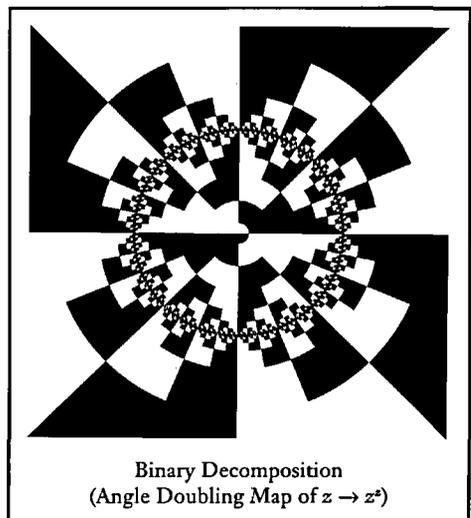


Fractal Logics of Romanticism: **Binary Decomposition**

Introduction: Paine's Headless Hydra

In fractal geometry, “binary decomposition” refers to a process whereby, through repeated iterations of a recursive mathematical function, a plane is divided and subdivided into binary sections (e.g., black and white) in infinite regress of scale (see Peitgen and Richter 1986, 40–44). A mud puddle dries up, cracking into progressively smaller pieces, but somewhere between the phlegmatic wholeness of the mud puddle and the uniformly atomized dust (or *Between Crystal and Smoke*, in François Jacob’s terms) is where everything (interesting) happens: with and against this one-directional deterioration emerge *patterns* of the distribution, shapes or sizes of the pieces. This “between” is not a simple compromise or equilibrium nor a static middle ground



between order and disorder but an opportunistic movement in which a different kind of order emerges, a chaotic order (designated simply as *chaos* here) contingent on the continuous slide toward disorder with which it is opposed but also intimately aligned. An “arrow of chaos” would define this movement, rather than the movement from order to disorder usually identified as the ultimate sweep of the “arrow of time,” as that which orients meaning in history. This reversal situates life itself not so much as a noble thermodynamic outlaw holding out against disorder, but more as a player in an ongoing intrigue.

The paradigm is useful here insofar as it offers a step or two beyond the focus on binarized difference to show how the spread (or saturation or explosion) of crucial differences across a historical field can coincide with both their apotheosis and downfall. Here I am concerned with how binary decomposition operates as a cultural logic, with how an ideological “gestalt” is made to cling upon an infinite brokenness, and vice versa.

The logic of binary decomposition informs Thomas Paine’s critical account of the abdicated throne or vacant center of hegemonic power: “Every office and department has its despotism, founded upon custom and usage. Every place has its Bastille, and every Bastille its despot. The original hereditary despotism, resident in the person of a king, divides and subdivides itself into a thousand shapes and forms, till at last the whole of it is acted by deputation” (284). I have not been able to locate the botanical or zoological referent that seems to provide the central figure for this brilliant gothicization of the Great Chain of Being; it could be something like Blake’s “polypus” or the related hydra—that is, either the mythological beast or its namesake, the small aquatic creature that scandalized eighteenth-century biology with its prodigious regenerative capacities and its ambiguous status as animal and plant (see Lenhoff and Lenhoff 1986). But it is of course precisely the absence of a “central figure” (the catachrestic logic of a metaphor without a clear referent) that operates the image. The diversification of a thousand shapes and forms, each of which still embody a power that is in some important sense “the same,” characterizes the spread of disciplinarity as well as “deputizing” describes the workings of a panoptic and hegemonic power whose mode is the sprawl of diversification. The problem that Paine posits is that storming the Bastille or cutting off the head of a king can no longer address the working of the invisible hands of a headless despotism that has already reduced its “original” to a straw man or a figurehead. Finally only a *molecular* or *viral* politics can be effective in such a regime.

Gender in the School of Mirrors: *Frankenstein*

A crucial sequence in *Frankenstein* begins when the monster confronts his creator and demands “a creature of another sex” (Shelley 1974, 142). Frankenstein refuses absolutely at first, then relents, then begins to assemble a female monster, and then abruptly destroys it, enraging the monster and enabling the destructive cycle to continue. When discussing this vacillatory sequence in a literature class, a student asked why Dr. Frankenstein didn’t simply create a *sterile* female monster. Then the monster would have had a mate, and the doctor needn’t have worried about a potential “race of demons.” Another student replied quickly that this was impossible because it would have short-circuited the plot and prematurely ended the book. This answer enacts the familiar convention that would situate fiction as a hothouse plant—a kind of house of cards or lesser, Newtonian universe whose author-god must keep stacking the deck in order to keep it up—but one that differs in this from the apparently sturdier and more flexible world outside books.

The doctor’s either/or decision represents a potential fork in the road of the plot, a bifurcation where either decision—the decision to make *or* not to make a female monster, no less than the vacillation between them—may well reproduce the tragic series. The first student’s blithely eugenic answer to the doctor’s dilemma does indeed short-circuit examination of what else has been short-circuited by the way the either/or branching is constructed: as long as we’re rewriting the novel, why couldn’t the monster’s partner be male? Is reproduction so tied in the novel’s context to the definition of femaleness that the possibility of a sterile female would short-circuit the ideology of gender, threatening an even more catastrophic series by adding the option of making or not making a female/not-female? Can eugenics solve a dilemma it has created? But the second student’s answer doubly short-circuits examination of the first question simply by calling it a short-circuiting, thereby working with it to contain what Foucault called “the great danger with which fiction threatens our world” (1984, 118). Here, the danger seems to involve the revelation of the flexibility and high-maintenance fragility—the *science-fictionality*—of the circuits through which gender is wired in and out of books. The joke is that the constructionist universe—by virtue of devices such as the double-question damage-control mechanism enacted by the two students—is perhaps *more* stably inertial than the self-organizing “nature” that ideology makes in its image.

The first student’s question is “naive” by narrow literary-critical standards insofar as “the literary critic” is not supposed to rewrite the plot, but to account for what is *there*, whether historically, generically, or hermeneutically. But

what happened in the class (as I argued) was that the book *continued to be written*, since the logic of short-circuiting and cross-circuiting is the ongoing work of the book. My purpose, in the classroom as well as here, is not to cure the disturbance—the gender trouble—that the plot enacts, but to prolong its life. That’s my job: I’m a literary critic.

There are many branchings in the text where characters are confronted with choices, or where it seems things could go either way; this is no less true of the act of interpretation. If the logic of these branchings is the motor of the plot, it is not limited to the text. This chapter explores the fraying and braiding that weaves textual space-time into “real” space-time.

At what point does the tragic cycle begin, at what points might it have been averted or ended, and by what logic does it continue? Frankenstein suggests a self-amplifying “butterfly effect” that swells, “by insensible steps,” from “ignoble and almost forgotten sources” into “the torrent which, in its course, has swept away all my hopes and joys” (32). I have suggested that the problematization of disciplinary division and recombination (e.g., between science and literature) situates reading itself as the ongoing source of the tragic (or gothic) series. There are, of course, numerous other crucial points in the plot: Frankenstein’s creation or first rejection of the monster, the De Lacey family’s rejection of the monster, Frankenstein’s refusal to create a mate, his decision not to reveal the monster’s existence, the magistrate’s refusal to help, and so on. One can always argue, that is, that Frankenstein’s mistake was not the creation of the monster but his rejection of it, not in rejecting it but in vacillating, not in vacillating but in keeping quiet, and so on. These relatively discrete sites are overdetermined in a nexus of structural factors in which the catastrophic series has somehow always already begun, is always beginning, always just ahead.

This causal or temporal shell game is precisely the form of gendering suggested by Lacan. Lacan’s vignette of gender production is elaborated along with his revision of Saussure’s model of the linguistic sign (Lacan 1977, 149–52), which features a signifier (e.g., the word “tree”) fixed arbitrarily to a referent (e.g., a picture of a tree). Lacan’s alternate model of the sign—two doors, marked “Ladies” and “Gentlemen”—refuses to allow a categorical distinction between word and thing (the bar dividing word from picture). Lacan also shifts the emphasis from a Big Bang mode of gender production (which looks back to an original primal scene or biological determinant always anterior to consciousness as its never-articulable condition of possibility) to a continuous-creation model that stresses the ongoing gaps-in-play by which Oedipal gender is sustained—ritually, as it were—only by an ongo-

ing channeling or canalization. This model correlates, under the term *canalization*, practices that maintain the way that sexuality is supposed to be genitalized in the individual body (i.e., libido is supposed to “flow through” the genitals) with the “primary segregation” that makes whole bodies flow through different doors. The “primary process” of metaphor, condensation, and displacement, whether it refers to the way erogenous zones or social traffic are configured, is precisely always in process, ensuring that the subject will always work both from and toward a fixation that will always exceed him-or-her.

This crux of gender is curiously enacted, in what could provisionally be called “real time,” between Mary Shelley and her husband, Percy, in their collaboration on a passage in *Frankenstein* where Victor describes himself and his wife:

Although there was a great dissimilitude in our characters, there was an harmony in that very dissimilitude. I was more calm and philosophical than my companion; yet my temper was not so yielding. My application was of longer endurance; but it was not so severe whilst it endured. I delighted in investigating the facts relative to the actual world; she busied herself in following the aerial creations of the poets. The world to me was a secret, which I desired to discover; to her it was a vacancy, which she sought to people with imaginations of her own. (Shelley 1974, 30)

Editor James Reiger notes that the final two sentences were added by Percy to Mary’s manuscript, or as he puts it, “written by Shelley” (30n). He is careful to distinguish the contributions of each author; to Mary Shelley’s statement (in her 1832 introduction) that she “certainly did not owe the suggestion of one incident, nor scarcely one train of feeling, to my husband, and yet but for his incitement, it would never have taken the form in which it was presented to the world,” Reiger adds a catty footnote: “Shelley contributed more than his widow recalls here” (229). In his “Note on the Text,” Reiger fusses over Percy’s “status”: “We know that he was more than an editor. Should we grant him the status of minor collaborator? Do we or do we not owe him a measure of ‘final authority’? The problem in editorial philosophy is perhaps insoluble” (xliv).

Indeed, the passage cited above works both to provoke and to confound attribution: the editor, like Mary and Percy and Elizabeth and Victor before him, and like readers of his edition after him, are drawn into and out of an “insoluble” problem whose form is, finally, the double bind of gender itself, a primary irritant around which various pearls of writerly, editorial, and hermeneutic discourse must continue to be secreted.

The provocation and confounding of attribution takes the form of a series of questions of the passage: How are the character descriptions autobiographical, in content or at least in form (that is, insofar as they can be taken as stylistic “signatures” of each author), and to what extent do Mary and Percy write as representatives of their genders? How are the descriptions biographical, representing each author’s portrait of the other—and of the other’s portrait of themselves? But because Mary writes as Victor writing about himself and Elizabeth, while Percy writes as Mary writing as Victor (and so on), these are only the first steps into a house of mirrors in which distinctions between fictional and real characters are subject to a binary decomposition—or rather, revealed to be always-already shattered. Do Percy’s additions represent mainly an attempt to imitate and build upon his wife’s text (to “pass” as Mary), or to supplement with something categorically different what he must have felt was lacking in her text (to make Mary’s text over in his image)? Or did Mary (as she claims) write the text as she did in order to please her husband or to fulfill a standard she had projected as his? Or did she write the novel (and especially the character of Victor) to expose and critique a masculinist Romanticism in which she understood her husband to be participating (as Mellor and others have argued)? Did Percy walk, knowingly or not, into the trap of self-caricature when his wife’s text moved him to write as Victor? Or did both authors, after all, follow after their fashion the self-amplifying and self-thwarting logic dictated to them by textuality itself, having taken on another life of its own? This last question only throws us back onto the logic of the Frankenstein story itself.

These are, of course, more naive questions. We know the text to be both child and parent, and neither child nor parent, to its author; this causal loop (people are produced by their relationships or practices and vice versa) cannot help but suggest some third causal element (ideology, textuality, or the like), but rather than ground the indeterminacy in a third and firmer place, it only elaborates the strange attractor around which agency and causality circulate.

Shelley’s work quietly thematizes questions of authorship as it goes. Walton makes notes on Frankenstein’s spoken story, then Frankenstein “himself corrected and augmented them in many places” (207), just as Mary was to give her text to Percy with “carte blanche to make what alterations you please” (xliv). More significantly, Percy’s description of Elizabeth (in the passage cited above) seems to form the model for Mary Shelley’s description (in her 1832 introduction) of *her own* youth, spent “indulging in waking dreams” and “airy flights of my imagination” in which she “could people the hours with creations far more interesting to me at that age, than my own sensations” (222–23). To say that Mary’s version of Mary

here is styled after Percy's version of Mary's version of Victor's version of Elizabeth is probably an oversimplification.

A "close reading" of the passage in question only orchestrates the echo chamber more densely. Both descriptions use extended parallelism: Mary differentiates Victor and Elizabeth by *degree* ("more calm . . . not so yielding . . . longer . . . not so severe"), while Percy differentiates them as binarized *kinds* (e.g., discovering secrets versus peopling with imaginations). Being careful not simply to distinguish in kind between kind and degree, though, one must admit that Mary's distinctions are not by pure degree, since there are some differences in kind between the qualities that differ by degree: stability versus flexibility ("calm . . . yielding") and duration versus intensity ("longer . . . severe"). Yet again, these seemingly binarized kinds could, by "insensible steps" (i.e., by degrees), be transformed into one another (e.g., duration becomes intensity by being compressed). Percy's descriptions, on the other hand, reperform the division/mixing between science and fiction (masculine "facts" and discoveries versus feminine "aerial creations" and imaginative "peoplings") as a version of the problematic of gender.

The domestic "harmony in dissimilitude" that Victor romanticizes is a harmony never realized in the novel. The novel adumbrates neither a kind of simple complementarity (a joining together to make a whole) nor a zero-sum game (the division of a whole between the genders) but an ongoing failure to connect in which the "dissimilitude" between continuous (nonarticulated) difference in degree and discontinuous (articulated) difference in kind is both a branching and a braiding. Typically, Frankenstein discovers this "too late": while he had been able to control the discretely articulated features of his monster ("His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful" [52]), the monster becomes horrific by the subtler—indiscrete—features that emerge only when he is animated: the strange color imbalance between hair, skin, and eyes; the convulsive expressions that play across the otherwise proportionate features. This dialectic reproduces the terms of a famous debate between the leading physiognomists of a previous generation: Johann Caspar Lavater grounded physiognomy in discrete and static features, while Georg Christoph Lichtenberg argued the primacy of expression over the features it orchestrates. The monster's horrific "aura" marks the failure of the body to coincide with its physically discrete location in a consensual, Euclidean space, or rather, it marks embodiment as embodiment of *this failure*; the way in which the body's recalcitrant self-difference constitutes it as a "material-semiotic actor" (Haraway 1991, 208).

The ongoing failure to coincide, in a spatiotemporal and discursive series, also serves as a rough account of the logic of the plot. I've noted how

Frankenstein's studies in modern science, which might have set him on the right course, contribute a vital ingredient to the fatal series only by being deferred. It is this same logic by which the monster is deprived of his mate at the last instant, and by which he takes it on himself to thwart the Frankensteins' consummation of their marriage at the last instant and then to keep the pursuing doctor just a step behind him, and finally, also the logic by which the monster appears just a moment too late to witness the death of his creator (or by which the novel ends a moment too soon for the reader to witness the death of the monster). As I also noted, the brain-stealing scene from the 1931 film meticulously applies the same interruptive logic.

This logic also structures the monster's fateful rejection by the De Lacey's. The monster becomes "solely directed towards my plan of introducing myself into the cottage of my protectors" (128), and finally the moment arrives "which would decide my hopes, or realize my fears." Just as the noise interrupts Fritz in the film, so too the sounds of the returning family cause the monster to panic and throw himself at De Lacey's feet; the urgency of this action causes the family to interpret it as an attack. Driven violently away, the monster seeks out his maker with a redoubled resentment. Apparently, a certain urgency of desire—not simply a matter of degree but something irreducibly in the nature of desire—is self-thwarting to the extent that, if there is something on which everything depends, it must go wrong.

Muriel Spark described this logic—proleptically, as a kind of strange attractor—when she described the novel "as a sort of figure-of-eight *macabresque*, executed by two partners moving with the virtuosity of skilled ice-skaters. . . . Both partners are moving in opposite directions, yet one follows the other. At the crossing of the figure-eight they all-but collide" (Shelley 1974, xxvii).

An interruptive logic also structures Shelley's account of the novel's conception in her 1832 introduction. Shelley first attributes the "present form" of the novel to her husband's insistence that she write for publication: "He was for ever inciting me to obtain literary reputation" (223). While this attribution may suggest an anxiety of authorship enforced for women, it was also still conventional to justify the audacious act of publication by appealing to some sense of duty. The same convention structures Shelley's justification of her introduction itself as a compliance with her publisher's request, since she would otherwise be "very averse to bringing myself forward in print" (222). In any case, it is not her husband's incitement but her resistance to it, in the form of the performance anxiety or "mortification" that she reports (on being repeatedly unable to "think of a story" in the ghost-story contest) that finally enables her subsequent production. In order for writing to take place at all, *it* must become a terror. Incitement—the mandate to produce—generates a

turbulent cycle in which the subject's own resistance and blockage allows her to be "haunted," in their wake, by what Baudrillard-on-Marx called the "spectre of production." In any case, the novel's conception seems finally to be immaculate: Shelley has the monster appear to her in a reverie, followed by the "eureka" moment in which she sees the entrepreneurial opportunity to universalize herself ("What terrified me will terrify others") by making readers over in her image, just as Wordsworth had in *The Prelude* ("what we have loved / Others will love"). Shelley offers a mutually interruptive ensemble of accounts of the novel's genesis. This ensemble is characterizable by its "someness" or undecidability, which Shelley translates into an infinite regress:

Every thing must have a beginning, to speak in Sanchean phrase; and that beginning must be linked to something that went before. The Hindoos give the world an elephant to support it, but they make the elephant stand on a tortoise. Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of the void, but out of chaos. (226)

Shelley's use of the older term "invention" (a reorganization of already extant materials) against the new Romantic standard of "creating" (caricatured as pure origination "out of the void") jibes with the reading of the novel as a cautionary tale of production (associated with creation) usurping reproduction, but Shelley's gothicization of production cannot adequately be read as simple opprobrium, since it also invests its subject with seductive power and danger—and moreover, since Shelley's account paints her own production with the same brush.

