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Doctoral Dissertation

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Abstract

Romantic Ethics

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This dissertation addresses the persistent problems in the critical discourse about English Romantic poetry that are produced by adhering to a false distinction between aesthetics and ethics. It has become a critical commonplace to see Coleridge and Wordsworth as poets concerned only with aesthetic questions, and, furthermore, that this concern constitutes a conservative, or even reactionary politics--what Jerome McGann has called the "Romantic Ideology." While there is a lot to be said for this generalization when applied to Coleridge and Wordsworth after their apostasy, it is not useful in understanding the original impetus of their aesthetic projects, and it is intellectually disabling when applied to Blake, the second generation of Romantic poets, or the so-called minor poets of the period. This study insists on reading ethics and politics back into the aesthetic choices poets make. Aesthetics have ethical implications, and all of these poets were aware of the ethical stakes involved in their art.

I proceed by first offering new readings of Blake's "Visions of the Daughters of Albion," and "Milton." These readings establish a Blakean poetics that refuses the distinction between aesthetics and ethics, and, rather, sees them as two parts of an integrated mode of artistic action. Using Blake's "contrary" poetics as a model for a political aesthetic, I proceed by offering new readings of Wordsworth's "Old Cumberland Beggar," "Tintern Abbey," and sections of "The Prelude," and then Coleridge's "France: An Ode," "This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison," and *Biographia Literaria*. By foregrounding the

relationship between aesthetics and ethics in these readings, the ethical impetus of the careers of each poet emerges. These projects create ethical crises for each poet. Finally, I examine Percy Shelley's responses to the aesthetic legacy and ethical problems of Coleridgean poetics. By comparing Coleridge's "Hymn before Sun-rise in the Vale of Chamouni," and Shelley's "Mont Blanc," it becomes clear that Shelley intends to create a profoundly ethical aesthetic system. I conclude with new readings of "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," and "Prometheus Unbound" which both establish the structure of Shelley's political poetics, and evaluate his aesthetic and ethical success.

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Dedication

For Shasta

Introduction

The impetus behind this study is to counter and correct the current critical view that English Romantic poetry constitutes a conservative, or even reactionary, ideology. This line of reasoning follows from Jerome McGann's coinage, "the Romantic ideology," but has since taken on a life of its own. What McGann characterized as an ideology in which the construction of the self superseded all other considerations, and, in effect, disregarded political questions is accurate as far as late Coleridge and Wordsworth go, but cannot be used as a productive strategy in reading their earlier works, the works they are most celebrated for. Both Coleridge and Wordsworth begin with well-defined ethical goals formulated within the specific historical conditions in which they write. Their poetics are direct responses to the perceived failures of their radical political formulations, and attachments, in the decade of the 1790's. Symptomatic of McGann's work is the current critical commonplace that Romantic aesthetics discounts ethics, and eliminates political questions. This line of reasoning parallels a more general critical movement best characterized in the ideas of Barbara Herrnstein Smith. She asserts that aesthetics constitutes a conservative rhetoric of the self, and that aesthetic categories of literature should be dispensed with as arbitrary re-inscriptions of corrupt power relations, the self-justification of the political status quo. Her analysis of the vexing problems inherent in making literary value judgements leads her to throw out the baby with the bath-water: "What all this [the problem of evaluation] suggests is that the obsessive debates over the cognitive substance, logical status, and "truth-value" of aesthetic judgements are not only unresolvable in the terms given but, strictly speaking pointless."¹ This critical line, the bracketing of aesthetics, has produced its own set of symptoms. Take, for example, the work of Margaret Homans. Homans has a complex and coherent program in which she attempts to create a counter-

¹Barbara Herrnstein Smith, "Contingencies of Value," *Critical Inquiry* 10 (September 1983), 22. For a more thorough critique of Herrnstein Smith's position see Hazard Adams, "Canons: Literary Criteria/Power Criteria," in *Antithetical Essays in Literary Criticism and Liberal Education* (Tallahassee: The Florida State University Press, 1994), 166-183.

