usefully describes the innovation of Bell's treatise in relation to late eighteenth-century physiological speculation, see Figlio, "Theories of Perception and the Physiology of Mind." See also Frederick Burwick, "Sir Charles Bell and the Vitalist Controversy in the Early Nineteenth Century," in *The Crisis in Modernism: Bergson and the Vitalist Controversy*, eds. Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 109–30.
  - 37 Cooper was among approximately 100 physicians, scientists, and philosophers to receive a copy of Bell's *Treatise*; other recipients included Humphry Davy, the anatomists John Abernethy, Matthew Baillie, and William Lawrence, and the editors of the *Edinburgh Review*, Francis Horner and Francis Jeffrey.
  - 38 Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of Mind*, 29–34, 114–50, quotation from 121.
  - 39 On the gender politics of Keats's work, particularly in connection to what Anne Mellor has defined as his "feminine" (sensuous, impassioned, richly figurative) style, see for instance Susan J. Wolfson, "Feminizing Keats," in *Critical Essays on John Keats*, ed. Jocelyn de Almeida (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1990), 317–56, and "Keats and the Manhood of the Poet," *European Romantic Review* 6.1 (Summer 1995): 1–37; Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, 171–86, and "Keats and the Complexities of Gender," in *Cambridge Companion to John Keats*, 214–29.

- 40 Arnold, "John Keats," 430.
- 41 George Ray, "Lectures on Surgery Delivered at the Theatre of St Thomas's Hospital by A. P. Cooper Esq. in the years 1815 and 1816." MS 42.b.36. Royal College of Surgeons of England.
- 42 Thomas Appleby, "Mr. Astley Cooper's surgical lectures continued 1814 and 1815." MS 42 b.37. Royal College of Surgeons of England. T. E. Bryant similarly records "the case of a Gentleman," presumably Kosciusko, in whom the sciatic nerve was divided. "Mr. AC's surgical lecture. Recorded by T.E. B." 1814. MS 42.c.33. Royal College of Surgeons of England.
- 43 Roe, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent*, 160–81.
- 44 Keats's ambivalence about the gains involved in the sacrifice of the senses can be read in relation to the motif of *le remède dans le mal*, the wound that is also the remedy, which Jean Starobinski has identified as an important premise of enlightenment political thought. Starobinski regards this motif as a key theme in the dialectical critique of society, in which, as associated with Rousseau (of whom Keats is an engaged albeit skeptical reader), the intensification of a social malady is regarded as furnishing the conditions for its cure (*Le remède dans le mal: Critique et légitimation de l'artifice à l'âge de lumieres* [Paris: Gallimard, 1989]). Hartman's *Fateful Question of Culture* adopts this concept to describe how the domain of aesthetic culture represents a field of specialization calculated to resist or overcome the deleterious effects of specialization itself (205–24).
- 45 McGann, *Romantic Ideology*, 134.
- 46 Keats, "On Edmund Kean as a Shakespearian Actor," in *The Poetical Works and Other Writings of John Keats*, ed. H. Buxton Foreman, 4 vols. (London: Reeves and Turner, 1889), 3:4.
- 47 In a suggestive essay on Keats, David Bromwich has maintained that "[p]osterity was often, for him, the name of a power of resistance and in that regard one of the necessary motives of abstraction" ("Keats and the Aesthetic Ideal," in *The Persistence of Poetry: Bicentennial Essays on Keats*, ed. Robert M. Ryan and Ronald A. Sharp [Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998], 183–8, quotation from 188). To this claim I would only add that Keats persistently describes such "abstraction," at least so far as it entails the sacrifice of the senses, in openly symptomatic terms.
- 48 In *The Poetics of Spice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Timothy Morton refers to this conflation of sensuousness and abstraction in Keats's poetry as "the blancmange effect," which he reads in relation to the discourse of luxury in the period (150).
- 49 Sharon Cameron, *Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 216.
- 50 John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, in *The Literary Criticism of John Ruskin*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Anchor, 1965), 77–8.
- 51 On the best-known deployment of this pun in Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," see Arden Reed, "The Riming Mariner and the Mariner