It is at the interpenetrative border of production and reproduction that Shelley situates her account of the novel's genesis, making the novel in the image of Frankenstein's making of his monster. The novel queries the distinction between feminine reproductive labor and masculine productive labor and the derogation of the former by a productivist—"creationist"—ideology that sustains what Baudrillard called "an unbridled romanticism of productivity" (1975, 17). This query is sometimes instantiated in the turbulence of similarity and difference between parenting and writing, or in a still more homely sense, as the question of how it is possible to be either or both a mother and a writer, or the extent to which the two overlap or interrupt each other. This suggests that the focus should be displaced somewhat, away from the caricature of a male Frankenstein whose hubris is to usurp female reproduction and to hybridize it with production, and toward an inquiry into how their necessary hybridization becomes a problem in a regime based on distinguishing them. Marie-Hélène Huet reminds us that when Mary Shelley wrote the novel, she had already lost one child, had her second child with her, and became pregnant

again in the course of writing the novel. Huet finds that Shelley's overassertion of her sole authorship and "erasure of the father" (i.e., Percy) comes out of "a tradition that closely associates monstrous births with the mother, stressing the principle of parental singularity" (1993, 61–62). Huet, then, implicitly revises Reiger's account of Mary Shelley as a cross-gender Frankenstein whose hubristic self-aggrandizement is to usurp her husband's role; the hubris of Huet's Mary Shelley is (paradoxically or not) one of self-*derogation*: she takes not the credit but the rap for her husband by claiming sole responsibility for the production of monsters. But Shelley presents this claim with as much glee as contrition or so-called self-hatred. It seems we must continue to read *Frankenstein* as an invalidation of the myth of masculinist self-sufficiency, in light of Carole Pateman's account of the foundational myth of liberal democracy as the brothers giving birth to the state. But it is also a validation of the myth's real effects, and a "reverse discourse" that exceeds itself. In other words, Shelley *takes on* (in the double sense of setting herself against—and allowing herself to be invested by) the pathological and interruptive power attributed to "the disorder of women."

Male writers may commonly characterize the writing process as pregnancy and giving birth, but insofar as parenting is among the referents of the *Frankenstein* story, what is horrific (and compelling) is how having a child is like being a writer, not vice versa. Insofar as parents are notoriously resistant to "constructionism," tending to prefer the notion that their children are born with definite tendencies and personalities, the scary part of parenting is not necessarily the immense responsibility that shaping a life entails, but how this shaping operates, insidiously, because of and in spite of either the agency or the patience of the parent. Frankenstein's account of the insidious and ironic "fatal series" marks fate as the operation of an unconscious that operates both with and against the will (thereby structuring moments in which either of two decisions, or vacillation between them, are fated to reproduce the series).

Mary bids her "hideous progeny" (the novel as monster) to "go forth and prosper" with a complex laughter radically at odds with the high seriousness with which Percy had hyped the novel in his preface. It is possible to hear in this laughter not only a derogation of the novel's importance (and with it, the old story of feminine anxiety and self-hatred) but also an affirmation of the gothic logic by which the book continues to live, of the monstrous victory of an indiscrete and interruptive power.

The self-immolation to which the monster looks forward at the end of the novel (again, not with contrition) is at least as equivocal as the account of

suicide that concludes Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" or the cliff-leap that ends *Thelma and Louise*: resistance or defeat? The monster's life must be called a limited success, at least insofar as it manages continually to frustrate its creator's murderous intent toward it and to achieve the death-on-its-own-terms that functions as the prime directive for creatures under the sway of the *death drive*. This limited success indexes the necessarily equivocal operation of all movements that seek to subvert the categorical distinctions on which they are predicated—the necessarily historically limited victories and defeats of all the monster has been taken to "stand for" (capitalism, feminism, the working class, Romanticism, and so on), sublating in the process the grandiosely totalized utopian and dystopian scenarios that drive the doctor. Are perverse hermeneutic convolutions necessary, after all, to rewrite the novel with a happy ending? Or does the novel conspire to validate its own monstrous frustration by allowing itself to be read as the moral tale of a failure and not the ironic laughter of a monstrous victory? Under what conditions could the novel be read differently? Does the novel have any power to participate in the production of such conditions?

These questions are echoed in Percy Shelley's "Ozymandias," where the collapse of the king's giant statue radically and ironically recontextualizes its caption. When the monument had been standing, its caption ("Look upon my works, ye mighty, and despair") suggested that others could never hope to achieve a success so grand and durable; the ruins of the statue make the same words mean that, in light of Ozymandias's failure, *all* power must despair of succeeding. By allowing both things and words to be subject to radical recontextualization, Percy seems to subject his own poem to the contingency of change and thereby to achieve a backhanded kind of symbolic mastery—while reserving his own mission of continuing to plead with the mighty to "Look upon *my* works." To take Percy at his word is to acknowledge how the poem participates in legitimizing the tyranny, in turn, of a hegemonic power that works not by its monumentality but by being forever brought down, a power that cops recontextualization as its own tool, and that wears not a "sneer of cold command" but a friendlier face. On the other hand, *Frankenstein's* gothic logic asserts priority over Percy's favorite theme of the "constancy of mutability" by offering a writer-parent whose necessary ambivalence in the act of production-reproduction does not (as Ozymandias does) pit desire for eternal life against the certainty of change and death but binds the two in an ongoing contradiction: "He would hope that, left to itself, the slight spark of life which he had communicated would fade; that this thing, which had received such imperfect animation, would subside into dead matter" (228).

Valéry's meditation on monsters explicitly turns the gothic logic of self-thwarting into a productive principle. For Valéry, monsters are known

only by this remarkable property of being unable to endure. The abnormal are those creatures who have a little less future than the normal. They are like the many thoughts that contain hidden contradictions. They are formed in the mind, they seem right and promising, but their consequences ruin them, and their presence is very soon fatal to themselves.

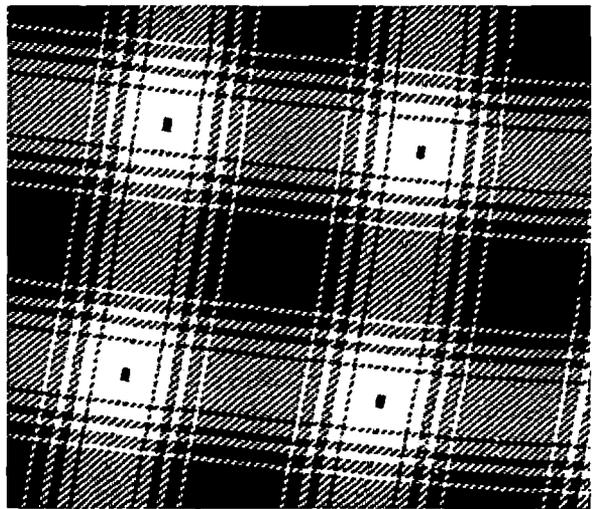
Who knows whether most of those prodigious thoughts over which so many great men and an infinity of lesser ones have grown pale for centuries are not, after all, psychological monsters—

Monster Ideas—born of the naive exercise of our questioning faculties . . . ?

But the monsters of the flesh quickly perish. Yet they have a certain existence. Nothing is more instructive than to meditate on their destiny. (1973, 5–6; emphasis in original)

If Valéry's meditation works to dichotomize the Methuselan monstrosity of ideas and ephemeral monstrosities of the flesh, it does so in order to make history the

story of their permutations; if normalcy is categorically differentiated from the abnormal, their difference is simultaneously rendered the question of a few ambiguous degrees: only "a little less future." Like Shelley's narrative, this paradox makes it clear that the aim of technological, economic, or eugenic "perfectability" and an eternal dynasty at the "end of history" must give way to a necessarily more limited goal of "sustainability," but it also demonstrates that neither eternalization nor sustainability can undermine the ongoing priority of a monstrous agency whose life and death are bound up together in "hidden contradictions" and whose mode of existing is always to "stir with an uneasy, half vital motion" (Shelley 1974, 228). If Mary Shel-

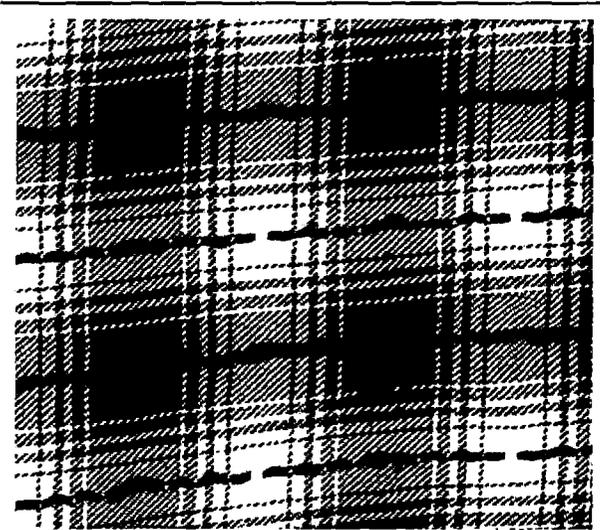


Plaid Theory. Once I was trying to take a nap in a room amid several loudly intellectual dialogues and an equally loud television. As I drifted off toward sleep, the sense of the words being spoken suddenly slipped away and the syntaxes and tones became a complex abstract pattern of patterns; that is, a plaid. This event occurred to me, at the time, as the *reversal* of a plaid to its underside, where what appear as discrete points on the front are seen to be a switchboard of tangled skeins on

ley allows the monster at the end of *Frankenstein* "a little less future," it is not in order to aestheticize a life compressed into a poignant intensity, but to acknowledge that monstrous agency is purchased at a price, and to take on the negotiation of that price as the ongoing struggle of Romantic and post-Romantic history.

The Romantic Double-Cross: Keats's Letters

The development of information theory, fractal geometry, and chaos theory were spurred by the typically postmodern problem of how to compact and maximize the transmission of information; this problem occupied Claude Shannon and Benoit Mandelbrot at Bell Labs and IBM. Within every transmission of information are sectors of noise; within each sector of noise is a sector of usable information, and so on until the limit of resolution is reached. This empirical finding follows the theoretical definition by which information and noise are inextricably related and information itself is predicated on a nonreducible dialectic between sameness (redundancy) and difference. Absolute randomness could either be called pure information or pure



the back. In other words, the becoming-plaid of the conversations was instantly also the becoming-not-plaid of the plaid. I stayed at the point of sleep for several switchings back and forth between pointed sense and pointless pattern.

This vignette emblemizes the mutually interruptive relations between noise, information, patterning, and meaning that are the subject of this section.

noise: this contradiction is both the product and the enabling condition of information theory no less than the particle/wave paradox had been the axiom and fetish of modernist physics. Taken in a broader sense (which I do not consider to be metaphorical), these observations suggest that the ubiquity of disciplinary power means also that in no place does it rule unchallenged; noise is only noise with reference to a certain code: noise is the unconsciousness of information, a pattern of the gaps in play. The jump from information to discipline is not a metaphorical one since everywhere they are each other's product and process.

But Shannon and Mandelbrot were not the first to confront the challenge of how to maximize in-

formation transmission. Letter writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries addressed the same problem, generated by the expense of paper and postage (the latter often restrictively manipulated by governmental regulation) and by increasing social mobility (in real space, that is). The continuous diaspora mandated by postmodern professionalism (and its poster child, the long-distance romance) are extensions of these conditions.

Romantic letter writers addressed the problem by *crossing* their letters (overlapping two perpendicular layers of writing). The practice depends on what Saussure called “the linearity of the signifier,” which in this case ensures that the text remains legible in both directions. The nonlinearity of meaning is generated as an excess against the unidirectional drive of information, like the snakes that weave around the staff of a caduceus or the turbulent wake of a forward-moving ship; meaning is the snake and the wake of information.

In 1819, the poet (and erstwhile surgeon’s apprentice) John Keats sent a crossed letter to his friend and publisher, John Taylor. The first, horizontal, text of the letter is devoted to a long prescription about where intellectual workers should live in order to remain healthy; this authoritative disquisition is crossed by lines from Keats’s *Lamia*, a poem about a man who falls in love with a snake disguised as a woman until she is unmasked by a scientist (pretty much the old boy-meets-snake story). In the passage included in the letter, guests at Lamia’s party marvel that they had never noticed her fantastic mansion on the numbered street. The uncanny way that the fantasy mansion exceeds the gridded and numbered streets (systematic house numbering began about this time in London) thematizes the way that poetry is situated, by the crossed letter, as an excess of prescriptive discourse (remember Keats’s dictum that “we hate poetry that has a palpable design on us”). The signifier—prescription crossed and exceeded by poetry—becomes a metaphor of the signified and vice versa; this is a site where words and things are conflated by being made to echo each other.

Curiously, though, the same pattern of dichotomy and excess structures the prescriptive part of the letter (Keats 1970, 286–87), where Keats proceeds by a logic of ongoing problematization that structures a dynamic spatiality. A simple binary alignment of city as unhealthy and country as healthy is rejected as insufficient: danger, and with it the injunction to vigilance, must be shown to implicate both city and country. Since the binary distinction between healthy and unhealthy must also divide country from country, a more powerful code capable of making distinctions and judgments between rural locales is offered. The healthy locale, it seems, must be one of pure distinctions between elements: the traditional elements

of air, water, and earth (and fire, represented by warmth or smoke), as well as life itself (in the forms of vegetation or human bodies), must ideally be distinct from each other. This implicit principle produces the ideal place to live as a “dry, gravelly, barren, elevated . . . open” country where even the “gravelly” pebbles are distinct from each other (Keats 1970, 286). Unhealthy locales, on the other hand, are ones in which these distinctions are lost or “leveled”: places where air contains water and matter and life (agricultural lowlands, slaughterhouses, and so on), where water is implicated with earth and life (“cabbage water,” fens, and the like), earth is implicated with water and life, and so on. The site to be avoided above all others is thus “a rich inclosed fulsome manured arrable land.” Thus Keats seems to posit a pure difference between pure difference and impure difference, preserving a vitalist virility that depends on the maintenance of distinctions and opposing strength, nerve, energy, occupation, and self-interest to weakness, idleness, enervation, and tameness.

Keats’s attempt to produce a hierarchy of kinds of labor out of these distinctions leads to another series of binary oppositions; first butcher is opposed to peasant, mountaineer to valleyman, strong to weak. Finally the code must weave back into itself: if the usually healthy country can be unhealthy, it must also be possible to maintain health amid an unhealthy environment, led by the bourgeois ideals of directedness and “self-interest” (i.e., “goal-oriented behavior”). A relatively closed, self-limiting system is almost magically woven out of almost nothing but binary distinctions. Its dynamic limit is not a simple border but the points where it folds back onto itself: in an environment too indistinct, the supreme singleness of purpose required to remain healthy—represented by the airborne dagger that leads Macbeth through “the fens” while keeping him from getting sick—amounts to criminality or pathology itself.

Keats rejects essentialism (“do not impute it to your own weakness . . .”) in favor of a dynamic organicism that defines personality and pathology alike as largely the products of interaction between a set of behaviors and an environment. Masculine differentiation is set explicitly against feminine indifferentiation by Keats’s warning of the enervating effect of breathing “the steam that rises from the earth” as the equivalent of “drinking their mother’s milk” (Keats 1970, 287).

John Wesley’s 1786 tract, *The Duty and Advantage of Early Rising*, had forged the same elements into a temporal discipline: “By *soaking* . . . so long between warm sheets, the flesh is as it were parboiled, and becomes soft and flabby. The nerves, in the mean time, are quite unstrung” (quoted in Thompson 1993, 392). Like Wesley, Keats weaves the homeliest principles behind traditional English strictures—against milk-drinking (as an infantilizing practice for adults) and against

dampness (as the source of numerous ills)—into an expansive ideological algorithm. Keats's figure of "encroaching . . . autumn fogs" seems to spread to subject all to the specter of dangerous indifferenciation. This spreading authorizes a disciplinary saturation to cover the same ground, redifferentiating gender (by equating masculine virility, vitality, and vigilance, and by making them contingent on continuous differentiations from mothers and others), nation and race (setting individualist England against an Orientalist vision of China's vast undifferentiated crowds), division of labor (situating agricultural labor as domesticizing, "low" in several senses, and feminized). At the same time, the figure itself threatens to collapse into an empty redundancy: "encroaching" indexes a liminal threat to distinct boundaries, just as "Autumn" is a liminal season between extremes, just as "fogs" is a figure of indeterminate boundaries. What begins to emerge from Keats's prescription is the sense of a single (imaginary, ideological) algorithm capable of processing and evaluating any given data or of generating an inexhaustible series of figures, contrasts, and so on—in short, of making everything over into its own image; another version of Paine's hydra or Blake's polypus. But Keats's prescription also begins to problematize the position of *poetry* as the privileged field of the very indistinction and hybridity pathologized in prescriptive discourse. Keatsian poetry—and for that matter, the human body or brain—turns out to be more like the "rich inclosed fulsome manured arrable land" that requires to be set against the pure distinctions of prescriptive discourse; they conspire between them to divide and conquer the world.

The textual history of a second crossed letter—Keats's May 3, 1818, letter to his friend, J. H. Reynolds—shows how the logic of binary decomposition can structure the ongoing life of a text. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, the Heaven where white male poets and a few of their guests go when they die (the Heaven where, as the song says, nothing ever happens), prints three blocks of text from the letter, marking by triple asterisks four large blocks omitted (Norton 1986, 865–68). I call the included blocks "i-sections" and those omitted "o-sections."

As printed in the *Norton*, the letter has been tailored to represent Keats as an evaluative literary and social critic. The anthology, then, participates in an ongoing opposition between two caricatures that began in Keats's own lifetime: Keats the effeminate, sensual poet and Keats the virile, abstract thinker and literary theorist. This hermaphroditic image gave Byron his figure of a Keats engaged in "a sort of mental masturbation—frigging his *Imagination*" (cited in Levinson 1988, 18), while Matthew Arnold came to champion the "manly" Keats against the lowbrow sensualist and effeminized slave to love. M. H. Abrams, Romanticism editor for the *Norton*, implicitly reproduces a hermaphroditically self-sufficient Keats

Keats's publisher and a mutual friend of Keats and Reynolds, had his secretary copy the letter and then corrected his secretary's work; this copy is reproduced in the *Norton*. The mistakes and corrections, then, are the result not of the relation between the fast mind and slow hand of Romantic genius, but between a secretary and his employer and finally a Romantic editor all too ready to collapse the transmission of the text back into a melodramatic interiority. There are two ways of reading Abrams's misrepresentation as positive information (or rather, as meaningful noise): in one sense it puts everyone who transcribes Keats *inside* the circuit between Keats's mind and hand, and indeed, in choosing which excerpts to publish, Abrams follows the blocks of text printed in the 1926 book that calls itself *The Mind of John Keats* (Thorpe 1926). But in the stronger sense, Abrams's "mistake" reveals the repeatedly reconstructed cultural artifact called "Keats's mind" as a displaced and condensed version of relations (extended widely in real space and time) between publishers and readers and secretaries and authors and editors, for the circulation of information and division of labor among them (without which the letter would never have been written or reproduced) is mandated by capitalism and the disciplinarity that is its Holy Ghost. In this, "Keats's mind" when he was alive and the cultural site subsequently called "Keats's mind" do not differ in kind.

The *Norton's* excerpting vandalizes the text, but Humpty-Dumpty can't be put back together. Restoring the full text cannot be a recuperation but only another act of vandalism (like the old joke about vandals breaking into the Louvre and putting arms on the Venus de Milo), since the letter's complex fractures and failures to coincide with itself are what generates and defines it as a text in the first place.