Romanticism on feminist lines. Her work on Dorothy Wordsworth asserts that there is a naturalism in Dorothy free from William's anxiety about the personal significance of the objects of nature. While this is a productive line of inquiry, Homan's work is often hampered by the taboo status of aesthetic considerations. She attempts to make a distinction between Dorothy's ethical interests, and William's aesthetic obsessions. But, this is a fundamentally false distinction. Writers make ethical choices when they make aesthetic choices. The critical fog created by this dismissal of aesthetics manifests itself, for example, in Homan's reading of Dorothy's walk with Coleridge on February 26, 1798. From the hilltop, Wordsworth states that she looks out over, "a magnificent scene, curiously spread out for even minute inspection, though so extensive that the mind is afraid to calculate its bounds."² Homans claims that this passage provides evidence of Dorothy's attention to the particularity of "minute inspection." Be that as it may, she completely misses the fact that Dorothy is offering a recapitulation of the Kantian mathematical sublime in which the mind fails "to calculate [the] bounds" of the sublime scene. Her comment on the exhaustion of the free play of the imagination in considering the scene, is not only not a mark of her naturalism, it places her in the most rarified of aesthetic subjects, the sublime. And, furthermore, her source for her aesthetic sensibility is doubtless her walking companion, Coleridge. In short, by removing aesthetics from the center of her discussion, Homans directly misreads, as its opposite, an instance of the practice of idealist aesthetics in structuring experience. She alludes to an undefined counter-poetics that she characterizes as an effort to "take on Coleridge."³ This reading is untenable, and based on a willful critical blindness.

I propose to restore aesthetics to a discussion of English Romantic poetry by turning to William Blake and demonstrating how Blake's aesthetic systems simultaneously constitute ethical positions and create the critical means to resist ideology (Romantic or otherwise). That re-formulation of Romantic aesthetics is followed by a discussion of Wordsworth and Coleridge

²*Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Mary Moorman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 8.

³Margaret Homans, "Building Refuges: Dorothy Wordsworth's Poetics of Image," in *Bearing the Word* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 53.

that makes it clear that if one chooses to characterize their poetics as reactionary, this can only be accomplished by resorting to a fundamental half-truth that also chooses to ignore the ethical and political impetus at the inception of their poetic careers. Finally, I turn to Percy Shelley and demonstrate that his poetics were not at cross-purposes with his political goals, a view propagated by both the critical view I have just summarized, and by the standard idealist (neo-Platonist) reading of Shelley. Rather, Shelley developed the political potential inherent in the constitutive power of poetic language.

Discussion of Shelley leads to a discussion of the other critical line that I attempt to modify in this study, de Manian deconstruction. The ostensibly historicist position of McGann, Homans, et al. (although it seems unwilling to see that aesthetic ideas take place in history) reacts, in large part, to the impasse presented by de Man in investigating poetic texts. Paradoxically, historicist suspicions of aesthetics follow directly from de Man's suspicions about the duplicity of language per se. I argue that de Man's impasse is actually a confusion regarding the differences between constitutive and descriptive theories of poetic language. In assuming that poetic language strives to achieve the goal of transparency that discursive language seeks (and fails to achieve), he misreads the generative function of poetic language, especially tropes, as evidence of the duplicitous nature of poetry. This malaise is repeated in Herrnstein Smith's complaint that questions of evaluation are "unresolvable." Blake would see this as the constitutive source of meanings, and as the process by which authority is eroded and ideology is resisted. In other words, the assumptions of duplicity behind de Manian and historicist attacks on Romantic poetics are fundamentally misguided and can be understood, at best, as half-truths of dubious critical use.

The terms employed in this study follow from the nature of the material discussed. I use the terms "aesthetics" and "ethics" in their broadest possible senses. Under the term aesthetics, for example, I place the classic formulations of the sublime by Kant, Burke and others, but also the effects achieved by employing such formulations (terror, self-aggrandizement, etc.).