- Rimed,” in *Romantic Weather: The Climates of Coleridge and Baudelaire* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1983), 147–81.
- 52 For Keats’s many references and allusions to the Intimations Ode, see Beth Lau, *Keats’s Reading of the Romantic Poets* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 39–40, 45.
- 53 On the dating of Coleridge’s verse-letter with respect to the Intimations Ode, see Worthen, *The Gang*, 136–54.
- 54 No small amount of ink has been spilled over the issue of this line, which on the poem’s first publication in 1829 (and subsequently) read, “To know the change and feel it.” For the first defense of the line as it now stands, see Sidney Colvin, *John Keats: His Life and Poetry, His Friends, Critics, and After-Fame* (New York: Scribner’s, 1925), 158–60; see also Jones, *John Keats’s Dream of Truth*, 8–9, 35–41.
- 55 Marx, *Capital*, quotations from 1:138, 165, 163. For a skilful commentary on the recurrent figure of sensuous non-sensuousness in Marx’s writing, see Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 125–76.
- 56 Catherine Gallagher has recently drawn attention to a “kinship between the economists’ and the aestheticians’ concept of value,” and to the Romantics’ defense of literary labor “in two, incommensurate ways: (1) they presented it as an idealized, perhaps utopian, contrast to the economists’ miserable but ‘productive’ labor, and (2) they stressed that they felt as alienated in their work, as jeopardized or engulfed in suffering, as any productive worker” (*The Body Economic*, 28). My reading of Keats sees this “kinship” not as a bad-faith transposition of the categories of economic onto aesthetic labor, but rather as the articulation of a contradiction specific to literary labor as such.
- 57 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. C.J. Arthur (New York: International, 1970), 37.
- 58 See Keats’s letter of 22 November 1817 to Bailey: “I beg now my dear Bailey that hereafter should you observe any thing cold in me not to [p]ut it to the account of heartlessness but abstraction – for I assure you I sometimes feel not the influence of a Passion or Affection during a whole week” (JKL, 1:186).
- 59 John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Perigree, 1980), 39.
- 60 Adorno offers in *Aesthetic Theory* the most cogent modern formulation of this negatively critical stance: “It is not so much that artworks possess ideality as that by virtue of their spiritualization they promise a blocked or denied sensuality” (81); and again, from the same source: “artworks can heal the wounds that abstraction inflicts on them only through the heightening of abstraction” (99).
- 61 Levinson, *Keats’s Life of Allegory*, 243.
- 62 For the image of epistemological “imprinting,” see Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1:121. For Marx’s reference to “the stamp of history” I use an alternate English translation of *Capital*, ed. Friedrich Engels, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, 3 vols. (New York: International, 1967), 1:169. In a stunning reversal of these metaphors, Adorno argues that “the necessity of [the artwork’s] giving itself its own stamp, is to heal it of the contingency which renders it unequal to the force and weight of what is real”

("The Artist as Deputy," 105). On the poet's appropriation of this stamp, and for an account of how through a process of sensory inscription the poet might furnish conditions for the pursuit of immortality, see Keats's program of imaginative development in "Sleep and Poetry":

Write on my tablets all that was permitted,  
 All that was for our human senses fitted.  
 Then the events of this wide world I'd seize  
 Like a strong giant, and my spirit tease  
 Till at its shoulders it should proudly see  
 Wings to find out an immortality. (JK, 39).