In the *i*-sections (Norton 1986, 865–68), Keats compares universalized and binarized individual developmental stages — "when the Mind is in its infancy" versus "when we have acquired more strength" — and states of being: "the difference of high Sensations with and without knowledge." He extensively evaluates "Wordsworth's genius . . . in the manner of gold being the meridian Line of worldly wealth, — how he differs from Milton." This crucial mixed metaphor aligns a capitalist currency referenced to the gold standard (which became official the following year) with a fully mapped and gridded globe (in which human space-time is oriented by its reference to an Anglocentric meridian) and with a literary field normalized by reference to the great author and English nationalist hero. Note that the mixed metaphor works by aligning fields in which an apparently arbitrary reference point or axis is valorized (the gold standard, the prime meridian, Milton). In other words, the fields are aligned by an interdisciplinary alignment to each other that

grandfathers their arbitrary axes into a resonant truth-effect. What makes the mixed metaphor an empty self-referential and tautological loop (the alignment of alignments) is also what allows it to configure (and implicate it inextricably with) the history of English cartography, economics, and literature.

Keats attempts to determine whether Milton sees “further or no than Wordsworth,” and again whether Wordsworth “has an extended vision or a circumscribed grandeur,” and finally, “to show you how tall I stand by the giant, I will put down a simile of human life as far as I now perceive it.” The measurer is to be measured by his measurements, or as Pierre Bourdieu has it, “social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make” (1984, 6).

The subsequently canonized figure of the “Mansion of Many Apartments” that follows spatializes a developmental schema, beginning with an anteroom (“the infant or thoughtless chamber”) and proceeding to a “Chamber of Maiden-Thought,” from which branch out numerous darkened passages. Keats deploys this blueprint to make a critical assessment: “To this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive when he wrote ‘Tintern Abbey.’” Again, by the phrase “as far as I can conceive,” the assessment marks the assessor as subject to the same spatial-developmental logic as that which is assessed. Keats concludes that Wordsworth “is a Genius and superior to us, in so far as he can, more than we, make discoveries, and shed a light” (in the dark passages), but he adds an important qualification: “though I think it has depended more upon the general and gregarious advance of intellect, than individual greatness of Mind.” In view of the fact that Milton’s philosophy may now “be understood by one not much advanced in years,” Keats offers a historical sketch, concluding in the manner of a logical demonstration: although Milton “did not think into the human heart, as Wordsworth has done— Yet Milton as a Philosopher, had sure as great powers as Wordsworth— What is to be inferr’d? O many things— It proves there is really a grand march of intellect.”

Masculine mapping, measurement, money, mansions, and marches are the predominant metaphors in the i-sections. In Keats’s universalized national progressivist history (set up as ongoing emancipation from superstition), historical perspective must be factored out in order for Great Men to compare the size of their geniuses. Evolutionary history is conceived as an acceleration and dissemination of features: Milton’s philosophy, formerly the product of the singular most advanced mind, is now accessible to every schoolboy. As it turns out, though, historical advance cannot be factored out in a determination of individual genius, which can only be compared synchronically. Both scenarios consist in the masculinist sci-

ence project of penetration and mapping of new and uncharted areas; the project of Romanticism is a “thinking into the human heart.”

In omitting blocks of text (Keats 1970, 90–97) that differ consistently from and alternate regularly with the included text, the *Norton* disciplines a cross-authorizing polarity between poetry and criticism.

The first o-section begins with a still conventional apology for not writing (“I have been in so uneasy a state of Mind as not to be fit to write to an invalid”) and meanders among topics such as the weather and books. In the o-section, however, the book is not a manifestation of genius but a physical and historical commodity, a collector’s item: “what say you to a black Letter Chaucer printed in 1596: aye I’ve got one huzza! I shall have it bounden gothique a nice sombre binding—it will go a little way to unmodernize.” The typically Romantic impulse to “unmodernize” stands as a foil to the progressivist modernization scenario of the i-sections to come.

The second o-section begins with an apologetic metacomment on the critical pronouncements in the preceding i-section: “This is running one’s rigs on the score of abstracted benefit . . . you will forgive me for thus privately treading out of my depth and take it for treading as schoolboys tread the water.” Yet even as Keats seems to denigrate his philosophizing, he also radically limits the discursive reach of the geometry of comparison developed in the first i-section: “when we come to human Life and the affections it is impossible how a parallel of breast and head can be drawn”; and again: “it is impossible to know how far knowledge will console us.” Note that here the question of “how” marks the impossibility of binary complementarity, while “how far” becomes not a matter of simply measuring the reach of knowledge but of how the knowledge of knowledge or measurement of measurement thwarts rather than amplifies each. Predictably, the o-section includes poetry, concluding with a verse of Keats that begins with a pre-Miltonic invocation (“Mother of Hermes!”) and ends with a post-Wordsworthian recuperation (Keats’s “Rich in the simple worship of a day” echoing Wordsworth’s “simple produce of the common day”), in which Keats associates himself with each in order to distinguish himself from both, situating his verse as a kind of excess that comprehends all of literary history.

A shorter omission toward the end of the letter is also an apology, in which Keats casts Reynolds as a “Tutor” forced to hear a tedious recitation, explaining that “I like to say my lesson to one who will endure my tediousness for my own sake.” While Keats’s apologies are clearly structured by his own overdetermined insecurities (especially his sociocultural class disabilities), returning as they

do to the figure of the schoolboy, they are also conventional markers of discursive change. Early literary critics, like doctors who say, "Now this might sting a bit," often apologize for their obtrusions. In casting himself as trying out the stance of "cultural critic" in the privacy of a letter, Keats situates the professional within the compass of personal friendship, *and vice versa*: the privacy or interiority of the "personal letter" appears as a kind of staging area; it is made into an interiority in order to be converted into a reserve for public production.

The third omitted block, which warrants full citation, begins again with a mock-apologetic metacomment:

—So you see how I have run away from Wordsworth, and Milton; and shall still run away from what was in my head, to observe, that some kind of letters are good squares others handsome ovals, and others some orbicular, others spheroid—and why should there not be another species with two rough edges like a Rat-trap? I hope you will find all my long letters of that species, and all will be well; for by merely touching the spring delicately and etherially, the rough edged will fly immediately into a proper compactness, and thus you may make a good wholesome loaf, with your own leaven in it, of my fragments—If you cannot find this said Rat-trap sufficiently tractable—alas for me, it being an impossibility in grain for my ink to stain otherwise: if I scribble long letters I must play my vagaries. I must be too heavy, or too light, for whole pages— I must be quaint and free of Tropes and figures—I must play my draughts as I please, and for my advantage and your erudition, crown a white with a black, or a black with a white, and move into black or white, far and near as I please—I must go from Hazlitt to Patmore, and make Wordsworth and Coleman play at leap-frog—or keep one of them down a whole half holiday at fly the garter—"From Gray to Gay, from Little to Shakespeare"— Also as a long cause requires two or more sittings of the Court, so a long letter will require two or more sittings of the Breech wherefore I shall resume after dinner.—

Have you not seen a Gull, an orc, a sea Mew, or any thing to bring this Line to a proper length, and also fill up this clear part: that like the Gull I may dip—I hope, not out of sight—and also, like a Gull, I hope to be lucky in a good sized fish—This crossing a letter is not without its association—for chequer work leads us naturally to a Milkmaid, a Milkmaid to Hogarth Hogarth to Shakespeare Shakespear to Hazlitt—Hazlitt to Shakespeare and thus by merely pulling an apron string we set a pretty peal of Chimes at work—Let them chime on while, with your patience,—I will return to Wordsworth— (1970, 93–94)

Here, then, Keats deploys a very different set of metaphors: animals, hunting and fishing, cooking and eating, games and holidays, clothes, and finally, cacophonous noise. First, Keats divides the textual field of letters into a domain of smooth, Euclid-

ean geometry (i.e., where “parallels” can be drawn and blueprints made) and a fractal “species with two rough edges,” the fragmentation of which is to motivate the reader’s interpretive labor. The rough edges of the letter are, presumably, those that divide the authoritatively measuring blocks of text from the apologetic, metacommenting, and playful: the dotted line along which the *Norton* breaks the text into i and o. But since the long letter as a genre must be, by Keats’s terms, a mix of the mixed (the o-sections) and the unmixed (the i-sections), the edge between rough and smooth is itself rough, a fractal interpenetration rather than a simple border.

In contradistinction, again, to the progressivist time line that Keats establishes in the i-sections, the checkerboard metaphor situates Keats the correspondent/poet as free from rules of sequence in time and space: the field of literature is no longer organized into domains ruled by individual authors (as in the octave of “Chapman’s Homer”) but an intertextually fluid one (as in that poem’s sestet). The field is not, as in the i-sections, normalized or axiologized with reference to a great author, but organized as the play of a metonymic fluidity against a uniform grid; it is the uniformity, black-and-white binarity, and Euclidean regularity of this grid that enables the nonlinear and lawless play of the poet to appear as such.

The checkerboard metaphor proleptically anticipates the actual *crossing* of the letter, which retroactively validates it. In writing the letter, Keats anticipates his crossing by beginning the metaphor before he begins to cross the letter; for the reader, though, the letter is “always already” crossed: word and thing seem always to have been made in each other’s image.

Keats mixes metaphors conspicuously throughout and comments on this mixing. After the long section of metacomment, he shifts via metaphor (comically now characterizing his consideration of Wordsworth and Milton as a court proceeding) into what I will call “subcommentary.” The “sittings of the Breech” that a “long cause requires” make the o-sections (the regularly recurring gaps or recesses in the literary-critical deliberations) into a fractal echo of the recesses from the recesses (the breaks Keats takes from the breaks he takes from his deliberations). Subcommentary consists of acknowledgment of the material conditions of the letter’s production. First, that it is produced in real time (“I shall resume after dinner”) and real space, the material constraint of the page end (and, with it, the anticipated necessity of “crossing”) being marshaled as the enabling condition for the play of further troping. Keats marks that he pauses not out of some internal necessity of organic form, but where external temporal, physical, and spatial constraints overdetermine a pause: “I shall resume after dinner” coincides with the end of the page.

The metonymic sequence that segues into the following i-section presumably works as follows: *chequer work* is the pattern sewn or worn by a *milkmaid*, who is the type of rural subject painted by *Hogarth*, who also painted scenes from *Shakespeare*, who was the object of literary criticism by *Hazlitt*, who criticized *Shakespeare*, who was the object . . . (and so on). The sequence proceeds like a stochastic process that finally spirals back to the circle of author and critic, each of whose work suggests and repetitively cross-authorizes the other. “By merely pulling an apron string we set a Pretty peal of Chimes at work,” just as the two edges of the Rat-trap letter are configured “by merely touching the spring delicately and etherially.” The metonymy/metaphor that closes the o-section and opens the i-section is one of only two images of sound and of woman that appear in the letter. The other, in the first o-section, associates the biblical Eve with the sound of a thunderclap. In this one, a needy child or would-be seducer pulls the apron string of a maid and sets off a “pretty peal” (slang term for a woman’s scolding [see *1811 Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*]). Having reintroduced the critic-poet relation, then, Keats can “return to Wordsworth—whether or no he has an extended vision,” the measurement of masculine vision and dualistic whether-or-no scenario set in stark contrast to a feminine cacophony of ringing sound that can’t be resolved or managed, merely touched off and then left to run its own course (“let them chime on a while . . .”).

The woman/sound image, erupting near the center of the long letter, functions—like the o-section in which it appears—as a fractal deterritorialization that both undermines and stabilizes the territoriality around it. The child/man, reconnected briefly by the umbilical apron string to the milkmaid, developmentally proceeds to symbolic masculine differentiations, while the semiotic choral riffing is reduced to a kind of background Muzak. And yet, wound like a golf ball’s core or curled up in the fluid womb of language or spinning like the inner ring of a gyroscope, in the middle of the milkmaid metaphor/metonym movement, the surgeon finds again those dead ringers in the tower, the would-be self-sufficient yin-yang twins of male homosociality, critic and poet, always about to be born or aborted.

The dependence of the i-sections on the o-sections they emerge from and stand out against is effaced insofar as the i-sections operate by exclusion, while the o-sections operate by inclusion. Thus the i-sections appear to stand alone and so can be printed separately without anything seeming to be missing, while the o-sections are doubly contingent, not only on the content of the i-sections on which they comment, but on the materiality of the letter itself. The i-sections define the realm of evaluative disciplinary standards as a public and homosocial field seem-

ingly oriented by the alignment of metaphors of orientation; the o-sections are carnivalesque, feminized, interruptive, and yet foundational. The metaphor of woman and cacophonous noise marks the place where signifier and signified become radically non-self-identical, since *sound* is precisely *not* what signifies in the written letter, while the visual resonance of the grid anchors signifier and signified by self-similarity.

It is easy to see the multiple cross-codings of hierarchized binaries that are configured by the letter's alternating sections, which align masculine and feminine with criticism and poetry, with visual and aural, and so on. Even so, the power enacted here does not operate simply by asserting the adequacy of these binary distinctions but by their decomposition: like a gene, it unzips in order to recombine and mutate. The two halves of the letter drop away, like a Cheshire cat that disappears leaving only its smile. The letter leaves a textual history as a zipper-like wake that is continually produced, continually expands, and continually disappears in a cleavage that is always being opened and shut. The epitaph Keats requested for himself—"Here lies one whose name was writ on water"—defines a logic by which the text continues to be animated by the death of the author. Another "late" Keats text works up this logic into the temporal and thermo/psychodynamic contradiction of a spookily manipulative come-on:

This living hand, now warm and capable
Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold
And in the icy silence of the tomb,
So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights
That thou would wish thy own heart dry of blood,
So in my veins red life might stream again,
And thou be conscience-calm'd. See, here it is—
I hold it towards you.
(Keats 1978, 503)

Interference of Text and Work in Stevens's "Palm"

The nothingness was a nakedness, a point

Beyond which thought could not progress as thought.

He had to choose. But It was not a choice

Between excluding things. It was not a choice

Between, but of. He chose to include the things
 That in each other are included, the whole,
 The complicate, the amassing harmony.
 —Wallace Stevens, “Notes
 toward a Supreme Fiction”

The palm at the end of the mind,

Beyond the last thought, rises

In the bronze decor,

A gold-feathered bird

Sings in the palm, without human meaning,

Without human feeling, a foreign song.

You know then that it is not the reason

That makes us happy or unhappy.

The bird sings. Its feathers shine.

The palm stands on the edge of space.

The wind moves slowly in the branches.

The bird's fire-fangled feathers dangle down.

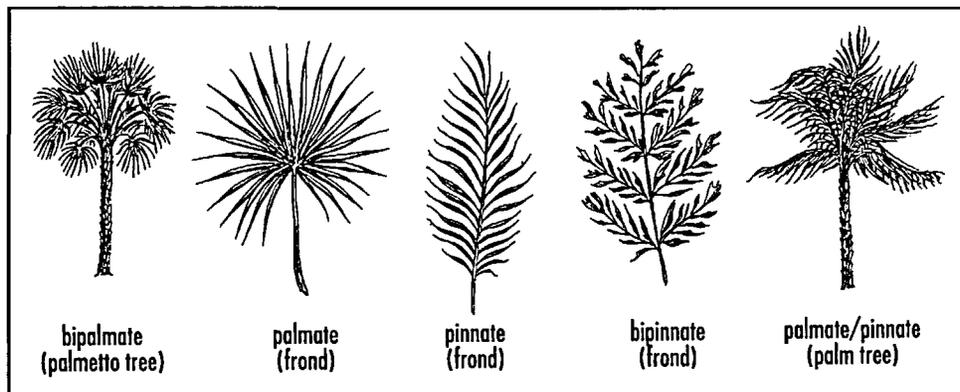
—Wallace Stevens, “Of Mere Being”

The moving but unintelligible voice of the Other is thematized in Stevens's enigmatic poem “Of Mere Being” as the typically Romantic “foreign song” of the bird; the narrator's relation to the bird in the palm is a model for the reader's relation to the poem, whose hypnotic suggestions tell you what you see and what “you know.”

“The end of the mind” must be a place where mind meets something that is not mind (something other — matter, the body); in a spatial sense, where it meets the world (the senses), if these are at least heuristically differentiable. In a temporal sense, the point of death: Stevens composed the poem as he faced imminent death by cancer; it seems to have been his last poem. But *the mind* need not refer only to an individual mind in either a narrowly autobiographical or phenomenological sense; the mind of the human or any other species will do, even most broadly the existence of “mind” in the universe.

Presumably, what the poem calls *thought* ends before what it calls *mind*, since the palm is at the mind’s end but beyond the last thought. But even temporally, what is “beyond the last thought”? The *next* thought (the rest of the poem) or something categorically different, the extinction of thought? Or might we be looking backwards in time to a place where thought or mind are supposed to arise out of what is not mind, or out of another mind or thought? What kind of difference is being engaged?

The figure of “bronze decor” continues the careful process of simultaneous location and dislocation that constitutes the poem. Bronze, in Stevens’s poetic palette, often signifies the color of the sea at sunset, an image that here echoes the sense of being at a boundary in space and in time. In any case, even this referential fixation cannot reduce, merely by substituting for interpretation a simplistic “decoding,” the manifold of readings already suggested. Are we supposed to be walking along a beach in the flux of waves or approaching shore from a sea journey (perpendicular readings), stranded alone on an island staring at a mirage in the air, or sitting in some tacky public space staring out the window at a “real” palm or at some

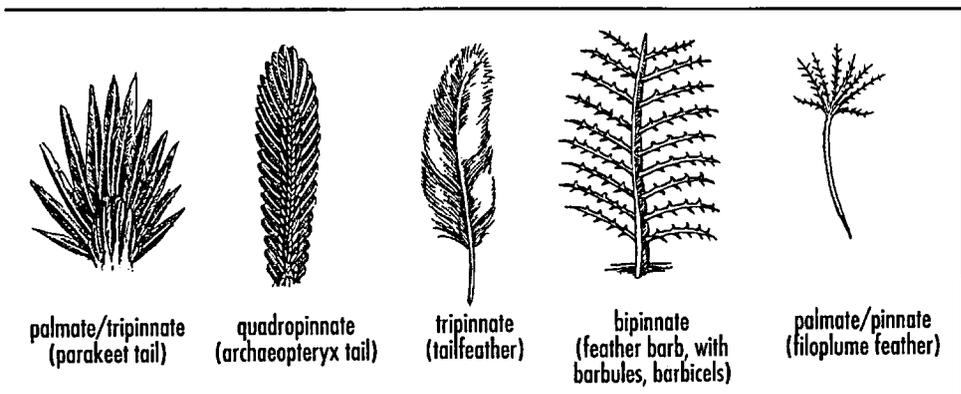


tropical scene on a cocktail napkin? Which of these, that is, stands best for what the writer or reader of the poem is actually doing or experiencing in writing or reading the poem?

Innumerable differences (between phases, spaces, times, readings) arise and multiply as a series of bifurcations (individual/species, time/space, forward/backward, and so on) that between them generate a combinatory more complex than the act of interpretation can sustain at once, but this multiplication of differences (the maintenance of ambiguities) is also how the poem produces a similarity dimension by folding back on itself.

The palm, at least at first, could refer either to a tree or to the palm of a hand. Rather than trying to distinguish between these (or even by virtue of having to pick one and exclude the other), the reader is invited to notice a structural similarity: in either case, a kind of branching or flowering, an outward bifurcation: the tree a single trunk flowering along its length and finally into an explosion of frond-stems that also radiate into veined leaves; the human palm a kind of flowering of bones and nerves; the brain an involuted flowering at the end of its spinal trunk. Each of these figures may be taken to embody temporal (ontogenetic and phylogenetic) and spatial structures.