In addition, I characterize specific poetic techniques, such as Blake's use of synecdoche, or Shelley's experimentation with simile, as aesthetic. The term ethics encompasses the entire range of responses to the problems of self and other, from the isolation of Wordsworth's theory of innate morality to Wollstonecraft's political polemics concerning the social construction of gender roles. The discussion tracks the movement of the various writers through this wide range of intellectual responses. Another source of terms in the study originates within the works of the poets discussed. Blake's concept of "contraries" is crucial to the study, and is employed not only to describe Blake's poetry, but to characterize a radical approach to the theoretical problems of self and other and the violence implicit in dualism. Similarly, once I have established the structure and critical uses of the term "selfhood" in Blake, I employ it as a general critical term throughout the study. Many of the terms originate in the tradition of the philosophical discourse of aesthetics, and are roughly contemporaneous with the works discussed. So, the appearance of the language of Burke, Kant, Schelling, Schiller, Reynolds, et cetera, is unavoidable, especially in relation to Coleridge and Shelley who are avid synthesizers of these works. Secondary theoretical works are alluded to where they illuminate the specific work under discussion, or where they illuminate the philosophical tradition that forms the context of that work. For example, Thomas Weiskel's study, *The Romantic Sublime*, comments directly on specific issues in Wordsworth, and also on the Kantian tradition. Wittgenstein makes an appearance because of a philosophical affinity with Blake's formulation of the selfhood, and Slavoj Zizek is included because his political re-interpretation of Lacan is useful in clarifying Blake's critique of ideology. In each of these instances, the goal is not the illumination or confirmation of any of these theoretical positions, other than to demonstrate their usefulness. The final source of critical discourse in my discussions is taken from specific critics of English Romantic poetry. These critics are engaged where they intersect the critical matters that arise in the readings I offer of certain works. Often, but not always, they serve as oppositional figures in the construction and clarification of my arguments.

The terrain of the study takes the following form. The first section,

chapters one and two, form a detailed investigation of Blake's poetics. In particular, the poetic concept "contrariety" serves as the critical means of addressing a broad range of aesthetic questions, and preparing the way for investigations of other Romantic poets and poems. "Contrariety" conceives of oppositional forces as generative. Rather than moving forward by quasi-Hegelian means, a process Blake would term a "negation," contraries remain in play and produce the necessary constitutive "energy." Poetic language, in Blake's model, is radically unstable as it resists settling into a progressive series of superseding Hegelian moments. "Contrariety," then, serves as a critique of German and English (Coleridgean and Wordsworthian) idealist aesthetics, particularly theories of the sublime. In Kant's classic formulation, the imagination, in its free play with the concepts of the understanding, fails to make the sublime object cognizable. In the moment of that crisis, the mind recognizes its ability to conceive of this failure and that conception points to the mind's supersensible destination. This complex moment is sublime in that its near-simultaneous two stages take the form of a negative stage (the crisis) and its supersession (recuperation). The ultimate meaning of being overwhelmed by otherness is the equally enormous construction of the aesthetic self. Blake's contraries resist the self-aggrandizement of sublime recuperation by refusing to supersede one of the terms in the contrary opposition. The poet experiences "the grandeur of inspiration" ("Milton," 43, 2), but does not do so by superseding the fallen condition of his basic humanity. No effort is made to overcome this unstable flux, and in fact the inspired state cannot be achieved without its contrary, the fallen state; inspiration works through its contrary relation to error, and error inevitably occurs as the result of any effort to stabilize inspiration into dogma. This contrary engagement creates the productive "energy" of Blake's poetics. Any effort to stabilize a perception of the sublime by superseding the fallen condition from which it sprang is a negation, and precipitates a more terrible fall into utter blindness to the very possibility of vision. The divine, the eternal, inspiration is achieved as moments which inevitably fall back into human error, but those moments are the only perception possible of those greatest othernesses. The Blakean sublime maintains contrary energy along the synecdoche formed between the fallen and inspired worlds. The content of the fallen immanently holds the