- 63 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Scribner's, 1958), 105.
- 64 See, for instance, David Perkins, *The Quest for Permanence: The Symbolism of Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 263–76; and Sperry's provocative reading of the poem in *Keats the Poet*, 292–309.
- 65 Levinson, *Keats's Life of Allegory*, 261.
- 66 My understanding of "Lamia" as an allegory of literary production revisits and reevaluates the suggestive terms of Douglas Bush's complaint that, "despite the technical skill, it is, spiritually, the raw material of a poem" ("Keats," in *Keats: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. W. J. Bate [Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964], 28).
- 67 In the sonnet "Great spirits now on earth are sojourning," Keats attributes a similar kind of re-animating power to the current generation of poets and artists – those who, "standing apart / Upon the forehead of the age to come . . . will give the world another heart, / And other pulses" (JK, 36).
- 68 "The sensory and motor nerves that run in the same sheath, are scarcely bound together by a more necessary and delicate union than that which binds men's affections, imagination, wit, and humour, with the subtle ramifications of historical language" (George Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," *Selected Critical Writings*, ed. Rosemary Ashton [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992], 283).
- 69 *Ibid.*, 282.
- 70 George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. Bert G. Hornback (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 428.
- 71 Eliot, "Quarry for 'Middlemarch.'" *Ibid.*, 626.

#### MORE THAN A FEELING?

- 1 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 486.
- 2 For influential accounts which, like Bourdieu's, date the emergence of the cultural divide to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), and Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great*



*Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

- 3 In *Distinction*, Bourdieu describes the process of “aesthetic distancing,” or the process by which the bourgeois aesthete introduces “a gap – the distance of his distant distinction – vis-a-vis ‘first degree’ perception, by displacing the interest from the ‘content’ . . . to the form” (34). Bourdieu finds one source for this account in Kant’s distinction between “empirical” and “pure” aesthetic judgment (see e.g. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 59–62).
- 4 Karen Swann, “Suffering and Sensation in “The Ruined Cottage,” *PMLA* 106, no. 1 (January 1991): 83–95, quotation from 84; and “Public Transport: Adventuring on Wordsworth’s Salisbury Plain,” *ELH* 55 (1988): 811–34. For further characterizations of “high” Romanticism as the effort to refine, contain, or appropriate the gothic, see Martha Woodmansee, *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 111–18; Clery, *Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, esp. 133–55; and Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic*, esp. 90–126.
- 5 In an alternative tradition of Marxist aesthetic theory, critics have offered a powerful account of the radical political potential of high aesthetic form, often reading Kant’s Third *Critique* as a crucial elaboration of art’s critical character. To date, however, these studies have not extended to a reconsideration of the basis for the distinction between elite and popular culture. For the classic Marxist defense of “high” aesthetics, see Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*; for further relevant engagements with Adornian aesthetics, many of which take the Third *Critique* as a benchmark for discussion, see Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno; or, The Persistence of the Dialectic* (New York: Verso, 1990), in addition to works by Cascardi and Kaufman cited above.
- 6 Compare Bourdieu’s characterization of bourgeois aesthetics as a “refusal of ‘impure’ taste” with what he describes as his own “deliberate refusal” to engage the topic of the cultural divide from the perspective of literary aesthetics (*Distinction*, 485). For one provocative effort to revise accepted accounts of the relationship of popular and privileged art-viewing practices in nineteenth-century Britain, see Judith Stoddart, “Pleasures Incarnate: Aesthetic Sentiment in the Nineteenth-Century Work of Art,” in *Aesthetic Subjects*, 70–98.
- 7 See, for instance, Allison Pease’s account of a “transition in the modern period from aesthetics in the tradition of Shaftesbury and Kant, which privileged cognitive response, to a modernist, twentieth-century aesthetic, which incorporated and demanded, even as it regulated, an embodied response” (Pease, *Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Aesthetics of Obscenity* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000], xv).
- 8 I refer to Adorno’s remark (in a letter to Benjamin dated 18 March 1936 and repeated elsewhere in his work) that high art and mass culture represent “two halves of an integral freedom, to which, however, they do not add up.” Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, *Complete Correspondence, 1928–1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 130.