Like its first line, the poem's concluding line suggests that something is going on in the "similarity dimension" of the poem, inviting the reader in visualizing the image to notice that the bird's dangling feathers are barely distinguishable from the fronds of the palm in which it sits. I imagine a bird of paradise (although almost any bird would suffice), its dangling tail two long threadlike shafts, each tipped with a fan of feathers, which, like the palms, comprise another series of



smaller splittings. But, importantly, difference as well as similarity inheres *within* palm and feather as well as *between*: in fact, palm leaves come in two basic shapes, “palmate” (palm or fan-shaped) and “pinnate” (feather-shaped); palms are notable for self-similarity (between the shapes of tree, leaf, and leaflet) and/or self-difference (that is, palms may alternate, across scale, between being palm-shaped and feather-shaped). Bird tails, too, may be roughly palm- or feather-shaped, and are strikingly self-similar (between tail shape, feather, barb, barbule, barbicle) or self-different (as in “filoplumes,” which alternate across scale between palm and feather shapes).

We cannot tell (because the poem does not tell) whether the bird’s feathers shine and are “fire-fangled” with iridescent color of their own or with the tincture of the sunset; that is, we cannot tell whether this iridescence is an intrinsic or interactive phenomenon, or whether the wave form (light, in this case) is differentiable from the particular network of matter (feathers) over which it plays. The same indeterminacy holds for the various wave forms that play across various bifurcating networks of matter in the poem: the synaptic electricity of thought and sensation, the sound of the song, the wind in the branches. This figural complex of wave forms rising and falling, unintelligible speech, and iridescence is an ongoing one in Stevens’s poetry, from the famous opening stanzas of “The Idea of Order at Key West” to “Notes toward a Supreme Fiction,” in which “the grossest iridescence of ocean / Howls hoo and rises and howls hoo and falls” (209) and so on.

The palm a poem makes—like the “footsteps” of textual distribution in Shelley’s “Mask of Anarchy”—is also a structure in “real” space-time. Mapping the extension of the poem (that is, every concrete instantiation of it) yields another palmate diagram. Stevens’s original typescript of the poem would appear as a line extending through space-time until the poem is copied, at which point another line would diverge, and so on, exploding into a firework at various technological “nodes of production” each time it is published, anthologized, or cited in published works. Since this diagram cannot show where the poem is being read (versus where copies simply exist), acts of reading might be marked as Stevensian iridescences.

Holly Stevens, the poet’s daughter and editor, develops this self-similar dimension by using the poem’s first line to title her collection of her father’s poetry, suggesting that his entire poetic output forms a “palm at the end of the mind.” The titling is metonymic (synechdochic) and metaphoric, suggesting that a single line can “stand for” the body of work in which it appears.

The problem with the diagram is that it maintains the author as a node into which (presumably) a root system of other poems converges and from which the poem in question originates, marking the author as a refractive interval, a

constriction or singularity between reading and writing in an essentially linear progress. My text, then, constitutes another node from which issue more copies of the poem, a synapse in the brain of postindustrial capitalism. But my language knows something that I do not; something transmits itself through the text that I cannot know because it is a phenomenon of a longer wavelength than my own subjectivity. Not merely Stevens's poem nor the genre of poetry that uses me as its host but language itself comes to seem an alien intelligence by which I am instrumentalized.

If we superimpose a particular parameter on the mapping of the poem's extension—say, “reader's cultural class” (as defined by a set of variables such as education and family of origin)—we would no doubt find that the two maps conform closely. Likewise we might observe an even more radical limitation in discursive space. If our diagram were able to represent instances where the poem was read, discussed, or written about, we would find that these were clustered around literature classes, poetry workshops, literary journals, and so on, and that these instances overlap broadly with contemporary maps of the distribution of other poetry (and of this book). Stevens, then, contemplates the posthumous discursive extension of his body in a discursive space of “poetry” that appears to be closed.

When we consider the poem as an intertextual object, it will be more difficult to maintain the vision of the palm. One refers outward to a figural complex or set of codes established as a formally closed system in Stevens's body of work, and beyond such an individual body to the generic body of poetry. Stevens's images are of course overdetermined in relation to any number of other poems: Marvell's embowered soul-bird that “waves in its plumes the various light”; Wordsworth's “solitary reaper,” singing her foreign song; Yeats's golden nightingale; and so on and on. Stevens is a bird singing in the branches of the distribution of these texts that converge in his own text as a singing bird; Stevens's critics sing, in turn, in all these branches, making each bird and each song a branching embedded within a branching. The palmate structure (a genealogical tree of texts sprouting from the patriarchal author's loins) gets continually lost in the fractal density of these structures.

Ambiguous echoes of this grand intertextual scale also structure the chaotic complexity of the signifier at a more and more microscopic level of the poem. Varying syntactic units of the poem (I will limit myself to considering sentences) play across unvarying formal units (three-line stanzas) in a seemingly schematic way: first a six-line sentence that comprises two stanzas, then a two-line sentence and two half-line sentences that comprise a stanza, then three single-line sentences that comprise a stanza. If there is a narrative logic to this movement, it

can only proceed as a stochastic process that bounces between permutations, coming closer to a closure that is a closure because it establishes an optimal congruence between aural, grammatical, and visual organization (the three single-line sentences that comprise the final stanza). Within these parameters, anyway, the poem proceeds through permutations of difference (between sentence, line, and stanza) to maximum similarity. However, by considering these relations of auditory to visual units statically and statistically (as a set of “spatial” possibilities), it is just as easy to maintain that the poem maximizes difference rather than similarity by distributing sentences that can be longer than, shorter than, or equal to stanzas or to lines. Only one of these six possibilities seems not to be provided by the poem: no sentence is exactly one stanza long. There is, however, one point of indeterminacy in this schema, a grammatical “error,” in fact, between the first and second stanza. The third line forms a dependent clause that, on first reading anyway, would seem to *conclude* a sentence that comprises the first stanza (thus one allows the pitch of one’s voice to fall with the final syllable). However, the same line also functions as the *beginning* clause for the subsequent three lines (in which case one would have to read the final syllable with rising pitch). Because this “error” allows several possibilities to overlap, the first and second three lines also form syntactically complete sentences comprising a stanza each. Thus the congruence and incongruence of units—their openness and closure—do not simply alternate but coexist. This overlap is marked by the crux of syntactic indeterminacy that problematizes the articulation of the final syllable of the first stanza: in order to allow for all possibilities, one must level the pitch and stress over the final two syllables. This ensures that one cannot read the poem as a linear progression, since what follows alters the articulation of what precedes it; that is, the poem marks as a literal contradiction in the signifier—the binary bit of sound-information that concludes the stanza—what otherwise occurs as a problematic in the hermeneutic process of its writing or reading—for example, the challenge to rectify categories and figures of “rising” and “falling.”

The final word of the first stanza is a crux in the “work” of the poem as well as in the text. Holly Stevens notes that, “as printed in *Opus Posthumous* . . . , the last word of the third line is ‘distance.’ ‘Decor’ is the word appearing in the original typescript, and has been restored here” (Stevens 1972, 404). When, how, or if Wallace Stevens was responsible for the change between typescript and first published version remains a question, but here above all it would seem to go against the author’s intention to follow the classical textual critic’s mandate to decide *between* versions by determining the author’s final intention (the “first” and “final” inten-

tion being nearly simultaneous in this case, in any case). All we can say is that the poem—as a work—vacillates between “distance” and “decor,” bifurcating it into two branches. The phonic choice between the words can be described as an opposition between oppositions between oppositions: (stressed/unstressed versus unstressed/stressed) versus (long consonants/short vowels versus long vowels/short consonants). These are among the primary oppositions (or transpositions) across which the poem makes its music, moving from a predominance of “long” consonants through a predominance of long vowels to find resolution in a profoundly mixed state. The difference between “distance” and “decor” is no less stark in the signified, where “bronze distance” and “bronze decor” turn on the axes of nature and culture, exteriority and interiority, energy (bronze as quality of light) and matter (bronze as a material substance).

The choice between “decor” and “distance” is also, more subtly, a visual one at the level of the signifier. The title begins a series of phrases that reproduce the figure of the palm as a series of words that expand in length: “Of Mere Being . . . the last thought . . . in the palm” and so on. It would be impossible to systematize these in any thoroughgoing way; it is in fact difficult to establish that such occurrences are anything more than accidents of ordinary language, but the subliminal figure only assumes significance where the poem most resonantly aligns it with aural, grammatical, and formal units (lines, clauses, caesurae, and so on), using it to shape word sequences into expansions and contractions toward closure. Predictably, this structure becomes most resonant in the last stanza. Given that the final word of the first stanza is a crux in a number of the signifying parameters of the poem, it is not surprising that it should be so in the letter-distribution curve as well, where the choice between the two words is between expansion and contraction.

Similar visual/aural play—such as the transposition between “n” and “g” in “foreign song” or the vertical transposition between the initial letters of “mind” and “wind”—is recruited into the signifying system; in *w* and *m*, for example, one may find again the frayings of rising palm and dangling feathers. Again, the visual transposition would not signify if it were not aligned with a vocal one—an *m* is made with closed lips, *w* with lips open to produce the wind that makes the sound—and a similar opposition in the signified: mind is a (formally) closed system (an organism); wind is not. This opposition is a primary conceptual engine of the poem. *Should the difference be treated as one of degree or kind? It's an open-and-shut case.* Wind, generated by temperature differentials, forms a complex dynamical system—a kind of fluid cortex around the earth's crust. The poem attempts to engage

the meaningless differentials of language (information) around which mind or meaning is generated.

In the signifier's space, it is the letter *d* that is "at the end of the mind." In fact, the poem distributes the letter carefully, beginning by *ending* words with it and concluding (both the first stanza and the whole poem) by *beginning* words with it. The shape of the letter has already been traced in the stochastic but determined swerving back that constitutes the movement of syntax in the poem; could *d* be the shape of a stem and leaf, or a tailfeather? This observation would again be arbitrary if the poem did not play so consistently with "rhymed" and opposed shapes of letters rising and dangling, open and closed, beginning and ending key words. Here at the most microscopic signifying scale (the letter), it is most difficult to distinguish noise from information, accident from intent, critic's overreading from author's overwriting. At the least, the use of *d* to accentuate consonant-stressed word endings ("end," "mind," "beyond") makes its position at the beginning of the final word (of the first stanza and poem) function to make the reader/listener see/hear how the word dangles from a *d*. It matters less what word is "chosen" as the final word of the first stanza, as long as it begins with the letter *d*, since the poem establishes a system in which the letter *d* is overdetermined in ways that dictate its placement. This overdetermination is, of course, not true of ordinary language but therefore of a particular kind of poetry (which concerns itself somewhat solipsistically with the physicality of its signifiers) that seeks to constitute a system in which the arbitrariness of language are made to signify, in which random noise (numbers and positions and shapes of letters) is converted not merely to information but—through its fractal engagement in the signifying structures of the poem—into meaning, the "rage for order." Why bother? Even if we could establish that, as Blake asserted, "Poetry admits not a Letter that is Insignificant" (560), what is gained, when Stevens's use of letters is not even generalizable to his other poems? If only it were not remarkable as high-poetic strategy, it would be the unmarkedness of this difference "that makes us happy or unhappy," that tells us we are in contact with an Other, a "foreign song."

The poem moves as an entity across a number of parameters at once. The evolution of these parameters is nonsynchronous; one becomes more orderly as entropy increases in another; one swerves back as another frays outward. An uncertainty principle operates in reading; it seems that when one parameter is brought under control, others wriggle away. Instead of finding an elementary particle as we direct our attention to more and more minute particulars of the poem, we find that particles multiply.

In trying to treat the poem as a formally closed system, one finds that it is a subsystem of other larger systems, the meander of a breeze in a cortex of intertextual currents, where meaning is made by simultaneous alignment and misalignment of structure across scale and dimension of discursive space-time. The discursively incestuous swerves inward and exogamously outward meet everywhere at a singularity; meaning is the zippery wake of information backward across our bodies swimming in language.

F

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V

E

and trees” to which the subject is reduced in “A Slumber” to the almost page-long list of performers and vendors at London’s Saint Bartholomew’s Fair (in *The Prelude* [1979, 262–64]), a collective assemblage that constitutes for Wordsworth a “Parliament of Monsters” (cultural democracy being as horrific for the poet as more democratic representation in the actual Parliament had been for Burke). Like the “almost unendurable” sentences of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* analyzed by Jon Klancher, Wordsworth’s trick of subordinating even a page-long list to the imperial reach of his syntax enacts a “victory over dispersion . . . again and again rehearsed in language,” by which “the baffling swarm of different people and social classes can now be read for its latent *unity*” (Klancher 1987, 53, 57–58).

Like Baillie’s “Evening,” Blake’s “Nurse’s Song” from the *Songs of Innocence* also turns on a liminal moment between day and night but takes this liminality as an occasion in which power is negotiated. The lyric turns on a dispute between a nanny and her charges: she orders the children to “come home” and “leave off play” because “the sun is gone down”; they respond, “No, no, let us play, for it is yet day”; she acquiesces (“Well, well, go & play till the light fades away”); and finally “The little ones leaped & shouted & laugh’d” (note again the list of noises), “And all the hills echoed” (1982, 15). “Innocence” here takes the form of a nonbinarity between binarity (day and night divided by the punctual moment of sunset) and nonbinarity (the fading light in which the moment is embedded, making the boundary negotiable). Play plays with its edge, requiring this liminal time (or another similar ambiguity) in order to count as play. The echoing hills mark the recursive “binary decomposition” of play at its edge. Even if it is apparently temporally contained, the noise of liminality (rather than the punctual sunset) is nonetheless the definitive one for the temporality in which it occurs; it is the “Moment in each Day that Satan cannot find / Nor can his Watch Fiends find it,” as Blake described it elsewhere (1982, 136).

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The nurse of Blake’s companion piece from the “Songs of Experience,” by contrast, is first embarrassed by remembering the days of her youth, then summarily orders the children home. This time the last word is hers: “Your spring & your day are wasted in play, / And your winter and night in disguise” (23). Against the echoic decomposition that ends the first “Nurse’s Song” is set the echoic reso-

Fractal Logics of Romanticism: **Rhythming**

Introduction: Romantic Dysrhythmia

Romantic devaluation of strictly metered verse and the privileging of aesthetic complexity and of “organic” literary form (featuring mixed and “self-organizing” patterns, and patterns of patterns or “plaids”) can be understood in relation to the real-time dysrhythmia that came to distinguish intellectual and professional labor (a distinction still preserved in the college student’s “all-nighter” and the medical intern’s long shifts as professionalizing “hazing rituals”). C. S. Whitaker (1970) characterized as dysrhythmic the clash between traditional and modern structures in twentieth-century Nigeria; at issue here is modernity’s valorization and attempted monopolization of dysrhythmia as a mark of distinction. Dysrhythmia in this sense—chaotic or complex rhythm rather than disorder—distinguishes the professional at once from the agricultural laborer, subject both to the regularity of diurnal and seasonal rhythms and to their unpredictable fluctuations, and from the factory worker, subject to industrial capitalism’s increasingly regularized alternation of labor and leisure and to its increasingly unpredictable economic cycles. In other words, chaos is distinguished from both the despotism of order and the terrorism of disorder. But emergent professionalism does not add a new or more complex temporal riff on top of the monotonous bass or drumbeat of traditional work, which had its own well-established ways of making chaotic peace with the implacable rhythms on which it depended.

Instead, the mix is altered systematically to produce the contrast by squeezing out casual labor and artisanal labor (carried on in relative temporal freedom), and so on. Professionalism is dysrhythmed against the regularization of nonprofessional labor.

Throughout subsequent remixings (such as the complex relations of salaried to wage labor), the literary writer has continued to be an important liminal figure. Such a writer may be “working” at any time or place or at all times and places (for example, using personal relationships as fodder for a new novel) or, on the other hand, doesn’t seem to work at all. Romantic writers repeatedly valorize the dysrhythmia that distinguishes their labor: Coleridge’s night meditations when the other “inmates” of his cottage are at rest (in “Frost at Midnight”), Blake’s “wandering” through the “chartered streets” of “London,” Wordsworth’s distinction from Lucy’s “diurnal round,” Keats’s poetic record of his all-night reading set against those who owe “fealty to Apollo” (god of the sun as well as of poetry). Another elegant twist on this distinction can be found in De Quincey’s record (in his *Confessions*) of taking opium on Saturday nights so he could mingle with “the poor” (that is, those who must work for a living, and who have just received their weekly wages) and thereby simulate for himself a periodic cycle of labor and leisure even though he “had no labours that I rested from; no wages to receive” (1950, 304).

A figurative combinatory of noise and regularity or harmony (one that is both surprisingly consistent and permutationally variable) is discernible in many poems of the period.

In “The Thresher’s Labor,” Stephen Duck contrasts the monotonous regularity of harvesting with the noise of harvest’s end—its “stunning Clamours,” “Bells, and clashing Whips, . . . And rattling Waggon . . . And loud Huzza’s” (1985, 360–61). Thompson calls this “an obligatory set-piece in eighteenth-century farming poetry,” but one that marks nonetheless a “moment at which older collective rhythms break through the new” as alienated labor gives way to a common satisfaction that includes a “momentary obliteration of social distinctions” (1993, 361).

Joanna Baillie’s 1790 account of the evening of “A Summer Day” is no less a set piece, but Baillie depicts a Romanticized organic rural community poised in transit between field and village, work and play, day and night. Rather than setting cacophonous “older collective rhythms” against a regularized and alienated labor that they can merely punctuate, Baillie aestheticizes the two into the *concordia discord* of a nostalgic chaos:

The village, lone and silent through the day,
Receiving from the fields its merry bands,

Sends forth its evening sound, confused but cheerful;
 Whilst dogs and children, eager housewives' tongues,
 And true-love ditties, in no plaintive strain
 By shrill-voiced maid at open window sung;
 The lowing of the home-returning kine,
 The herd's low droning trump, and tinkling bell
 Tied to the collar of his favorite sheep,
 Make no contemptible variety
 To ears not over-nice.
 (Lonsdale 1990, 432)

In spite of their differences, the two poems both mark “older collective rhythms” by *lists* that level syntactic subordination into a series of sound-figures connected only by commas or “ands”; that is, to a “horizontal” series in which each element is in some sense equivalent. This distinguishing feature closely relates listing with poeticity itself insofar as poetry strings words together into equivalent rhythmic units (metrical feet), or because of their equivalence in sound (as in rhyme).

The poetic list has continued to function as a figure of insubordination, excess, and “leveling” of difference. Its genealogy can be traced back through Ginsberg’s *Howl* (which contains a four-page run-on sentence comprising lists of lists of lists) and back through Whitman at least to Keats and Blake, who used lists to valorize sensual and mystical excess. Wordsworth, on the other hand, tended to use lists to stigmatize insubordinate levelings of difference, from the “rocks, and stones,

List as Argument. The history of the list as a trope of insubordination makes it a characteristically postmodern argumentative device: Eve Sedgwick’s list of some of the ways that people understand their sexualities has compelling argumentative force because it sprawls across and implicates (rather than dialectically transcending) the supposedly definitive binary oppositions that organize hegemonic sexual difference (e.g., male/female, straight/gay, top/bottom, butch/femme, nature/nurture, practice/identity, fantasy/reality, and so on). Here’s a selection:

Even identical genital acts mean very different things to different people.