inspired within it and vice versa. When Milton falls, in the poem that bears his name, he makes possible his redemption. This is a complex moment in that Milton wills his fall and as a result falls yet remains outside that fall as its external source. The distance between these two simultaneous positions is further complicated by the fact that the "eternity" Milton inhabits is the partial and insufficient version of his own theological making. His fallen body and his theological structures both serve as necessary sites of redemptive possibility despite the appearance of their contrary separation (material and eternal, fallen and redeemed). And similarly, Milton's emanation, Ololon, "opens" a path to the eternal in the act of falling. The structure of that path is synecdochal in that it connects the fragmentary world of Ololon to its redemptive possibility as a part of the eternal. The imagination creates/experiences the contrary flux which enables those immanent moments to be temporarily realized. Tropes therefore constitute and transform the real rather than merely serving as descriptive tools at the disposal of a greater intellectual faculty. The radical instability of such transformations subverts the claims of knowledge or meaning made for the reason by making them contrary to the imagination's claims. Totalization may be internally valid in a rationalist model of knowledge, but it becomes a fallen activity when it attempts to extend its authority into all other domains--when it takes itself as the sole structure of knowledge and thus confuses knowledge and method. In other words, Blake's poetics erode the power of recuperation by exposing it as the product of a negating fiction. The Blakean sublime must be a contrary formulation. The pathos of loss and/or terror, rather than a condition to be superseded (the negative stage) must, instead, serve as the necessary sympathetic gesture in constituting the sublime--its contrary. Sublime aesthetics are thus always constituted by a contrary of pathos and sublimity. Section two, chapters three and four, proceeds to read Wordsworth and Coleridge from the vantage offered by Blakean poetics. The idealist aesthetics of Wordsworth and Coleridge, using Blake's contrariety and the formulation of the "selfhood" in "Milton" as points of comparison, appear to be based, in large part, on the complex fictions of supersession. By looking at the poetic means of superseding the realm of pathos in Wordsworth, and the equally complex means of transvaluing it in Coleridge, a fresh perspective from which to view

and define the basis of Romantic aesthetics emerges.

Of equal importance to the potential critique of aesthetic idealism implicit in contrariety is its potential as a means of formulating complex and specific critiques of the cultural forms Blake faced. In extending the subversive potential of contraries to ideology and ideological forms, a clearer view of Blake's social project emerges. His revolutionary poem "Visions of the Daughters of Albion" employs his poetics to engage in the ongoing debates concerning the *woman question*. By challenging, supplementing and revising the views of Rousseau, Wollstonecraft, Godwin and others, Blake creates a comprehensive critique of the ideological structures which constrain women and the resulting psychological and cultural effects. The struggle of "Oothoon" resists reduction to a social polemic, and instead attempts to present a complex record of the individual experience of religiously and socially sanctioned oppression. As a result of studying Blake's critiques of specific ideological oppression, a method emerges that employs contrariety as a means of interrogating ideology per se.

Chapter one constructs a Blakean critical method by carefully reading "Oothoon's" experiences in "Visions of the Daughters of Albion" as specific instances of oppression, synecdoches of the ideological oppression of English women in 1794, synecdoches of all oppression affected through the use of negation, etc. The specificity of these critiques functions only so long as "Oothoon's" status as a Blakean particular is preserved. To supersede the particularity of "Oothoon" in the service of a political, psychological, or hermeneutic argument, or in the production of sublime transport, is to lose the means of making such critiques.

Chapter two expands the terms of Blake's critique of ideological violence by examining the much more complex examples offered by his poem "Milton." That poem lays bare the sacrificial economy at the root of Christian ideological practices. Blake critiques the psychological pressures (i.e., the fear of death) which underwrite Pauline dualism. The sacrifice of the body as a means of securing the immortal soul displaces Christian love at the ideological center of church practice and underwrites the power of the "priesthood." Blake's

antipathy towards churches arises from his recognition of this fundamental negation (sublime supersession), and the power hierarchies derived from it (the ideological guarantors of immortality). Furthermore, Blake exposes the structure of cultural misogyny in the association of the female with the body and with sin (that which must be superseded). In choosing John Milton, he finds a poetic site where the theological and the sexual overlap. Milton's notorious mistreatment of his wives and daughters, conflated into the experience of "Ololon," acts as a synecdoche in generating Blake's general critique. He does not spare himself from this examination, and he becomes a character in his poem in an effort to engage his own misogyny. The crises of the male and female wills, constructed out of fear and the desire to supersede that fear, can only be overcome by renouncing negation and annihilating the "selfhood" it constructs. The complex problem the poet must work out is how to renounce negation without employing negation in the process--how to avoid "becoming what you behold" as Blake calls it. Blake's vision of human oppositional tensions ("energy") beyond gender, the sexual equivalent of "mental fight," is highly contentious in its figuring of the female "emanation," yet must be recognized as a major effort in attempting to unravel the implicit violence of ideologically enforced gender roles.