- 9 On Wordsworth's complicated relationship to the eighteenth-century poetics of sensibility and sentiment, see McGann, *Poetics of Sensibility*; and for an account richly attentive to the materialist dimensions of Wordsworth's thought, see Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind*, esp. 66–92.
- 10 In her reading of "The Ruined Cottage," for instance, Swann draws attention to Wordsworth's "insistence . . . on the near disembodiment of the tale's human forms," associating the poet's stance with his "assertion of the poem's difference from the literature of sensation" ("Suffering and Sensation," 89).
- 11 See, for instance, the final book of the poem, where Wordsworth warns against enslaving the mind to "the laws of vulgar sense" (P, 13.140).
- 12 See for instance, in addition to Levinson's landmark essay on "Tintern Abbey," Barrell's "The Uses of Dorothy," which like Levinson's essay reads the passage from sensations to ideas in that poem as a figure for the ideological character of Wordsworth's thought. For a particularly strong version of this argument, see David Lloyd and Paul Thomas's account of how Wordsworth's poetic epistemology at once reproduces and abets the civilizing process by abstracting individuals out of their sensuous concrete identity: "The narrative by which poetry transforms the disintegrative effect of the multiplying shocks of modern experience into a principled phenomenology of perception in turn replicates the universal history of man's progression from 'savage torpor' to true culture" (Lloyd and Thomas, *Culture and the State*, 78). On the political dimensions of Wordsworth's associationist poetics, see Chapters 2 and 4 in this volume.
- 13 In her discussion of this passage, Anne-Lise François captures well this process of gradual transmutation: "the most unreflective moments remain open to the influence of intervening time, and are capable of being conflated with other moments, permeated finally with a meaning not (solely) their own" (François, "To Hold in Common and Know by Heart: The Prevalence of Gentle Forces in Humean Empiricism and Romantic Experience," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 7.1 [1994]: 156). In a more general vein, see Simon Jarvis's elegant examination and defense of "Wordsworth's interest in the possibility of receiving something living, meaningful, whose life cannot be wholly dissolved into the operations of spirit on matter" (Jarvis, "Wordsworth's Gifts of Feeling," *Romanticism* 4:1 [1998]: 90–103, quotation from 92).
- 14 As in the above-quoted passage from *The Prelude*, Wordsworth explicitly dissociates the mental activity described in "I wandered lonely as a cloud" from that of purposeful reflection. In an 1815 note to the poem, Wordsworth describes its subject as "rather an elementary feeling and simple impression . . . upon the imaginative faculty than an *exertion* of it," and further describes the experience as being similar in nature to that of Darwin's *ocular spectra*, the optical hallucinations discussed at length in *Zoonomia* (P2V, 419).
- 15 Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*. The 1893 Text. Ed. Donald L. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 167. See also

Pater's assertion from the opening paragraph of "The School of Giorgione": "art addresses not pure sense, still less the pure intellect, but the 'imaginative reason' through the senses" (*Renaissance*, 102).