To some people, the nimbus of “the sexual” seems scarcely to extend beyond the boundaries of discrete genital acts; to others, it enfolds them loosely or floats virtually free of them.

Sexuality makes up a large share of the self-perceived identity of some people, a small share of others’.

Many people have their richest mental/emotional involvement with sexual acts that they don’t do, or even don’t want to do.

For some people, the preference for a certain sexual object, act, role, zone, or scenario is so immemorial and durable that it can only be experienced as innate; for others, it appears to come late or to feel aleatory or discretionary. (Sedgwick 1990, 25)

and trees” to which the subject is reduced in “A Slumber” to the almost page-long list of performers and vendors at London’s Saint Bartholomew’s Fair (in *The Prelude* [1979, 262–64]), a collective assemblage that constitutes for Wordsworth a “Parliament of Monsters” (cultural democracy being as horrific for the poet as more democratic representation in the actual Parliament had been for Burke). Like the “almost unendurable” sentences of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* analyzed by Jon Klancher, Wordsworth’s trick of subordinating even a page-long list to the imperial reach of his syntax enacts a “victory over dispersion . . . again and again rehearsed in language,” by which “the baffling swarm of different people and social classes can now be read for its latent *unity*” (Klancher 1987, 53, 57–58).

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The nurse of Blake’s companion piece from the “Songs of Experience,” by contrast, is first embarrassed by remembering the days of her youth, then summarily orders the children home. This time the last word is hers: “Your spring & your day are wasted in play, / And your winter and night in disguise” (23). Against the echoic decomposition that ends the first “Nurse’s Song” is set the echoic reso-

nance that ends this one: the conventionally self-similar “scaling” relation between a life, a seasonal year, and a single day depends on alignment of the binarities of youth/age, spring/winter, day/night. Each of these are aligned in turn with the curious opposition of “play” and “disguise.” “Experience” takes the form of a binary between binarity and nonbinarity, impoverishing both play and work as “wasted” time; play because it brings no profit, and work because it brings no pleasure. The nurse of “Experience” seems to be caught between two economies, one of bourgeois work-discipline in which time is money, and an earlier one in which gratuitous waste or bestowal of time and money is the supreme marker of wealth and power. The nurse’s role is also caught between two frameworks: a precapitalist or paternalistic economy (which situates the nurse as a kind of family member, with certain discretionary powers) and the other a capitalist one in which the home-centeredness of the nurse’s occupation tends not to make her labor relatively less alienated but only particularly low status; here the nurse enacts and reproduces her own subordination, in her relation to her charges. The temporal scenario whereby the nurse’s remembered past is rigidly separated from the stern disciplinary role she has adopted also appears as a spatial one: the “disguise” of the disciplinarian (apparently a kind of assumed persona or mask) is dependent on its distinction from the so-called inner child (identified here as a pathetic ruse). This distinction displaces and internalizes what is otherwise a physical distinction between “outside” play and the relatively homebound interiority enforced by winter, night, or old age. The nurse of “Experience” is the subject of a proletarianization vis-à-vis a precapitalist economy of time and status. The “betweenness” that for the first nurse allows a suspension of hierarchical power makes the second nurse and her charges especially subject to it; the terms by which time had been negotiated have ceased to be available. E. P. Thompson traces a similar movement in factory work:

The first generation of factory workers were taught by their masters the importance of time; the second generation formed their short-time committees in the ten-hour movement; the third generation struck for overtime or time-and-a-half. They had accepted the categories of their employers and learned to fight back within them. They had learned their lesson, that time is money, only too well. (Thompson 1993, 390)

While the liminality of nurses, artisans, mothers, pieceworkers, and other home laborers is being devalued with respect to regularized labor, the temporal liminality of professional labor is being valorized. Keats’s “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer” elegantly marks professionalization as dysrhythming:

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,
 And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
 Round many western islands have I been
 Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
 Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
 That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his desmesne;
 Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
 Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
 Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
 When a new planet swims into his ken;
 Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
 He star'd at the Pacific—and all his men
 Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
 Silent, upon a peak in Darien.
 (Keats 1978, 64)

Keats wrote the sonnet after an all-night reading of Chapman with his old school-teacher, Charles Cowden Clarke, and sent Clarke a copy by the morning post (Norton 1986, 798); that is, he documented the immediacy of its writing by official postmark. His night reading and writing mark him as an intellectual or professional worker, not “rolled round in earth’s diurnal course” but exempt from the rhythms that rule working-class labor. “Fealty to Apollo,” god of the sun as well as of poetry, is situated as belonging to a superseded stage, characterized in the octave as an explicitly feudal mode of literary production: literature is organized into domains ruled by individual authors, who in turn owe “fealty to Apollo” in a pyramidally scaling hierarchy. The nighttime discovery of the astronomer-poet, on the other hand, belongs to a contemporary mode of knowledge production: the swimming planets and oceanic vistas mark the liquidation of cultural capital into raw material for the poet’s own production. The “indetermination” of what Cortez sees, and therefore of what Keats sees in Chapman’s Homer (marked not only by its oceanic expanse but, more explicitly, by the bafflement of Cortez’s men), is that which professional knowledge characterizes as uniquely its own (as against merely “technical” knowledge), attempting to appropriate for itself the unreifiable and incommunicable character of all cultural or “enculturated” knowledge.

In other words, the poem is itself a kind of postmark, written in order to document what first seems to be the reading of Chapman but turns out to be the dysrhythmia of its own writing; in this sense it is *performative*: by reading and

writing about reading at night, Keats performs his professionalization as a poet. The poem is constituted by working up the conditions of its production; the fact of reading and writing at night and the relative social significance of these acts are both repressed and elaborated. Similarly, Keats writes Clarke (and the mediation of cultural power by education) out of the experience, the better to present his own unmediated and solitary communion with genius.

Keats's famous "mistake"—his substitution of the conquistador Cortez for the discoverer Balboa—succinctly reenacts the dynamic, making his reading, by virtue of a literal forgetting of history, no mere discovery but, as it becomes raw material for his writing, a conquest. This poetic parapraxis—overdetermined by the (Britishized) resemblance of "Cortez" to "Keats"—writes the poet into the patrilineage, now reconstituted as an English national literary empire that does not merely inherit the classics but continually liquidates and remakes history to its specifications. Neither the fixity of mappable property nor the reading of Greek can any longer delimit cultural power; the tautology of the genius of genius—like the genius of money, on which it is modeled—is that it can be made to liquidate all other meaning and to generate a surplus in subjectivity itself, fetishizable in the name of the author. The distance between Romantic reader and writer is at once collapsed and made unbridgeable; an infinite but already redundant series of sequels is established: "On First Looking into Keats's 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer,'" and so on. The belated reader plays Achilles to Keats's tortoise.

A survey of the poem's textual history reveals a series of transformations, each of which tells the same story of individuation and professionalization. When writing out the draft, Keats changes "low brow'd Homer" to "deep brow'd Homer": the word "low," crossed out in Keats's handwritten copy, with the word "deep" written above it, makes another nice emblem for the dynamic of the poem, by which Keats enacts his own sociocultural transit from "low-brow" to "deep-brow."

Between the draft and the version published in the *Examiner*, the passively childlike "wond'ring eyes" of Cortez/Keats become the vigilantly predatory "eagle eyes" that look down on the text not as spectacle but as potential raw material. Between the *Examiner* version and the version published in Keats's *Poems* of 1817, the pedestrian admission of previous ignorance and exclusion ("Yet could I never judge what Men could mean") becomes the assertion of present and immediate participation ("Yet did I never breathe its pure serene"). In each case, the changes make the poem "more poetic." It makes little difference whether Keats or others made these changes, since each so succinctly records and performs the "making of a

On the first looking into Chapman's Homer
 Much have I travell'd in the Realms of Gold,
 And many goodly Isles, and Kingdoms seen;
 Round many Western Islands I have been,
 Which Bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
 Of one wide expanse had I been told,
 Which ~~low~~ ^{deep} brow'd Homer call'd as his Demesne:
 Yet could I never judge what Men could mean,
 Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
 Then felt I like some Warbler of the Skies -
 When a new Planet swims into his Skies,
 Or like stout Cortez, when with wood'ning eyes
 He stood at the Pacific, and all his Men
 Look'd at each other with a wild surmise -
 Silent upon a Peak in Darien --

"On First Looking into Chapman's Homer": Keats's Holograph Draft.
 (MS Keats 2.4. By permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University)

difference" that was not Keats's own to begin with: poeticization and professionalization are made to coincide. In any case, posthumous editions continue the fractally pervasive logic of development: between Keats's edition and modern versions, the sonnet *number*, making the poem merely one of many, is omitted in favor of a title. Individuation keeps happening in and to the text; its sequence from posted letter to newspaper entry to author's volume to literary anthology is made to tell the story of the apotheosis of Literature and the figure of the author. The simple placement of the poem in the *Norton Anthology* makes the poem performatively "happy," retroactively validating as a self-fulfilling prophecy Keats's famous boast that he would be "among the English poets" after his death.

Keats's "To Autumn," almost exclusively a palimpsest of lists, offers a veritable apotheosis of dysrhythmia. Its first stanza signifies excess by a list of autumn's attributes and actions in a series of noun phrases and dependent clauses that, in fact, do not yield a grammatical sentence but a list so elaborate that few readers notice this fact; syntactic excess performs what is thematized in images of excess, particularly, in the stanza's concluding lines, the surplus liquidity that is the product of the bee's collective labor. The poem ends with another elaborate list of sounds that, unlike Baillie's "Summer Day," have now been rigorously and hierarchically orchestrated:

Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
 Among the river shallows, borne aloft
 Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
 And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
 Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
 The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
 And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.
 (Keats 1978, 477)

Keats's gnats, completely subject to external forces (the wind that moves them about and the approaching winter that will kill them), can only mourn their imminent death; likewise the lambs, "full-grown" insofar as they will not be allowed to live to maturity, seem impotently to protest their imminent slaughter, a traditional autumn event (at least since the seventeenth century, when lambs began to be raised as much for meat as for wool [Russell 1986, 157]). Among the "hedge-crickets" who next add their song—if these are like the typical poetic crickets of Keats's "The Grasshopper and the Cricket"—some few individuals will manage to cheat death for a time and to eke out a precarious indoor existence singing from a hearth. Next, the whistling "red-breast" is even more privileged, traditionally represented in English poetry as the only bird that continues to sing throughout the winter. Keats's symphony works its way up by increments of pitch and speed from mourning to bleating to singing to whistling and finally twittering, as it works its way up a "chain of being" marked by increasing exemption from regular cyclical change. The "gathering swallows," whose twittering ends the poem, form a collective subject, a body whose dynamically shifting boundaries make it a kind of liquid (another overflowing surplus like the "o'erbrimming" honey that ends the first stanza or the "oozings" of the "cyder-press" that end the second), a class whose restless motion and manic twittering ori-

ents and coordinates its members self-referentially and semiautonomously to each other rather than to the earth, whose rise and imminent transnational migration allow it to transcend the temporal and spatial boundaries at which all other creatures are stationed—in short, perhaps the most highly naturalized and aestheticized version of that old story, the rise of the middle class, identified here with the surplus liquidity by which it is constituted. Keats makes this liquidity subsume and dissolve all other relations by embodying it at every scale, down to the most molecular, the sound and shape of the single letter “s,” which (anticipating Joyce’s *Ulysses*) conspicuously begins, sinuously weaves through, and ends the poem—as well as stanzas and words—from the first stanza’s opening (“Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness”) and concluding line (“summer has o’er-brimmed their clammy cells”) to the final “swallows . . . in the skies.”

Blake’s Cycles

By following a very simple temporal, biographical scenario—William Blake’s falling-out with his employer, William Hayley, between 1800 and 1803 (see Wilson 1971, 145–203)—it becomes clear that, as in each “Nurse’s Song,” the structuration of real time depends on the ambiguity of power relations within the changing economies that configure them. Blake’s relation to Hayley (like the role of the “Nurse”) fluctuates between several very different frameworks. Hayley is, most consistently, Blake’s *employer* insofar as he commissions Blake to complete certain projects specified and judged by Hayley, although Hayley is always only on the verge of becoming an employer, since Blake’s income from Hayley never does more than hover around a subsistence level. On the other hand, Hayley also always seems about to become more of a *patron*, allowing Blake more liberty to control his own productions, but within the quasi-feudal structure of dependence that characterizes patronage. These two ambiguous relationships, in turn, hold the never-quite-materializing promise that Hayley could become a “consumer” (a “patron” in the modern sense) who would buy artworks that Blake produced as an “independent” producer. The ongoing liminality of these relationships produces a temporal trajectory for Blake’s career that remains continually under construction. It is easy to see that such ambiguities are ongoing in the economic status of artists, literati, and intellectuals; what may be less easy to see is that such liminality differentiates them less than it allies them to other apparently more clearly defined economic relations. In following Blake’s cycles, though, it should become clear that the persistence of ambiguity is definitive even for what seem first to be unambiguous points that fixate the cycle.

In September 1800, Blake and his wife Catherine moved to Felpham from London so that William could work more closely with Hayley. Hayley had been encouraging Blake to make a living painting portraits and miniatures, and had already given Blake a commission. Just arrived, Blake writes to sculptor John Flaxman that “Mr Hayley recievd us with his usual brotherly affection” and that “Felpham is a sweet place for Study. because it is more Spiritual than London Heaven opens here on all sides her golden Gates her windows are not obstructed by vapours” (Blake 1982, 710). After about eight months, Blake writes to his friend and patron, Thomas Butts, that “Mr Hayley acts like a Prince”; “Miniature is become a Goddess in my eyes & my Friends in Sussex say that I Excell in the pursuit”; and that “Felpham in particular is the sweetest spot on Earth at least it is so to me & My Good Wife” (715).

Blake’s subsequent letters to Butts, and to his brother James, seem to chronicle a gradual but very thorough disillusionment with Felpham, with Hayley, and with portraiture.

A year after his arrival at Felpham, in September 1801, Blake has begun to set his own “historical” design practice against the miniature and portraiture Hayley paid him for. He writes to Butts that “I have now discovered that without Nature before the painters Eye he can never produce any thing in the walks of Natural Painting Historical Designing is one thing & Portrait Painting another & they are as Distinct as any two Arts can be *Happy would that man be who could unite them*” (717; my emphasis). In November 1802 Blake writes more emphatically to Butts that “Portrait Painting is the direct contrary to Designing & Historical Painting in every respect,” reasserting the incompatibility of painterly naturalism with his own design practice, and now arguing that “the Venetian finesse in Art can *never be united* with the Majesty of Colouring necessary to Historical beauty” (718–19; my emphasis), even citing Sir Joshua Reynolds as an authority (although in Blake’s private marginalia, Reynolds appears exclusively as a nemesis). By July 1803, having decided to leave Felpham, Blake writes even more vehemently: “Nature & Fancy are Two Things & can *Never be joined neither ought any one to attempt it* for it is [Idolatry] & destroys the Soul” (730; my emphasis).

Blake’s “falling out” with Hayley seems to follow a trajectory parallel to these pronouncements about design: his early praise of Hayley is followed by long silence, then oblique hints that all is not right, and finally, outright denunciation. In November 1802 Blake explains to Butts that he has not written because “I have been very Unhappy & could not think of troubling you about it or any of

my real Friends (I have written many letters to you which I burnd & did not send)" (719). At this point, only the mystifying secrecy Blake ascribes to propriety, in conjunction with the reference to "real Friends" (and its implicit contrary, false friends), suggests that Hayley is involved in Blake's unhappiness, for this conjunction will occur repeatedly in Blake's complaints about Hayley.

In January 1803 Blake first mentions his wife's "Ague & Rheumatism" to Butts, now asserting (contradicting an earlier letter) that these "have been her almost constant Enemies which she has combated in vain ever since we have been here"; several lines later, a more gradual onset is again implied: "When I came down here I was more sanguine than I am at present but it was chiefly because I was ignorant of many things which have since occurred & chiefly the unhealthiness of the place" (723). The same etiological nuances problematize the course of Blake's own relation with Hayley, and will finally bear on whether Blake's dis-ease with Hayley was an acute or a chronic condition. For now, Blake asserts that "Mr H I doubt not will do ultimately all that both he & I wish to lift me out of difficulty," but then adds an ambiguous qualification: "but this is no easy matter to a man who having Spiritual Enemies of such formidable magnitude cannot expect to want natural hidden ones." Later in the letter, Blake manages, in spite of himself, to be a bit less ambiguous:

But you have so generously & openly desired that I will divide my griefs with you that I cannot hide what is now become my duty to explain — My unhappiness has arisen from a source which if explord too narrowly might hurt my pecuniary circumstances. As my dependence is on Engraving at present & particularly on the Engravings I have in hand for Mr H. & I find on all hands great objections to my doing any thing but the meer drudgery of business & intimations that if I do not confine myself to this I shall not live. this has always pursud me. (724)

Blake introduces his unhappiness with a propriety that anxiously absolves him of responsibility for what follows (Butts's inquiries make it Blake's "duty to explain"), promising to explicate what has been hidden, but proceeding only to implicate in the course of explaining why he cannot be explicit. Blake mentions Hayley only as one on whom he depends, but again suppresses Hayley's name as a source of the "great objections" and threatening "intimations," as if these were the voices of evil pursuing spirits. Finally, he suggests that the consequence of being a poet and artist in his own right would be death, although (as he goes on to explain) he also "cannot live without doing my duty to lay up treasures in heaven"; that is, by exercising his spiritual gifts as an artist. Material life ("business") and spiritual life (art) seem to be mutually exclusive polarities.

A January 1803 letter to his brother James establishes more clearly the terms of this dynamic. Blake complains openly of the “Agues & Rheumatisms” his wife has suffered in Felpham and states his determination to leave, “because I am now certain of what I have long doubted Viz [that H] is jealous” — namely, as he goes on to specify, of his own artistic and poetic gifts — “& will be no further My friend than he is compelld by circumstances” (725). In light of what follows, such an assertion seems an ironic and wishful projection, for while his own financial circumstances seemed continually to compel Blake to be Hayley’s friend, Hayley needed Blake’s friendship only for the gratification and status of patronizing “my gentle visionary” (as he addressed Blake in a dedication). Blake mentions his uneasiness at Hayley’s envy, and that

This is the uneasiness I spoke of to Mr Butts but I did not tell him so plain & wish you to keep it a secret & to burn this letter because it speaks so plain I told Mr Butts that I did not wish to Explore too much the cause of our determination to leave Felpham because of pecuniary connexions between H & me. (725–26)

An irony that marks levels of financial and professional dependence operates between the “plain speech” Blake allows himself with his brother (with the proviso that the letter be burned), the veiled hints he sends to Butts (a patron and friend), and the secrecy he observes with Hayley. Blake goes on to boast that he is “fully Employd & Well Paid,” having

made it so much H’s interest to employ me that he can no longer treat me with indifference & now it is in my power to stay or return or remove to any other place that I choose, because I am getting before hand in money matters The Profits arising from Publications are immense & I now have it in my power to commence publication with very many formidable works . . . I am now Engraving Six little plates for a little work of Mr H’s [The Triumphs of Temper] for which I am to have 10 Guineas each & the certain profits of that work are a fortune such as would make me independent supposing that I could substantiate such a one of my own & I mean to try many. (726)

These assertions will be belied by Blake’s continual failure to make even a subsistence market for his own work; because the capital and control needed for his “independent” productions remain dependent on his more profitable work for others as an engraver, his class position remains actively ambiguous.