More than any other poem, "Milton" applies Blake's critical method at the level of language itself. "Book the First" exhaustively explores the fall as a condition of language. Meaning is made impossible in the dualistic madness of never-ending division. De Man would characterize this as the "duplicity" of poetic language, but Blake challenges the morbidity implicit in such declarations and demands we overcome our fear. Efforts to stabilize this flux and end the reader's sense of vertigo accelerate the process. The "Bard's song," rather than serving as a helpful metaphor or clue to a first cause, further contributes to the sense of free fall and disintegration. Efforts to use the language of reason, especially syllogism, to establish meaning are constantly undone by the ongoing rush of contrariety. Reason can establish nothing. Yet, in the endless generation of subversive contraries, the poem also generates the possibility of redemptive moments. The very collapse of rational meaning as a totalizing ethical and/or aesthetic system makes possible "moments" of vision

in which we see back through the entropic flow to the eternal. Paradoxically (or contrarily), the content of the syllogism may be visionary despite the fictionality of the truth claims made for its form. Only through literal expression can visionary moments be produced and thus even syllogisms are potentially redemptive as poetic events. Rationality is insufficient, not incorrect. By creating the contrary, temporal and eternal, the poet subverts the ideological attempts to secure the eternal (through dogma) and makes possible the eternal moment immanently held in each moment of the temporal flux. His creation of the time and space contrary near the end of "Book the First" also creates the possibility of a redemptive poetics provided it remains radically unstable as part of the generative tension of the fallen and redeemed contrary.

In "Milton," Blake develops other poetic devices besides contrariety in his critique of the ideological products of reason. The concept of "states," which range from the most fallen condition of pure selfish appetite to the selflessness of imaginative vision, provides the poet with further means of critiquing ideological positions. Because each individual passes through various "states," the primacy of any position is systematically eroded. The anti-perspectival (and contrarily multi-perspectival) element in Blake's illuminations makes clear his deep suspicion of the authority of constructed three-dimensional fictions. He deeply distrusts the presumption of single-point perspective that it represents the real. Its status as a trick, a subterfuge, relates it directly to Blake's critique of selfhood. "States" make the task of reading "Milton" especially complex, and some of the most glaring hermeneutic gaffes occur when a figure in the poem is taken as a stable (if complex) unitary self, a stable perspective. The untenable nature of this proposition is at the center of the poem's critique of "Milton" who must give up the safety of the ongoing production of his fictive "selfhood" in order to experience true vision (true in the sense of unmediated by his own fear). Unlike Postmodern attacks on the notion of the unitary self, Blake critiques only the presumption of the selfhood in taking itself as the organizing center of all meaning. He preserves a de-centered acting self potentially free of this limit (the redeemable self), and thus avoids the mistake of demonizing the self per se so common in contemporary

critical epistemes like "the unitary self." The destabilization of truth claims caused by "states," the erosion of a single perspective, brings to mind Wittgenstein's final work, *On Certainty*, and his analysis of "frameworks" (limited positions) which take themselves as totalizing rather than as temporary and provisional. In Wittgenstein's terms, Urizen suffers from "aspect-blindness" in his vain efforts to rationally order his universe. "Milton" moves towards recognizing the ultimate fictionality of the "selfhood's" "framework," and in so doing gives up the recuperation afforded by negation. This critique of the uses of the sublime in creating the selfhood intersects with important and ongoing theoretical debates, in that it serves, prior to Hegel, as a critique of the negative conception of Hegelian being. In this, Blake is an ally of many contemporary theorists who recognize the sacrificial violence implicit in Hegelianism. Georges Bataille's critique of sacrificial violence and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's "rhizomic" end-run around Hegel come to mind, but perhaps the most interesting resemblance is with Antonio Negri's attempt to establish a theory of positive being via Spinoza in *The Savage Anomaly*:

Spinozian ontology presents an absolutely positive and univocal conception of being founded on the material power of its own constitutive force. It is a "savage" conception in that it rejects any preformed model of order, any external organization, any hierarchy, and insists instead on being continually remade through a constitutive process on the immanent field of forces.⁴

The phrase, the "constitutive process on the immanent field of forces," strikes me as crucial to both Blakean poetics and contemporary critical theory. It summarizes the constitutive power of Blakean poetic language. Through the radical, tropological production of meanings created in the generative tension of contrariety and the multiplicity of "states," Blake constitutes the experiential real. His is not a description of internal "states," but an insistence on their reality (and limits) in and of language. Supplementing this explosive language are Blake's illuminated designs of the poems which serve to further create and disperse meaning in their complex relations to the text. Ideological dogma, and

⁴*The Savage Anomaly* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1991), especially the section from the author's introduction, xvii-xxiii.

its manifestations as political and religious institutions, is exposed, through Blake's contrariety, as self-deluded in believing itself to be a description of real conditions. Its totalizing violence is recognized as a vain effort to constitute an oppressive real--its language is negation. Blake's insistence on the "annihilation of the selfhood" signals a giving up of the fictive stabilization of the constitutive flux of poetic language. In this context, the crisis of de Manian method marks a failure to recognize the constitutive and descriptive contrary as a generative force in poetic language. In theorizing the failure of language to achieve transparency (the end of knowledge, if knowledge is conceived of as total description) de Man recognizes only the fallen portion of the fallen and redemptive contrary. He would be unable to see the redemptive potential in Urizen's syllogistic universe, only its failure. However, while opacity makes totalizing meanings impossible, it also serves as the very site of multiplicity as meanings proliferate at its surface. Thus, there is great theoretical potential in Blakean poetics for formulating a critical method that has radical liberation as its simultaneous end and means.

Chapters three and four take Blake's use of contrariety in resisting recuperation and use it as a point of entry into a discussion of recuperative strategies in the aesthetics of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Both poets began their poetic development with clear ethical and political goals, and attempted to integrate those goals into their aesthetic methods. Chapter three begins with a reading of Wordsworth's "The Old Cumberland Beggar," as a means of establishing his ethical and political goals, and of exploring the aesthetic means he offers for achieving those goals. This is followed by a reading of his poetic history of the events of the French Revolution. Wordsworth's literary versions, in "The Prelude," of the history of his own participation in those events (his Jacobin past) are carefully constructed to ensure his total supersession of the past self who held those radical views. He details first the general history of events: the promise of revolutionary possibility, disappointment in its failures, and the final sacrificial apotheosis of the murder of Robespierre. The aesthetic structure of this third person account constitutes, for Wordsworth what Georges Bataille would call a "closed economy." The fear and confusion of the Terror is superseded by sacrificial means, thus preserving the essential, poetic

self beyond the contamination of the body politic. The quasi-Kantian structure is clear. The sublime of crisis creates a greater self out of the laceration and dismemberment of his revolutionary failure. But, in Wordsworth's case, he creates a paradox in the process. His own sublime transformation, predicated on the violent negative stage of his radical past, is undermined by his evasion of that negative stage through self-division (that other me did it) and the shifting of culpability onto revolutionary theory per se (I was contaminated). Bataille's primary target in critiquing the sacrificial supersession of the fear of death is the Hegelian dialectic, and that critique extends equally to Wordsworth's reduction of the Terror to a negative stage in his self-aggrandizement. A second version of events in "The Prelude" attempts the more difficult task of imaginatively extricating the poet from personal culpability in the events. Even though Robespierre has been sacrificed in an effort to atone for the sins of the revolutionary project as a whole, Wordsworth must still wrestle with his recollections of his tainted past. Recollection is, after all, the basis of his poetic project. In order to remove the taint he divides the self and sacrifices the tainted portion. By objectifying the past self that was governed by Reason (contaminated by Rousseau, Godwin, et al.), he is able to recuperate the poet-self. His participation in France thus becomes another negative stage on which he attempts to capitalize, through the sublime turn, and convert into "a poet and that alone."