- 16 *Ibid.*, xix–xx.
- 17 Linda Dowling, *The Vulgarization of Art: The Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 76. For a suggestive reading of the rhetoric of literary "impression" in Pater and others, see Jesse Matz, *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- 18 Graham Hough, *The Last Romantics* (1947; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1961). For more recent accounts of Pater's reading of Wordsworth, see J.P. Ward, "An Anxiety of No Influence: Walter Pater on William Wordsworth," in *Pater in the 1990s*, ed. Laurel Brake and Ian Small (Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 1991), 63–75; and Kenneth Daley, *The Rescue of Romanticism: Walter Pater and John Ruskin* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), 30–50.
- 19 Pater, "Coleridge's Writings," *Westminster Review* (1866): 124.
- 20 Pater, "Wordsworth," in *Appreciations* (New York: Macmillan, 1910), 48. Hereafter cited by page number in the text.
- 21 Pater, *Renaissance*, xix.
- 22 Pater, *Renaissance*, 187. Stephen Gill's *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) observes a similar discrepancy in the estimations of Wordsworth by Arnold and Pater; see 213–14.
- 23 In a similar vein, see Pater's famous paragraph on Wordsworth in the Preface to *The Renaissance*, xxi–xxii.
- 24 Denis Donoghue makes a similar point, observing that "Pater is willing to emphasize Wordsworth's sensitivity to the world of sight and sound, but as the essay goes on he makes even more of those passages in which that world seems to dissolve, displaced by the poet's imagination in its most daring autonomy" (*Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls* [New York: Knopf, 1995], 238). See also F.C. McGrath, *The Sensible Spirit: Walter Pater and the Modernist Paradigm* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1986), 180–1.
- 25 Pater taught Hegel's *Aesthetics* at Oxford, and cites or alludes to his work throughout *The Renaissance*, particularly in the essay on Johann Winckelmann; see, e.g., 141, 180.
- 26 Huyssen, "Adorno in Reverse: From Hollywood to Richard Wagner," in *After the Great Divide*, 16–43.
- 27 "Z," "Modern Cyrenaicism," *Examiner* (12 April 1873), in *Walter Pater: The Critical Heritage*, ed. R.M. Seidler (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 75–6. "Z" is responding to Pater's insistence, in the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance*, that the aim of life is to "get[] as many pulsations as possible" into our brief interval of existence (198). In *Marius the Epicurean*, Pater describes the Cyrenaic philosophy in terms strikingly similar to that of the "Conclusion" (*Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas*, ed. Ian Small [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986], 83–90).

- 28 Ibid., 76.
- 29 See Huyssen, “Mass Culture as Woman,” in *After the Great Divide*, 44–62.
- 30 J. A. Symonds, *Academy* (15 March 1873), in *Pater: The Critical Heritage*, 57. In a November 1873 review for *Blackwood's*, Mrs. Oliphant responded in similar terms, characterizing Pater’s book as one of the more offensive “productions of a class removed from ordinary mankind by that ultra-culture and academical contemplation of the world as a place chiefly occupied by other beings equally cultured and refined” (unsigned review, in *Pater: The Critical Heritage*, 86).
- 31 W. J. Courthope, “Modern Culture,” *Quarterly Review* 137 (July 1874): 415.
- 32 Ibid., 409.
- 33 “Z,” “Modern Cyrenaicism,” 75.
- 34 Courthope, “Modern Culture,” 409.
- 35 Winter, *Mesmerized*, 324. For accounts of the reception of sensation fiction among its contemporary readers, see Walter C. Phillips, *Dickens, Reade, and Collins: Sensation Novelists* (1919; New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), and Patrick Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1998), 142–65.
- 36 Pater, *Renaissance*, xx.
- 37 Margaret Oliphant, “Sensation Novels,” *Blackwood's Magazine* 91 (1862), in *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Norman Page (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 118. Numerous critics have since drawn attention to the meta-fictional quality of this scene. See, for instance, Walter M. Kendrick, “The Sensationalism of *The Woman in White*,” in *Wilkie Collins: Modern Critical Viewpoints*, ed. Lyn Pykett (New York: St. Martin’s, 1998), 76–77; D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 152–53; Winter, *Mesmerized*, 322–6.
- 38 Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, ed. John Sutherland (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 20, 4.
- 39 Pater, *Renaissance*, xix–xx.
- 40 On William Collins’s friendship with Wordsworth, see Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins, Esq., R. A. With selections from his Journals and Correspondence*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1848), 1:131–2. Wordsworth was among the advance subscribers to the *Memoirs* (Collins’s first book), and acknowledged its receipt in a letter to Collins dated 10 December 1848; see *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, 2nd edn., vol. 7, part 4: *The Later Years, 1840–1853*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. edn. Alan G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 882.
- 41 Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*, ed. Anthea Trodd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 431. Hereafter cited in the text by page number.
- 42 See, for example, Ross C. Murfin, “The Art of Representation: Collins’ *The Moonstone* and Dickens’ Example,” *ELH* 49 (1982): 653–72; and Tamar Heller, “Blank Spaces: Ideological Tensions and the Detective Work of *The Moonstone*,” in *Wilkie Collins, Modern Critical Views*, 244–70.