In April 1803 Blake asks Butts to “Congratulate me on my return to London with the full approbation of Mr Hayley” (728); that is, since he has managed to keep his animosity secret from Hayley, thus securing continued sup-

port. As before, Hayley's name arises in this neutral statement only juxtaposed to the complaint that follows but clearly applies to him, although Blake again introduces it with a dark complicity that promises a dangerous revelation:

Now I may say to you what perhaps I should not dare to say to any one else. That I can alone carry on my visionary studies in London Unannoyd . . . & at liberty from the doubts of other Mortals. . . . if a Man is the Enemy of my Spiritual Life while he pretends to be the Friend of my Corporeal. he is a Real Enemy. (728)

Blake's polarity with Hayley has now been fully charged; by July 1803, he sees prospects for profitable employments elsewhere, so

As to Mr H I feel myself at liberty to say as follows upon this ticklish subject . . . Mr H approves of My Designs as little as he does of my Poems and I have been forced to insist on his leaving me in both to my Own Self Will. for I am determind to be no longer Pesterd with his Genteel Ignorance & Polite Disapprobation. I know myself both Poet & Painter & it is not his affected Contempt that can move me to any thing but a more assiduous pursuit of both Arts. (730)

Blake goes on to characterize Hayley's "imbecile attempts to depress Me" and his own "Patience & Forbearance of Injuries upon Injuries," assuring Butts that "if I could have returned to London a Month after my arrival here I should have done so, but I was commanded by my Spiritual friends to bear all to be silent & to go through all without murmuring."

What, then, has happened over the course of three years at Felpham? How should the narrative be written? Did Blake change his mind about Hayley, portraiture, and Felpham as his early hopes came to seem naive in light of subsequent knowledge? Or had he always only tried to put a good face on an always ambivalent relationship and an artistic venture that was never more than an economic expedient, finally (but not quite) giving up as he realized again that "the eagle never lost so much time as when he submitted to learn of the crow" (Blake 1982, 37)? What should be made of the fact that the realization coincides with new possibilities for financial independence, opened partially by what he has learned (and earned) "of the crow"?

In order to establish ironic ambivalence in Blake, one must refer first of all to incongruities *between his texts*. The simple spatial construction (concentric circles or spheres from most private to most public) in which I have located Blake's texts seems to be fixed at its extremes. His private comments and epigrams about Hayley—or about kings, or about Sir Joshua—are continually damning. Blake's public friendship with Hayley, on the other hand, seems also to remain constant and

intact; there is no open falling-out. Indeed, after Blake leaves Felpham his letters to Hayley are more solicitous than ever. Only between the polarized extremes of private blame and public praise—in his letters to his friend and patron Butts—can the narrative structure of a “falling-out” be established.

But the irony of blame by praise begins to appear even in Blake’s early approbations of Hayley, an irony so consistent that it is difficult to support the notion that Blake changed his mind about Hayley at all. “Mr Hayley acts like a Prince,” but which Prince? Could it be . . . Satan? In other writings, Blake most often associates the title of “prince” with wickedness, except by an ironic substitution of the spiritual for the material (as in “I, William Blake, a Mental Prince . . .” [580]). And what of Hayley’s “brotherly affection?” Blake ironizes it in *Milton* as the malignant “officious brotherhood” of Satan, “seeming a brother, being a tyrant, even thinking himself a brother / While he is murdering the just” (101, 100). “Miniature is become a Goddess in my eyes”—but in his prophetic works, Blake reserves the title “Goddess” for the likes of Vala, associated with natural delusion. Incipient spiritual/material polarizations lurk in these statements, although their irony is attenuated by being distributed among his texts. Still, irony can be located, even without reference to other texts, in the language of representation: “acts like a Prince” (but is it only an act, a display?); “become a Goddess in my eyes” (but only, then, as a passing appearance?).

In other early letters, too, the evidence of ironic polarity is at hand. In an 1801 letter, for example, Blake asks Butts to “continue to excuse my want of steady perseverance” in completing a promised miniature, explaining that “I labour incessantly & accomplish not one half of what I intend because my Abstract folly hurries me often away. . . Alas wretched happy ineffectual labourer of times moments that I am” (Blake 1982, 716). He goes on in a similar vein to express “Extreme disappointment at Mr Johnsons forgetfulness, who appointed to call on you but did Not. He is also a happy Abstract known by all his Friends as the most innocent forgetter of his own Interests.” Given these backhanded compliments (praise by blame) to the unbusinesslike habits of the artist, the economic and commercial language render ironic his subsequent praise of Hayley’s “matchless industry” and of Hayley’s *Life of Cowper* as “a most valuable acquisition to Literature.”

The apology for deficient production (“excuse my want of steady perseverance”) appears often in Blake’s writings, as do apologies for what amounts to excessive production. An apology of the latter type occupies a prominent place in Blake’s preface to *Jerusalem*: “The Enthusiasm of the following Poem, the Author hopes [no Reader will think presumptuousness]” (145). Blake’s October 1804 letter

to Hayley is also typical: after a long paragraph setting out his spiritual triumphs, Blake interrupts himself, as if beginning the letter again, "Dear Sir, excuse my enthusiasm or rather madness, for I am really drunk with intellectual vision whenever I take a pencil or graver into my hand, even as I used to be in my youth" (757). It does not seem to matter whether this apology is read as "sincere" or as an emptyly apotropaic gesture, an irony of a kind: it operates in any case as a trough between waves of performative enthusiasm, enacting a withdrawal or denial. Like the coyote in the cartoon, Blake runs off a (rhetorical) cliff but falls only when he looks down, when he feels the disapproving gaze of his hegemonic audience (suffers from ironic knowledge).

Of course "enthusiasm" denotes a religious passion or inspiration particularly déclassé among the "enlightened" in Blake's time: the apology is not merely the mark of some "personal" neurosis, but is charged by the institutionalized polarities in which Blake finds himself. He withdraws in a wave of shame (even if ironic shame) that is at least in one dimension a kind of class-based phenomenon.

Predictably, Blake's apologies for deficient production seem always to concern "business" (e.g., the miniature promised to Butts), while the excesses for which he apologizes involve his own idiosyncratic spiritual-artistic practices. Excess and lack or deficiency operate like mania and depression for Blake, and the cycles between these poles recur often, structuring units of time or text from the course of a single letter to the sweep of a life (e.g., his assertion of having regained, at age forty-six, the enthusiasm of his youth). Only at the nadir of his Felpham trajectory, though, does Blake (in a letter to Butts) represent his condition as a seemingly essential polarity within himself and between himself and the rest of humanity, a mark (obverse of the mark of Romantic "genius") that falls on him alone ("O why was I born with a different face"), so that "When Elate I am Envy'd" (leading to a phase of being "silent & passive"), but "When Meek I'm despisd" (733). Passivity—the attempt to please, to follow the dictates of another, and to be the person required by the other—seems always to fail, no less than envy and rejection will follow pursuit of his "Own Self Will" (730), the eponym "Will" marking Blake's ongoing investment of identity in the polarity that kept reasserting itself in his economic relationship with Hayley. Inevitably, then, Blake was always relearning his proverb about the eagle and the crow, or as he wrote to John Linnell some twenty years later (a year before his death):

*No discipline will turn one Man into another even in the least particle. & such Discipline I call
Presumption & Folly I have tried it too much not to know this & am very sorry for all*

who may be led to such ostentatious Exertion against their Eternal Existence itself because it is Mental Rebellion against the Holy Spirit & fit only for a Soldier of Satan to perform. (775)

Yet in another mood, Blake ameliorates the scenario that opposes the Holy Spirit to Satan (or mania to depression or life to death): his description of the Felpham sojourn as merely a restful “three years Slumber on the banks of the Ocean” (728) is typical.

As the private returns to speak in public as irony, so the public returns in private to silence, partially. Thus even private letters that “speak too plain” must be burned, complaints ambiguated, and—even in private epigrams—complainants identified mostly by initials only, as if the names were too holy or profane to be written. If this excessive caution smells like paranoia, only an analyst or paranoiac could be delusionally certain that the smell is exclusively his own or exclusively the other’s.

One of the few verses in which Blake names his enemies outright is his “apology for his Catalogue,” an angry piece of notebook doggerel in which he comments on his own polemical exhibition catalogue. “Having given great offence by writing in Prose,” he begins, “I’ll write in verse as soft as Bartolloze” (i.e., as polished as Bartollozzi’s popular engravings), since “Some blush at what others can see no crime in / But nobody sees any harm in Rhyming” (505). Even in the privacy of his own notebook, then, Blake seems to be pursued by a gaze under which he is compelled to ironize his anger, generically, into doggerel; Blake could not have been surprised that nobody saw “any harm” in those “beautiful little poems,” his *Songs*.

Does the downturn in Blake’s representation of Hayley simply mark an upswing in his own hopes for financial independence from Hayley (for a rise in class) or simply the attrition of his hopes for the relationship? The safest and apparently most reasonable choice for a biographer would be to steer a middle course, assigning Blake a cautious hope that Hayley would become a “true friend,” then disappointment when this proved not to be the case, then renewed confidence, and so on. The main problem with such a scenario is that it fails to account for the patterned repetition of phase transitions between hope and disillusion it constructs. Blake leaves Felpham with the same visionary enthusiasm for his prospects in the London publishing scene that he had entertained for Felpham, and soon enough these hopes are again succeeded by what will seem to be inevitable disillusion. Even during Blake’s stay in Felpham, his hopes for expansion of the art market as a result of the lull in the war with France (“The Reign of Literature & the Arts Commences,”

he had written to Flaxman in October 1801) had suffered a similar fate. Blake's falling-out with Hayley had not been prototypical, either, but merely repeats his trajectory with other patrons and employers. Just before moving to Felpham, for example, Blake had been engaged as an illustrator by the Reverend John Trusler. After a time at work on the project, Blake wrote to Trusler, explaining that "I find more & more that my Style of Designing is a Species by itself. & in this which I send you have been compell'd by my Genius or Angel to follow where he led if I were to act otherwise it would not fulfill the purpose for which alone I live" (701). When Trusler disapproves of Blake's designs, Blake again asserts that he cannot do otherwise, the strength of his assertion, which effectively ended Blake's employment by Trusler, reflecting his expanding prospects for employment by Hayley. Cycle follows cycle and nestles within cycle (Trusler, Hayley, the market with France, the London market); the wheels keep spinning in place.

This is not to suggest that Blake generated these polarities merely out of some personal neurosis or psychosis. The question is more convoluted: was Blake mad because Trusler's moralizing *Way to Be Rich and Respectable* or Hayley's antifeminist *Triumphs of Temper* made him mad or because he triumphed over his temper for riches (meager as they were) and for respectability's sake?

The scenario of shifts between enthusiastic hopes and bitter disappointments is not primarily a personal (biographical) matter, nor even only a marker of contradictions between Blake's class identities. The same scenario, for example, is sometimes cited in explanation of Wordsworth's changing attitude toward the French Revolution, as if the course of the revolution itself were a "fact" sufficient to explain it. In fact, the most explicitly radical and politically engaged Wordsworthian statement extant is his 1793 "open letter" to Robert Watson, bishop of Llandaff (whose essay also provoked Blake's most inflammatory marginalia). In this letter—which he declined to post or publish—Wordsworth makes clear that he is prepared for the immediate result of the revolution to be merely a "change of tyranny," but also that he expects that "the stream will go on gradually refining itself" (Wordsworth 1974, 38). How was it, then, that Wordsworth was not able to keep the faith, even as he castigated Watson for falling away from *his* early support of the revolution? It may be just as accurate to assert not that the revolution's course directed Wordsworth's change of mind, but that Wordsworth's change of mind directed the course of the revolution, at least insofar as England's participation in the war against France contributed to the polarizations and extremisms of the revolution, and insofar as this participation was facilitated by the failure of active English support for the revolution—a failure in which figured prominently "that profound disenchant-

ment, of which Wordsworth is representative, in an intellectual generation which had identified its beliefs in too ardent and utopian a way with the cause of France," as Thompson put it (1966, 115). Admittedly this causal construction is attenuated and reductive—it might be better to dispense with traditional causality altogether. Until this can be done without seeming to endorse some kind of quietistic fatalism, it seems necessary to continue to observe that opposition and disenchantment with revolution still function as self-fulfilling prophecies or, to abbreviate the causal loop still further, as performatives. When Wordsworth recoiled in real mock horror from the French Revolution, he failed to recognize in that moment the monster he created and abandoned, created by abandoning, made contemptible by his contempt.

There is always a problem of which comes first, the coercive attempts to silence opposition or the hegemonic ("spontaneous") change of heart. Coleridge, for example, is very careful in his *Biographia*—too careful, that is—to show that, by the time he and Wordsworth were under surveillance by spies, they had already renounced Jacobinism. But hadn't this renunciation been the product of the watchful gaze of a much more effective hegemonic surveillance, by which Coleridge and Wordsworth anticipated (*avant-garde*) the renunciation that the powers that be came to demand, as subordinates come to read the desires of superiors before they are articulated? Is this what it means to be in touch with the "spirit of the age"?

It is likewise difficult to determine whether circumstances conspired, or Blake conspired with circumstances, to keep him in Hayley's orbit. After Blake had decided to leave Felpham, a soldier Blake had thrown out of his garden accused him of damning the king (among other seditious statements), and he was forced to rely again on Hayley to provide a lawyer for the trial (he was acquitted). Could Blake's denial of the charges represent the retroactive fulfillment of his hero's hope that, in *Jerusalem*, "he who will not defend Truth may be compell'd to defend / A Lie" (1982, 152)? Scholars have been inclined to conclude that the charges against Blake were false (it makes things easier), and knowing his even paranoid caution, it seems likely. Yet the real vignette also seems too consistent with the patterns of Blake's writing to have occurred without his collaboration: the private denunciation and, seeming to follow it in space or time, the public denial; irony is, after all, a strategy of deniability. Blake had written it before and would write it again, only embellished with names from the "real" incident, altered (as usual) to avoid prosecution. Even Blake's reluctance, in his notebooks, to spell out his accusations is ironically duplicated in his public deposition, in which he denies having uttered the words "D—n the K—g" (734): the injunction to speak and the injunction to remain silent

meet in an irony by which the name of the king is reduced, if only in the letter, to the status of a swearword, under the gaze of his all-powerful spirit. Did Blake *really* damn the king? As in his letters and poetry (before, during, and after the event), he did—and, simultaneously and/or subsequently, he didn't. Irony can appear as a space or time between texts and/or utterances, between phases or phrases of a text, or even as spaces that emerge in individual words: the spiral of silence and speech weaves through every modality of an n -dimensional textual/historical fabric, from the smallest moment in a private notebook or public deposition to the widest swath of literary history. The absolute interval between affirmation and denial is what I have been calling irony, whether it manifests itself as timelike or spacelike.

Blake's irony was of a piece with the irony that neutralized it. On one hand, this irony functions to privatize, to localize, to contain, to keep intact, and to foreclose mediation. In Blake's own time, it worked through him to ensure that his most radical statements remained only graffiti in the margins of a single, private book or notebook, or that his works (auraticized and unmediated by printers and booksellers) circulated only as curiosities among a few collectors. At the textual level, this irony ensured that real names (Hayley, George III, and so on) kept contracting with the infinitely receding lower term of allegory. On the other hand, such irony seems to function just as well to dilute, to dissipate by distributing, so that the Blake who appeared before the largest public (in the largest number of texts) was a "gentle visionary" cooing over "sublime displays" of public charity, a madman, or even more widely, a second-rate illustrator. At the textual level, this irony works by distributing the code by which Blake can be read across his texts or between his and other texts. These two ironies, fingers of those invisible hands of order and disorder, sometimes seem to pull in different directions only to tighten the woven spiral of a thoroughgoing hegemony in which we must remain caught.

Is this then the structure of Blake throughout discursive space-time? A burning sun of political rage orbited and eclipsed by the false consciousness of an aestheticized "green and pleasant land"? A radical root, buried underground, which in the open air merely branches out into a "pretty rose tree"? In fact, the Blake engaged here is a four-dimensional or n -dimensional orbit and system of branchings, a curvature in one dimension coextensive with the collective mind and body politic, crazed and warped by the turbulences of hierarchical difference.

The turning of political energies inward, toward the body (as toward the person of the author)—shortening the feedback loop until the body appears to attack or to desire only itself—seems to be a particular skill of capitalism, although the reformist's belief in the perfectability of the world was always as bogus

as the belief of today's "fitness victim" in the perfectability of the body, and as many ironies continue to be committed in its name. Did Blake suffer from a similar involution, pedaling his own stationary cycle, when he fought "the accuser" or the ghost of an insufferable patron or mad king only in himself, or across the electrical network of his brain and the pages of his arcane texts and not in the streets or even the salons? Predictably, the stories of Blake's extratextual political actions are as problematic, obscured, and ironized as the politics of his texts. Did Blake really warn Thomas Paine to leave the country on the eve of his arrest, and thus save him from a trial that (who knows?) might have galvanized resistance in England; save Paine's skin at the cost of a revolution, as he saved his own? Did he really voice outrage and cause the chain to be removed from a young worker's leg, when he could not shake loose the chains from his own writing hand? Was he merely swept along by the crowd during the Gordon Riots of 1780, or did he take an active part in the release of prisoners and burning of Newgate Prison? In each case Blake is found writing and being written by the polarities (material/spiritual, passive/active, and so on) of an ongoing textual and historical field. One keeps finding Blake the resistance fighter and Blake the collaborator, and finding that no critical centrifuge can separate the two. To demonstrate that Blake conspired against himself is not, after all, to assign blame but to affirm that he was afraid.

In "London," Blake elaborates the recursive shudder of fear that binds victim and oppressor:

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.
And mark on every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear

How the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every blackning Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse

Blasts the new-born Infants tear
 And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse
 (1982, 26–27)

The narrator of “London” (as in Wordsworth’s “I Wandered Lonely”) seems to do little but wander, look, and listen—and, apparently, to speak or write the poem. He hears victims speaking and their words—or rather their inarticulate cries, sighs, and curses—made flesh and come back to haunt—to mark—institutions responsible for their oppression (“Church,” “Palace,” “Marriage”). The final verse, however, complicates this construction. The “Harlots curse” is allowed to be—without metaphor—both word and flesh, both verbal and viral: a curse she utters or that which utters her (interpellates her as immoral); syphilis that infects her or, through her, her clients and their children. The disease, whose effects are suggested in the poem’s final lines, is beyond human agency, or rather it is systemically bred and operates *through* people, instrumentalizing victims and oppressors alike; the cursers and accursed implicated in the recursivity of the spirochete, representing a lowermost bound (what Blake might have called a “limit of Contraction”) to which systemic contradictions can be repressed and from which they insidiously return.