The chapter concludes with a discussion of "Tintern Abbey" which provides the most detailed version of the poet's internalization of moral and religious questions into the aesthetic economy Wordsworth names "abundant recompense." In order to guarantee the power of his aesthetic sensibility to overcome the psychological/emotional traumas of existence (figured in the poem as products of the city, but clearly standing for his radical past as well), and to construct moral certainty, the poet creates an intellectual sublime. The immediacy of his childhood sensibility must be superseded in order to secure the "abundant recompense" of moral certainty and quasi-religious transport. As a result, Wordsworth is forced to sacrifice his childhood as a negative stage, yet his entire method is predicated on the innateness of human morality, from its first formulation in "The Old Cumberland Beggar" forward. His

recuperation should mark the end of the poem, but he is paradoxically undone by the power of the recollection of his childhood experience. The creation of this realm of loss as an unassimilated by-product of his sublime turn (it ruptures the closure suggested by "abundant recompense") creates a moment of overwhelming pathos (where I would locate the poem's greatness). Unlike Blake, who places pathos at the center of his poetics by making it part of the sublimity and pathos contrary, Wordsworth attempts to supersede his pathos as a part of the emotional instability he finds intolerable to his larger intellectual project (and one suspects to his emotional well-being), yet he is unable, in the end, to deny the primary value in the ordinary moments of childhood experience. The final sections of the poem attempt to exploit Dorothy's childhood as a means of having it both ways. He supersedes his own childhood immediacy but retains access to hers. As a figure in the poem, she becomes a source of capital in a sublime economy. Despite this effort, the pathos produced by his apparent appetite for Dorothy's immediacy (made necessary once he has cut himself off from his own) continues to haunt the poem. The emotional power of "Tintern Abbey" results from the inability of its aesthetic rhetoric to totally supersede its desire.

While Coleridge shares many of Wordsworth's aesthetic goals, his means of achieving a recuperative sublime is made more complex by two important factors. Chapter four explores those factors, and re-emphasizes Coleridge's commitment to political goals, as expressed in "France: An Ode." Like Wordsworth, he attempted to internalize his ethical and political goals into his aesthetic production. The first factor that causes him to differ from Wordsworth is that he sees himself as incapable of any natural sensibility, the innate moral ground of Wordsworthian poetics. He claims that this incapacity is the result of his constrained (urban) childhood. His deficient childhood makes it necessary for Coleridge to experience nature through the mediation of another person. He extends wishes for Lamb in "This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison," and for Hartley in "Frost at Midnight" that allow him to vicariously experience their aesthetic "joys." The sublime moment can only be achieved through this mediated means. By placing himself at a step removed from the sublime source, Coleridge also protects himself from charges of blasphemy (the

unmediated experience of the divine) the fear of which is the other crucial difference between him and Wordsworth, and an anxiety he expressed from "The Eolian Harp" forward. His poetic figures, especially the "veil," reflect this sensitivity. Despite these complex structural differences, Coleridge's aesthetic goal is recuperation (the supersession of his childhood, for example) as clearly as is Wordsworth's. The differences amount to variations in figuring the quasi-Kantian negative stage which enables the pantheistic dream of sustained sublimity (self and nature as total undifferentiated meaning). In the end, however, the differences in figuration become crucial to their poetic debate. Wordsworth capitalizes and supersedes his childhood sensibility, but he still places the source of aesthetic experience in nature. As his poetic gift (his ability to derive universal meaning from nature's particulars) wanes, his aesthetic structure becomes unstable. Coleridge responds to his colleague's poetic anxiety, as expressed in the early stanzas of what would become the "Immortality Ode," by arguing, in "Dejection: An Ode," that the aesthetic source must be internal. This argument erodes Wordsworth's position by leaving him no aesthetic reservoir in nature to alleviate his anxiety over the decline of his aesthetic power. His rhetorical move of cutting himself off from his childhood immediacy of nature increasingly resembles a subterfuge designed to deny his aesthetic instability and the feeling of the erosion of his sensibility. The "Dejection Ode," thus, puts Wordsworth in free fall as evidenced by his desperate and dubious creation in "The Immortality Ode" of a pre-existing realm, a source beyond Coleridge's critique. "Home at Grasmere" is an instructive work in viewing his aesthetic collapse. His recuperative structure becomes a set of empty gestures; instead of transforming nature into a realm of religious and psychological certainty (the "one life"), Wordsworth neurotically reduces nature to the condition of property. Chapter four concludes with a discussion of Coleridge's efforts to philosophically consolidate his position in *Biographia Literaria*. He proposes a philosophical version of the internalization of all significant moral, ethical, or religious questions through the reduction of objective knowledge to the status of a functional mode within the primacy of subjective knowledge.