- 43 Collins, letter to Harper Brothers, 30 Jan 1868, in *The Letters of Wilkie Collins*, ed. William Bates and William M. Clarke, 2 vols. (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1999), 2:62–3. Winter similarly characterizes the sensation novel as an experiment in physiological response (*Mesmerized*, 326–27).
- 44 Thus while Tamar Heller identifies Jennings as a “Romantic” figure within Collins’s text, for instance, she sees him as more closely associated with De Quincey and Keats, among other second-generation Romantic authors (“Blank Spaces,” 262).
- 45 Beyond Jennings’s citation of De Quincey, there are clear biographical sources for Collins’s connection of opium use with Romantic authors. Collins’s father was a close friend of Coleridge in Wilkie’s youth and a witness to the poet’s frequent struggles with opium addiction; years afterward, the novelist vividly recalled conversations between Coleridge and his parents on the subject of the poet’s opium use. For background, see Collins, *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins*, 1:134–5; and Catherine Peters, *The King of Inventors: The Life of Wilkie Collins* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1991), 24.
- 46 Collins, *Fortnightly Review* NS 42 (September 1887), in *The Public Face of Wilkie Collins: The Collected Letters*, ed. William Baker, Andrew Gasson, Graham Law, and Paul Lewis, 4 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005), 4:264; on visiting the grave of “the illustrious Shelley,” see Collins to Nina Lehmann, 9 December 1866, in *Public Face of Wilkie Collins*, 3:54.
- 47 Collins to R. H. Dana, 17 June 1850, in *Letters of Wilkie Collins*, 1:63.
- 48 Collins to Frederick Locker, 27 November 1866, in *Public Face of Wilkie Collins*, 2:52; Collins’s emphasis.
- 49 Collins to Paul Hamilton Hayne, 16 July 1884, in *Letters of Wilkie Collins*, 2:469–70.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 2:470. Collins’s position is of course ultimately consistent with Arnold’s appreciation of Wordsworth as the poet of moral sentiment, though their estimations of Wordsworth on this ground are sharply divergent.
- 51 So much, indeed, is consistent with the reputation of *The Moonstone* as being among the least “sensational” of Collins’s sensation novels. See, for instance, Alison Milbank’s assertion that *The Moonstone*, in contrast to Collins’s earlier fictions, “eschews sensational effects” (Milbank, *Daughters of the House: Modes of the Gothic in Victorian Fiction* [New York: St. Martin’s, 1992], 54).
- 52 For a further example of how Wordsworth applies this conception to a concrete narrative, one closer in theme to the physiological experiment at the center of *The Moonstone*, we can consult the celebrated boat-stealing episode of *The Prelude*, in which Wordsworth depicts a transgressive act partly redeemed through its imaginative revisitation (P, 1.372–427). As Collins confirms in a different context, such moments of “vulgar joy” – what in this episode Wordsworth calls “troubled pleasure” (P, 1.389) – contain the seeds of their own transfiguration.
- 53 In further respects the details of Jennings’s physiological experiment, of which Collins maintained the strictest accuracy in his preface to the novel

(xxx), suggest a clear orientation towards the Romantic past. Historians of science have maintained that Jennings's medical practice is largely patterned after the late eighteenth-century Scottish physician John Brown, of whose work Wordsworth would have been at least indirectly familiar from his reading of *Zoonomia*. On the Brunonian contexts of *The Moonstone*, and on Brown's influence on nineteenth-century medical practice generally, see, e.g., Barfoot, "Brunonianism Under the Bed," 22–45.

54 Mrs. Oliphant, "Sensation Novels," in *Collins: The Critical Heritage*, 115.

55 *Ibid.*, 116.

56 Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1988), 178.

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