But the poem also problematizes the victim/oppressor scenario from the first. The narrator’s *marking* may be more active than a noticing; it is at any rate a selective notice. It first seems that this marking may itself amount to an oppressive act, reinscribing victim status, or alternately, even that “marks of weakness” may be read as physiognomic manifestations of some character deficiency on the part of their bearers. But in Ezekiel’s “Vision of Jerusalem in her Pollutions,” which Blake echoes here, “marking” has quite a different effect. In *Ezekiel*, God summons the man who has “the writer’s inkhorn by his side” and commands that he go “through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof” (I:9, 3–5).

It is then the *unmarked* that God orders to be slain. The story works as an empowering myth for the writer, promising that, come the revolution, the blacklisted writer’s own blacklist will prevail. But for Blake’s narrator the marking isn’t so simple. It marks victims, but everyone is a victim (and an oppressor): “every face” and “every voice” bear the mark of the “mind-forg’d manacles” and, presumably, some responsibility for forging them. Blake’s manuscript version of the poem first identified these mentally generated chains as the all-too-concretely produced “German-forg’d links” (796) of the oppressive Hanoverian rule of George III. This original epithet, oblique as it now seems, amounts to identifying an oppressor by

name and thus can be read as a call for more overt oppositional action: “Damn the King!” It seems likely that fear of prosecution for sedition, the very reasonable fear of being put in real chains, was a factor in Blake’s rewriting. Between the “German-forg’d links” of Blake’s unpublished manuscript and the “mind-forg’d manacles” of his printed text, the fear—itself a “mind-forg’d manacle”—of real chains, themselves manufactured out of fear of potentially seditious sighs and cries like Blake’s own, intervenes. The chains twist the cry back—but not quite back—upon itself. The fear Blake describes and can’t help but enact is an unprocessable *noise* that is conserved—carried over, echoed—through all permutations of commentary and metacommentary. David Erdman has remarked on the same phenomenon in Blake’s “Grey Monk,” where again it is enacted around figures of recursive binding (the rack, the chain, and the bent body of the tortured monk): “In continuing to write, Blake does of course defy the rack and chain. Yet their marks are even upon this ballad, for he mutes ‘Seditious Monk’ to ‘Thou lazy Monk’ before transferring it to the public text of *Jerusalem*” (1954, 386). The literal and the figural rack and chain twist into an ongoing recursion that is the mark of hegemonic power. To conclude, as does the “Grey Monk,” in such a viral-political regime, that even “a Sigh is the Sword of an Angel King,” may be both a radical affirmation and the height of false consciousness.

Irresolution and Interdependence

The ambiguous trajectory of Blake’s career traced nesting cycles in which a spatial structure (concentric circles of audience) correlated with a temporal structure of enthusiasms and fallings-out, both structures propagated by fractal resonances across various scales of text and time. Wordsworth’s “Resolution and Independence” begins by sketching a similarly scaling cycle of moods that is finally “resolved” by a related but very different notion of “independence” that both coordinates and ironizes the relation between poetic time and real time.

As the poem opens, night storm gives way to an echoic play, this time at the liminal moment of sunrise, which comprises a traffic between species and even between living and nonliving processes as “the Jay makes answer as the Magpie chatters; / And all the air is filled with pleasant noise of waters” (Wordsworth 1969, 155).

As in Blake’s first “Nurse’s Song” (or in the utopian conclusion of Coleridge’s “Frost at Midnight”), echoic noise signifies an ecology of plenitude marked not by “full presence” but by maximal hybridity and interpenetration. The activity of the creatures who participate in this ecology is an end in itself, a “wake” that inalienably accompanies the body but is not reducible to a discrete or reified thing:

The hare is running races in her mirth;
 And with her feet she from the plashy earth
 Raises a mist; that, glittering in the sun,
 Runs with her all the way, wherever she does run.
 (1969, 155)

To experience the bodily indiscretion of a prealienated engagement with the world is for Blake, as for Wordsworth here, not to betray one's attachment to an older economy but to partake of a mystical excess in which (for example) "ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way, / Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five" (1982, 35). By contrast, Blake's "fallen" human life is characterized as a "worm of sixty winters" or of "seventy inches" (177, 285, 175), in which the tortuous wake of the body (its "worldline") is discretely measured as it moves through a world in which time is money.

But Wordsworth's trick is to autonomize and automatize the way in which the highs of "mystical participation," by internal necessity and as a kind of law of physics, give way to the lows of alienation, abjection, and proletarianization:

By our own spirits we are deified:
 We Poets in our youth begin in gladness;
 But thereof come in the end despondency and madness.
 (Wordsworth 1969, 155)

The leech-gatherer will offer a "resolution" to this two-cycle rhythm by being an example for the poet of how the ongoing ability to alienate one's labor constitutes "independence." In the process, the interpenetrative ecology that begins the poem can be said to be recouped in the complex play of difference and identification between poet and laborer. The mystification that the poem perpetrates is in aestheticizing this play of similarity and difference between the leech-gatherer, subject to the unpredictable rhythms of supply and demand, and the poet, apparently subject only to the rise and fall of his own moods, his transcendence of these cycles marked by his ability to extract speculatively a poetic profit at any stage, by merely "thinking" of the figure of the leech-gatherer. The poet seems thus to be rendered self-sufficient in a self-organizing, specular, and speculative economy (i.e., a "free market") that internalizes his control over the means of poetic production.

Two facts are recorded in Dorothy Wordsworth's journal and letters that throw the poem into a starkly ironic perspective.

First, Dorothy's journal (1941, 63) records that the actual leech-gatherer that she and her brother encountered was not the proudly "self-sufficient"

laborer William's poem depicts but, in fact, a beggar who asked them for money. This fact in itself would not have been enough to disqualify the leech-gatherer as a figure of and for the poet: beggary in other Wordsworth poems performs the service of affirming the persistence of an earlier economy of gift and obligation (a romanticized feudalism). Even so, the problematic dichotomy between dependence and independence that divides Dorothy's (private) text from William's (public) poem persists self-referentially *in* the poem as a nagging ambiguity about whether leeches or poems and those who peddle them are cathartic healers or parasites.

Second, Dorothy's letters record that what happened, in real time, between her brother's beginning and finishing the poem, is that the Wordsworths received substantial portions of the inheritance owed to their father's estate by Lord Lowther. In Dorothy's letters from this time (as in Blake's), "independence" is used as a straightforward synonym for "capital": when her brother wishes to invest her portion of the inheritance, Dorothy demands security for it, citing "the impropriety of my running the risque of losing this money by which means I might forfeit my independence without any means of reinstating myself in it" (Wordsworth and Wordsworth 1967–93, 2:386). If she were to lose the money, that is, work for pay would offer Dorothy's only "means of reinstating" herself, but such work (like her governess job before she became her brother's helper) would be unlikely to provide savings—and would in itself constitute the fall in class that the money (and her ongoing residence with her brother) staves off.

In light of the two facts Dorothy provides, the poem and its figurative or ideological resolution (as well as its ongoing critical interest) can be seen to depend on the irresolubility of a complex economy of alignments, oppositions, and transmutations between and among fact and image, real time and poetic (textual, narrative) time, private journals or letters and public poetry, brother and sister, leech-gatherer and poet and healing and parasitism, and independence as capital and independence as labor—intervals the poem works to insinuate itself as their mediator.

Parkinsonism, Romanticism, Postmodernism: Neurology as Ideology

Beauty will be convulsive or it will not be.

—André Breton

James Parkinson (1755–1824), apothecary and surgeon, was a prominent member of the London Corresponding Society during the 1790s. All of his writings (which could only now qualify as "interdisciplinary") are of a piece with the tradition of Enlightenment dissent and reformism that shaped his career. He published several im-

portant Jacobinical pamphlets during the years 1793 to 1795, mostly under the pseudonym “Old Hubert” (e.g., *An Address to the Hon. Edmund Burke from the Swinish Multitude*). Many of his works are devoted to the advocacy of medical discipline: *The Hospital Pupil* (1800) addresses the professionalizing process, *Medical Admonitions* (1799) and *The Villager’s Friend and Physician* (1800) exhort what we now call “the consumer”; and institutional discipline is the object of *Observations on the Act for Regulating Mad-houses* (1811). A lifelong fossil hunter, Parkinson rushed off from his medical practice—with the eagerness of a Renaissance artist at the exhumation of a Roman sculpture—to witness the excavation of a “huge crocodile.” Parkinson’s popular *Organic Remains of a Former World* (1811) affirms a new historicism in late-eighteenth-century geology and recuperates a disciplinary god: “The world is seen, in its formation and continuance, constantly under the providence of Almighty God, without whose knowledge not one sparrow falls to the ground” (Critchley 1955, 130).

Somewhat like Keats in his 1818 preface to *Endymion*, Parkinson prefaces his groundbreaking 1817 *Essay on the Shaking Palsy* with a kind of apology for its prematurity:

Some conciliatory explanation should be offered for the present publication: in which, it is acknowledged, that mere conjecture takes the place of experiment; and that analogy is the substitute for anatomical explanation, the only sure foundation for pathological knowledge. (Critchley 1955, i)

The trajectory leading from analogy—via apology—to anatomy is characteristic of the general epistemological shift traced by Foucault’s *Birth of the Clinic*. As promised, Parkinson spends most of his essay in the traditional, analogical mode, carefully welding similarities and chiseling differences between sets of symptoms and etiologies in order to rough-sculpt his “shaking palsy” in a taxonomic space roughly coextensive with the social space in which symptoms occur. In an analogical medicine, “when they become dense enough, these similarities cross the threshold of mere kinship and accede to unity of essence” (Foucault 1975, 7), but an emergent disciplinary regime increasingly defers this “unity of essence” into a bodily interior—buries it alive—where it can be pursued by the anatomist’s penetrating gaze. In other words, a more extended and heterogeneous tissue of similarities and differences implicated in language and culture is displaced and condensed into the density and opacity of bodily tissue, from where it may be triumphantly brought to light: the body “materializes” for medicine as an analogue of analogy, “realized” in the flesh without realizing that the very density of flesh is always already also a metaphor of metaphor. *Origins* are the privileged ends of a process that now begins in medias res with what Parkinson

calls a “substitute” (a superficial trace or set of symptoms) and proceeds, via dissection or excavation, toward a “sure foundation,” toward that which is beyond semiosis, that which simply is what it is, like Althusser’s “Absolute Subject” or (sometimes) Freud’s cigar. The end of Parkinson’s essay restates its goal of “leading the attention of those who humanely employ anatomical examination in detecting the causes and natures of diseases, particularly to this malady,” and with an encomium to the “professional ardour” of anatomists, to whose “researches the healing art is already much indebted for the enlargement of its powers of lessening the evils of suffering humanity” (Critchley 1955, 66).

“Pathological knowledge,” situated as origin and end, entails a new kind of individuation or subjectification for both doctor and patient, differentially: here, sufferers of the “shaking palsy” isolated by Parkinson will come to be assigned a provisionally coherent identity tied to their pathology and its patriarch: they will be known as “Parkinsonians.” Like the fossil bean, *Pandanocarpus parkinsonis*, they will bear the Name of the doctor/taxonomist/Father into our century.

The neurologist Oliver Sacks begins *Awakenings*, his popular 1973 study of postencephalitic Parkinsonism, with a rhapsodic note on Parkinson’s walks through London. During these walks, Parkinson had encountered some of the people whose case histories appear in his 1817 essay, and who will come to bear his name:

Parkinson resembles a genuine astronomer, and London the field of his astronomical observations, and at this stage, through his eyes, we see Parkinsonians as bodies-in-transit, moving like comets or stars. Soon, moreover, he came to recognize that certain stars form a constellation, that many seemingly unrelated phenomena form a definite and constant “assemblage of symptoms.” He was the first to recognize this “assemblage” as such, this constellation or syndrome we now call “Parkinsonism.” (Sacks 1990, 4n)

The “unmoved mover” of these heavenly bodies, then, is the truth and unity of the disease that is the object of “pathological knowledge”: in the depths of disciplinary space, the doctor’s vision, as it simultaneously cleaves symptoms together and apart (“carves up and articulates,” in Foucault’s formula [1975, xix]), reverently worships its own reflection, the artifact that its own unacknowledged positionedness configures. Just as Keats felt, “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer,” like “some watcher of the skies / When a new planet swims into his ken” precisely because he was *not the first* to read it, Sacks can claim Parkinson as a “genius” because “his observations were deeper than those of his predecessors, deeper-rooted and more deeply related” (1990, 4n): he saw what everyone else saw, but dissected and put it together more intricately, more densely. This construction of genius is given in schematic form by

Blake: "As none by traveling over known lands can find out the unknown. So from already acquired knowledge Man could not acquire more. therefore an universal Poetic Genius exists" (1982, 1). The "knownness" of the world is thus a grid against which genius can be made to appear, situating Romantic creation at the always ambiguous intersection of invention and discovery, writing and reading, production and reproduction. The world seems to be created anew in Romanticism because *creation* is created—in the image of capitalist discipline, continually revolutionizing power and knowledge, dissecting and connecting. It is predictable, then, that the final enclosure of English common lands during this period coincides with their unprecedented opening up both to scientific and aesthetic exploration (fossil hunting and view hunting), and that ongoing colonization and disciplinary saturation of space abroad and at home will come to align Mayhew's urban anthropology in "darkest London" with Livingstone's travels in "darkest Africa." Internal and external Others are coproduced in an ongoing mission of fractal disciplinary saturation and imperial expansionism: to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no one (but many others) has gone before. Haraway's succinct comment on the *Star Trek* introduction is relevant here: "Science remains an important genre of Western exploration and travel literature" (1991, 205).

In *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, Sacks's account of a street encounter implicitly updates both Parkinson's astronomical street-diagnostics and Althusser's cop-on-the-beat parable of ideology, generating a postmodern school-of-mirrors account of interpellation. On a crowded New York street, Sacks sees "a grey-haired woman in her sixties, who was apparently the centre of a most amazing disturbance": convulsed by Tourette's syndrome, "and, by a sort of sympathy or contagion—also convulsing everyone" she passes, the woman delivers a two-minute performance, a "virtually instantaneous, automatic and convulsive mirroring of every face and figure":

Every mirroring was also a parody, a mocking, an exaggeration of salient gestures and expressions, but an exaggeration in itself no less convulsive than intentional—a consequence of the violent acceleration and distortion of all her motions. Thus a slow smile, monstrously accelerated, would become a violent, milliseconds-long grimace; an ample gesture, accelerated, would become a farcical convulsive movement.

And there were ludicrous imitations of the second and third order; for the people in the street, startled, outraged, bewildered by her imitations, took on these expressions in reaction to her; and those expressions in turn, were re-lected, re-directed, re-distorted, by the Touretter, causing a still greater degree of outrage and shock. This grotesque, involuntary resonance,

or mutuality, by which everyone was drawn into an absurdly amplifying interaction, was the source of the disturbance I had seen from a distance. This woman who, becoming everybody, lost her own self, became nobody. This woman with a thousand faces, masks, personae—how must it be for her in this whirlwind of identities? (Sacks 1987, 122–23)

Keats's identitiless "camelion poet" returns here with a vengeance that derives from its recursive speed. Presumably, people could not interact at all without reflecting and refracting each other's gestures, mixing and matching from whatever repertoires they have at hand. But when the speed—or more generally, the *scale*—of gestures in time and space (not necessarily even their sequence or shape) changes in the mirroring process, mirroring itself becomes disruptively visible. Elsewhere Sacks writes of Parkinsonians that "the wrongness of their movements is a wrongness of *scale*—their movements are too large or too small, too fast or too slow" (1990, 346).

Sacks's "amazing disturbance" is produced by a collective and unspeakable confrontation with the Otherness of the self. Speed and other scalar differences are categorical, making it difficult to say whether something that goes fast becomes a different thing, or whether what kind of a thing it is follows *from* its speed. But "fast" and "slow" only begin to account for the richness of the scalar dimension, which is here also marked by its "convulsive" rhythm. Unlike a simple anamorphoscope in reverse, the Touretteur does more than offer the spectator a distorting mirror: she performs in a seductive and compelling way that neurological "normalcy" is already at least the distortion of a distortion. The bodily, almost automatic response of the spectators-turned-actors performs another turn on the turning around or "conversion" of suspect into subject by Althusser's cop. The spectators are available or "on call" as actors not because they respond by identification ("it's me!"), but because of their engagement in the turbulent play, between the normal and the pathological, of two responses: "it's me!" and "it's not me!" The Touretteur enacts a kind of "candid camera" critique that is effective insofar as it intervenes, directly as it were, not into the "self-images" of the passersby, but into the means whereby they are produced and sustained.

The shaky, analogical truth of Parkinson's "shaking palsy" had been established by observing the same symptoms and etiology in different people; its instability appears as a *desire* to anatomize its "sure foundation." This trajectory gets a new twist as well: postmodern Parkinsonism is initially "exciting" to Sacks not as the manifestation of a similarity but as "the spectacle of a disease that was never the same in two patients, a disease that could take any possible form—one rightly called a 'phantasmagoria'" (1990, xxviii). As such, Parkinsonism is capable

of producing a performative truth-effect by recursive self-similarity and difference in a contagion of gesture: the Touretter functions to create an “amazing disturbance” in the crowd as her Tourette’s syndrome itself functions to disturb her own brain. Unfortunately (as we will see later), Sacks’s account works to restore “pathological knowledge” back to the social and cultural space from which Romantic discipline had appropriated it only to protect discipline from the excess it generates.

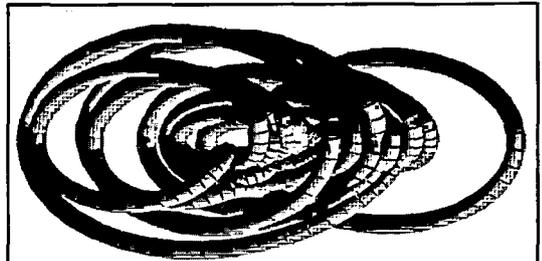
Sacks’s account of “The President’s Speech” (1987, 80–84) seems to propose an even more intimate identity between neurology and ideology. Sacks describes the effect of a televised Reagan speech on a neurology ward. The ward includes aphasics, who can only comprehend speech insofar as it is charged with “feeling-tone” (often because of damage to the left temporal lobe, which is supposed to process grammar and syntax), as well as one patient with the “opposite” disorder: stricken with “tonal agnosia” or “atonia” (due to a tumor on the *right* temporal lobe), she cannot process emotional or colloquial speech except insofar as it is also grammatically and logically correct. For the aphasics, then, its forced and misplaced sentiments make Reagan’s speech hilariously incomprehensible, while for the atonia patient, it is strangely “not cogent” and the speaker must either be “brain-damaged, or he has something to conceal.” Sacks offers a moral: that “we normals—aided, doubtless, by our wish to be fooled, were indeed well and truly fooled,” yet “so cunningly was deceptive word-use combined with deceptive tone, that only the brain-damaged remained intact, undeceived” (1987, 84). The neatness of the paradox forecloses the most radical—and I believe the most obvious—conclusion from the evidence. In order to make the paradox work, Sacks must forget that a great many “normals” consistently found Reagan speeches laughable, monstrously unbelievable, and brain-damaged. Second, Sacks is forced to exaggerate the difference between the brain-damaged as innocent and undeceivable fools and the president as a crafty rhetorician, again forgetting that Reagan was most often cast as the “natural” in a regime where “undeceivability” is inseparable from a power that awards the privilege of believing in one’s own fictions. Ideology *is* neurology (not simply neuropathology) and vice versa. Aphasia or atonia are categorically indistinguishable from the partial abjection or nonsubjecthood enforced on those who, for whatever reason, respond atypically (or do not respond) to the “hail” of a given dominant ideology.

Sacks’s quest to articulate his vision of Parkinsonism leads from Einsteinian relativistic models to quantum mechanics and finally to chaos theory. Parkinsonism—significantly, like Romanticism, modernism, postmodernism, ideology, love, and so on—is first described by Sacks as “a systematic disorder of space-

time parameters, a systematic warping of coordinate-systems" (1990, 345), and as "a dynamic, field, or relativistic disorder." But these Einsteinian terms, Sacks comes to conclude in subsequent revisions, are not quite adequate to account for Parkinsonism, which (like Einsteinian relativity itself) turns out to require a quantum-mechanical qualification: in Parkinsonism, "what we observe is not, in fact, a smoothly *warped* metric, but an infinitely stranger *twitching* metric; not a smooth geometrical transform, but a sudden algebraic or statistical one" (341). In a 1990 appendix, "Chaos and Awakenings," Sacks completes the paradigmatic trajectory from quantum mechanics to the chaotic or fractal "phase space" model of the "strange attractor," whereby "*Parkinsonism itself* can be visualized as a sort of surface, bipolar, like a figure-of-eight" and Parkinsonians are "enthralled on this surface, which is a dynamical surface, an orbiting surface in time" (1990, 364).

It would seem that the difference between neurological normalcy and Parkinsonism is always like the difference between the current and the emergent paradigm: if "normals" are Newtonian, Parkinsonians are Einsteinian; if normals are Einsteinian, Parkinsonians are quantum-mechanical; if normals are quantum-mechanical, Parkinsonians are chaotic. Neither the mandate to represent sickness as radically different nor the mandate simply to keep pathology up-to-date with the latest paradigms can quite account for the schematic temporal thrust of Sacks's paradigm parade. Disease is *futurity* and vice versa; the trajectory of time is literally "sickening," and the future manifests itself as a pathological disturbance of the present.

"Enthrallment" and "surface" seem to function as the markers of pathology in Sacks's strange-attractor paradigm. In the most generous reading, it is not the operation of a strange attractor itself but enthrallment by it that seems to constitute the pathology of Parkinsonism for Sacks, as implicitly opposed to the semiautonomous connection that "normal" people must enjoy with their strange neurological attractors. The Parkinsonian self skewered on an attractor deeply em-



Ed W.'s State. Sacks's "mathematically inclined" patient Ed W., a Parkinsonian on an L-dopa regimen, graphed his degree of Parkinsonian symptoms (from extreme hyperkinesia to extreme immobility) hourly for three months. Sacks and colleague Ralph Siegel took the linear graph of Ed W.'s first month and plotted it in "phase space" against its derivatives (e.g., its rate of change); the resulting "attractor" shows the typically chaotic ("orderly but unpredictable") cycles of Ed W.'s Parkinsonism and L-dopa response.

bedded in the brain can also appear as “surface,” a self nakedly algorithmic, a machine, a model. It is finally, then, its paradigmatic status that is pathological: for normals, the strange attractor may be merely a model upon which the fiction of the self is loosely built; for Sacks’s Parkinsonians the model is, as it were, lived, as is ideology for those who, in Slavoj Žižek’s formula, take it seriously and are thereby driven to challenge it.

If the repeated discontinuities or “twitching” of the quantum model can characterize Parkinsonian pathology against the smooth transformations of Einsteinian relativity, Parkinsonism can also appear as a disease of excessive continuity, a quality also marked by one of Sacks’s migraine patients, who says his migraine “*looms*,” but “it’s just a change of scale—everything is already there from the start” (1990, 98). One Parkinsonian says she would have no trouble getting around “if the world consisted entirely of stairs” (43), that is, if all otherwise continuous differences were quantized. Excessive continuity continually requires externally articulated algorithms in order to be properly rhythmized. This contingency is dramatized in the film based on Sacks’s book when an otherwise chronically “akinetic” patient spontaneously and deftly catches her eyeglasses as they fall from her face, illustrating Charcot’s diagnostic category of “*aboulia*” or “absence of the will,” which he applied to patients who “would sit for hours not only motionless, but apparently without any impulse to move . . . although they might move quite well if the stimulus or command or request to move came from another person—*from the outside*” (Sacks 1990, 9). In the film, this otherwise akinetic patient is able to catch a ball thrown to her, leading to the conceptual-breakthrough conclusion that she adopts “the will of the ball” as a substitute for her own. The thrown ball works like the cop’s shout in Althusser’s parable: one can either catch or dodge the ball or let it strike, but one must come into relation with it in any case (you can play ball or not, take your pick). Another Parkinsonian in the film can walk only as far as the black-and-white checkerboard pattern of the linoleum guides her footsteps; other patients are animated and guided (“roused and fixed” or “kindled and restrained,” as Wordsworth put it) by the rhythms of music. It is finally the drug L-dopamine into which the doctor will attempt, and fail, to displace and condense these ideological rhythmizing functions.

Instead of providing a dramatic illustration of the externality of ideology to the organism, and of the organism’s necessary cyberneticization (its animation and guidance as well as its paralysis or disabling by the way that differences are articulated in culture), the discovery of Parkinsonism as a disorder of excessive continuity is an occasion for Sacks to *distinguish* the discretion of normalcy from

Parkinsonian continuity in a strangely unconscious and obsessive manner. At the very moment that Sacks announces his discovery of the “always-already” character of Parkinsonism and its tendency to “proceed by an infinite multitude of infinitesimal increments,” he obsessively marks the ruptural discontinuity and radical newness of his *own* discovery as “a sudden jarring of my thinking, a sudden wrenching from a way of seeing, a frame of reference, to one which was deeply and shockingly different,” repeating that he “suddenly realized” and again “suddenly realized” and again “it suddenly came to me” (1990, 97). This obsessive (or, in Parkinsonian terms, *echolalic*) characterization of the discoverer and the discovery against the discovered represents only a particularly acute attack of the apotropaic or prophylactic principle that structures the doctor’s professional knowledge and discourse. The doctor is, as it were, defined as the one with the most “at stake”; the one for whom the dangers of the recursive performativity (and therefore, the compelling and contagious virality) of pathology are most acute, and therefore also the one most mandated to establish that “it’s not me” — and finally, thus also the one by definition incapable of representing sickness as knowledge. By the same token, one might say that professional intellectuals are most often those who must continually immunize themselves to ideas, those whose training is designed to protect them from the danger that *living* ideas poses.

The film of *Awakenings* moves the doctor from primarily a principle of the discourse to primarily a character among characters, and in the process, performs a “systematic warping” of the book. The film follows the main trajectory of the case studies in the book, showing the initial success and eventual failure of the drug L-dopamine in reviving chronic patients often lapsed into akinesia for years after bouts of encephalitis. The film *individualizes*, focusing on a single patient (Leonard L.) from among the many case histories that appear in Sacks’s account. It *bipolarizes* the states of the patients: in Sacks’s account, it is clear that a range of various functionalities and dys functionalities characterize Sacks’s patients before, during, and after their course of L-dopa. In the film, though, all the patients are at first nearly totally akinetic, achieve brief near-normalcy on L-dopa, and then are plunged back into deathlike akinesia when the drug is taken away. Finally, the film *simultaneizes* the patients, awakening them en masse and allowing them to lapse, in neat succession, back to sleep.

But this schematization only allows the relatively complex trajectory that characterizes the patients in the film — dehumanization by akinesia, brief rehumanization by drugs, re-dehumanization by mania and then again by akinesia — to be opposed again to the one-directional humanization trajectory of the heroic

doctor. Established as a shy man who prefers research and solitary hobbies to human contact, his (at first reluctant) engagement with his patients brings him out more and more until, in the film's final scene, he is finally able to ask his nurse assistant to lunch. One could say that the humanity of the professional is finally proven by his ability to engage in sexual harassment. Rather than an extraneous or gratuitous alteration of Sack's book, then, the film's implicit opposition of the singular individual and his one-way humanization trajectory to the plural patients and their repeated transits of de- and rehumanization works as a very precise translation of the "author function" and "doctor function" that structure Sacks's discourse.

Sacks's own account of the film and other fictionalizations of his book, appended to the 1990 edition of *Awakenings*, is particularly revealing. It is only in considering these fictionalizations that *truth* becomes problematic for Sacks, and truth, in Sacks's rhetoric, becomes an embarrassing Romantic tic that enthralls Sacks's accounts of the plays and films, which he describes repetitively with phrases such as "faithfulness to the *truth* of the story, the inner truth" (1990, 367; emphasis in original), "the ultimate touchstone of truth" (367), "just like the truth" (370), "the inmost truth" (370), "never departed from the truth" (373), "the emotional truth of the portrayals" (374), "what was overwhelming for me was the *truth* of this scene" (385; emphasis in original), and so on. On one occasion, Sacks describes a radio play in which his Parkinsonian patient, Miriam H. — "an ageing, and somewhat deformed, Ashkenazi-Jewish white woman" — is played by Jackie Samuels, "a great, busty, gutsy, ebullient black woman," and yet the performance is an "absolutely perfect Miriam," "deeply right" and "fundamentally true," a performance "the original Miriam H., had she been alive, would have delighted in" (1990, 373). The "truth" of disease, for Sacks, must be "deeper" than the apparently superficial identities of ethnicity, race, religion, age, and other bodily specificities, and yet somehow the "truth" of the portrait makes it not simply a perfect representation of the *disease* but an "absolutely perfect *Miriam*" (my emphasis). The paradigmatic status of Parkinsonism is contained by being individualized, by being given a "human face."

The truth of Parkinsonism, then, appears for Sacks only recursively, in transit through the multiple mediations of a school of mirrors: the doctor observes patients and writes case histories; actors and writers read the doctor's accounts (and sometimes, after being thus prepared, observe patients); the doctor observes the actors and writers who have relied on his case histories and then finds their performances to be "true" — not by consulting his patients but by *imagining* their responses. This last — crucial — mediation repeatedly drives the doctor to put words into his patients's mouths:

This, for me, is the ultimate touchstone of truth—a sense that the actual patients, if they could be shown these versions, would exclaim: “Yes, that’s amazing—that’s just how it was!” . . .

I imagined Rose reading and seeing the play, and saying: “My God! He’s got me.

He’s got me to a T.” . . . I was agonized at the thought that Rose R. might see it, and be beside herself, and say: “No, no, it’s all wrong, it’s nothing like the truth.” . . . She has just given me a wink, and a barely perceptible thumbs-up sign, meaning, “He’s okay—he’s got it! He really knows what it’s like.” (1990, 367, 370, 370n, 386)

Can the Parkinsonian speak? Through *me*, says the neurologist. Sacks describes Leonard L.’s convulsive production of a fifty-thousand-word autobiography, but not a word of it appears in Sacks’s book.

In spite of wondering whether acting the part of a Parkinsonian could “actually alter the nervous system” (383) and wanting, “half-seriously, to get an EEG” (383) during Robert De Niro’s performance of a Parkinsonian seizure, Sacks does not follow up these impulses, perhaps to protect the assumption that Parkinsonism must proceed from organic causes to behavior, and not vice versa. Ironically, the Sacks role in the film is played by Robin Williams, an actor famous for his Touretteic performances, but even when noting that “Robin suddenly exploded with an incredible playback of the ward, imitating everyone’s voice and style to perfection” and, “almost, being possessed by them” (376), Sacks will not explicitly acknowledge that acting—and along with it, all identity performance—may itself be a kind of Tourette’s. But De Niro’s performance, for example, is compelling not because it is “truthful” in a simple referential sense but because (like Dustin Hoffman’s famous portrayal of autism in *Rain Man*) it is so *contagious*; it induces the viewer to copy it; it generates second- and third-order copies because it undermines originality: aestheticization pirates and makes available what medicalization works to copy-right and contain. Likewise, to attribute the popularity of Sacks’s books simply to the exoticism of the pathological Other is to radically underestimate the turbulence of the *me/not-me* dynamic in which pathology becomes the paradigm for normalcy.

Predictably, Sacks’s response to the Sacks character in the film script differs dramatically from the truth-seizures he reports on seeing his fictionalized patients. The Sacks character, he protests, bears “some relation, but only some relation, to myself!” (374). Likewise, modest or immodest ellipses interrupt his account of first hearing “that Robin Williams would play . . . *me*, or at least the doctor character in the film who was, in part, to be based on me” (375). But the quaintly hesitating gesture enacted by these ellipses is, in fact, the very touchstone of Williams’s portrayal of the doctor’s doctorlike modesty. What may seem to be an affectation of

modesty in Williams's portrayal of the doctor may well portray an affectation of modesty in the doctor's portrayal of "himself." But Sacks would oppose the loose relation that "normals" maintain with their identity performances to the truth that fixes pathology to performance and paradigm.

In a predictably self-referential maneuver, the film aligns doctor and filmmaker by showing the Sacks character filming his patient, marking the way that the "doctor as character among characters" opens uniquely onto the "doctor as the field of the film's gaze." The Sacks character's modesty in the face of his patient's seizures is overcome by Leonard L.'s heroic desire to be documented. In returning to Sacks's account, though, one finds that the films-within-the-film are only a schematized reduction of the complicated circulation of "real" filmic images in which the Hollywood production is implicated. These include clinical footage of patients, "home movies" recorded by patients and their visitors, and an earlier documentary film made from these. In one radio play, Sacks reads the part of the Sacks character, putting a half-twist on the famous postmodern advertising claim that "I'm not a doctor but I play one on TV."

But if the circulation of images mark Parkinsonism as a relay for cultural production, this circulation is also crucial in the diagnostics that define the disease medically. William Langston's study of California teenagers stricken with severe Parkinsonism after ingesting a synthetic opiate designer drug leads to an important diagnostic breakthrough: "The reason for the similarities of Langston's findings and my own is extremely simple, but its discovery had to await the development of PET scanning, which can directly visualize living brain tissue" (Sacks 1990, 334). The visualization techniques of scanning only confirm another conjunction of images: "The similarity between Langston's patients and my own was dramatically shown in 1986 when his tapes, and the documentary film of *Awakenings*, were shown together at a meeting of the American Academy of Neurology in San Francisco" (334n). These multiple mirrorings seem to make the American Academy of Neurology into a strange analogue of the "amazing disturbance" on a New York street, or is it the other way around?

The ongoing development of imaging techniques such as radiography, stratigraphy, and tomography participates in an ongoing redefinition of pathology, which is, in Cartwright and Goldfarb's account, "no longer identified by way of surface symptom; it is now located in the differential between the multiple surfaces constituting the depth field of the body" (1992, 197). In other words, the differential necessary for the correlation between a surface symptom and a deep structure to be revealed by the anatomist is broken down into the "multiple surfaces

constituting the depth field of the body," in which surface and depth are no longer simply opposed. In the process, the representation of one visual image in another visual medium (as in photography) is ongoingly displaced by the technical "visualization" of largely nonvisual phenomena (such as brain waves, electrical activity, or volumetrics), a practice that does not deprivilege the visual but rather insists that its privilege be reproduced dynamically in a continual translation between dimensions, an attenuation that allows power to be exercised in the interval. Such a change is schematically illustrated in the gradual displacement of a disciplinary regime whose ideal is the visibility of pathology on the "actual" surface of the body. If nineteenth-century physiognomy and physical anthropology are the patriarchs of this regime, the yellow Star of David and the pink triangle are its crowning glories. The emergence of twentieth-century genetics stands nicely for an increase in the order of magnitude of mediation between the social and the physical, the large and small, the collective and the individual, in such a way that these differentials break apart without thereby undermining the hegemonic power-knowledge that had been built upon them. It is no wonder, then, that the causes for violence are now hysterically sought in television images of violence or in genetic predispositions. Medical ethicists, acting as shills for the Human Genome Project, like to hype the new and prodigious power and knowledge that genetics puts at human disposal, but this power is not so much a new ability to intervene between genetic causes and pathological effects as it is the actual production of this interval as a new site for intervention by a power that is dangerous because it is *not* new, another interval between the "multiple surfaces that constitute the depth field" of the collective and discursive body in which to install mechanisms of the more properly institutionalized violences of racism, capitalism, and sexism. The paradigm for power-knowledge ventures such as the genome project should not be the old modernist misreading of *Frankenstein* but a willfully postmodern misreading of *The Wizard of Oz*: the little man behind the screen, what Lacan called the "Imposture of the Phallus" (which can only function when veiled), is both the genome project and the genome itself, a thoroughly ideological object, a fetish, a con game whose effectivity (in producing knowledge effects) is guaranteed, since the reality in which it operates was thoroughlygoingly *virtual* to begin with. But what does it mean to even want the kind of brain, heart, and courage being offered? And what if one doesn't want to go "back" to an epistemological Kansas?

Upon rereading *Awakenings*, it gets more difficult to tell how much L-dopa, institutionalization, sophisticated diagnostics, and even humanistic science have hurt or helped either individual patients or Parkinsonians generally.

Predictably, though, Sacks's account of a correlation between staff layoffs due to institutional downsizing and a dramatic collective neurological "decompensation" by his patients does not lead him to acknowledge his own institution as a Parkinsonogenic agent or Parkinsonism as a socioeconomic phenomenon. What is the status of Hippocratic principles or of "pathological knowledge" generally when it is impossible to say whether the Parkinsonian effects of some antipsychotic drugs are side effects of the drugs or (as Sacks prefers) resilient somaticizations of a patient's prior condition, and when anti-Parkinsonian drugs prescribed to reduce these side effects sometimes include Parkinsonism among their *own* side effects? Or when the horrors of institutionalization are matched by the horrors of deinstitutionalization, or the interventionist hubris of "curing" are matched with the laissez-faire cruelties of "maintenance"?

But the trick of Sacks's book is to affirm at each moment the essential rightness of disciplinarity in spite or even because of its ability to accommodate resistance, to persist heroically or modestly in the face of its own failures and counterproductivities, which it acknowledges only to reference its own modest heroism.

Sacks describes one Parkinsonian patient, Rolando P., whose symptoms are particularly, even perversely, resistant to L-dopa, able to accommodate any variation in the rhythms or titrations of the drug treatment and still reassert themselves. He gradually and convulsively is made to replace his dependency on his mother with his relationship to a staff nurse, but then is thrown into a neurological tailspin—from which he never recovers—when the nurse is fired in the latest round of cutbacks. As against the film's Leonard L., who heroically insists on being documented and thus serves to inaugurate and legitimize disciplinary knowledge as an unproblematic response to a patient's desire, Rolando P.'s last words mark the absolute impasse of disciplinarity, the point at which both the patient and the institution achieve their ultimate defeat and victory: "Can't you fuckers leave me alone? Where's the sense in all your fucking tests? Don't you have eyes and ears in your head? Can't you see I'm dying of grief? For Chrissake let me die in peace!" (1990, 128).