Chapter five turns to Shelley and a renewed emphasis on the ability or

inability of poetic language to image the sublime. Shelley also introduces an ethical dimension into the subject through his suspicion of the self-aggrandizement of the sublime turn. He finds himself in two related, and difficult, binds. His revolutionary politics provide him with a fervent desire for a radical transformation of the social real. Yet his efforts to image that transformation are undermined by the aesthetic means at his disposal. If he attempts to poetically represent revolutionary change, he risks exploiting that change through the personal recuperation which would inevitably result. The reduction of his revolutionary hopes to self-aggrandizement would repeat the Wordsworthian construction of moral certainty. The revolution and pantheism would be roughly equivalent *personal* achievements. Despite this sensitivity to the risk of reducing oppressive social conditions to a negative stage in a transcendent personal moment, Shelley still strongly feels that the force of poesis itself propels him towards a revolutionary future and its representation. Whether or not that "power" can be known, let alone represented through poetic language, is the other bind in which the poet finds himself.

In "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," Shelley attempts to come to terms with "the power" and its radical instability. He employs similes as relatively stable tropes which may image both "the power's" transformative force (the tropological function itself) and the extreme ineffability of the power per se. The similes transform one ineffable (and futile) image of "the power" into another and another and so on. This exercise images the radical instability of "the power," and does so by demonstrating the radical transformative potential of poetic language. "Mont Blanc" continues this exploration of the transformative power of tropes, but does so while confronting the basic ethical question that concerns him about the sublime. Can a sublime landscape be aesthetically apprehended without constructing a fictive realm of value and personal power? The poem acts as a critique of Coleridge's "Hymn Before Sunrise In the Vale of Chamouni" (which he had recently read). Coleridge feels no apparent anxiety in converting the sublime landscape into a personal deity (employing his usual figural evasions of blasphemy), and challenges the reader to perceive that landscape without perceiving God. Shelley rises to the challenge and attempts to observe the power inherent in Mont Blanc as vast,

unknowable and amoral. He is partially compromised in his project by his own recuperative desire. He cannot help but long for the ability to poetically harness the undeniably powerful force as a means of constructing revolutionary rhetoric. The poem ends, however, with his rejection of that course and his insistence on maintaining the possibility of the mountain's ultimate "vacancy." Shelley's rejection of recuperation at the end of "Mont Blanc" is a crucial moment in developing the radical skepticism of a modern anti-sublime. In many important ways it prefigures Nietzsche's efforts at constructing a non-recuperative sublime that can provide a critique of the construction of the self rather than a means of attaining the self's ultimate grandeur.

Shelley's problematic aesthetics are clearly an inherited box. He attempts to work simultaneously inside and against Wordsworthian and Coleridgean aesthetics. He is cut off from Blake's contrariety, and tropological experimentation. As a result he seeks a distinctively Shelleyan solution to the impasse reached in "Mont Blanc." This effort occurs most clearly in "Prometheus Unbound." He sets out the political dimensions of the problem of the human will. Prometheus and Jupiter are held together in a violent dualism of the desire for supersession (Blakean negation). This amounts to a mad and unproductive Hegelianism where the master/slave dialectic's fictive subterfuge cannot lift the participants out of the morass of cyclical violence. As a result, the poem cannot proceed through the heroic means of Prometheus's will (despite the traditional readings of the poem). Act II removes Prometheus from the poem's action, and attempts to find an alternative agency in Asia's selfless struggle towards the necessary knowledge of the destructiveness of dualism, and human/Promethean complicity in that violence. She acts through following the internal/external (self/other) agency of the echoes and ultimately the sounding-chamber of Demogorgon's cave. Her apotheosis as Aphrodite (love as a transformative influence) is the revolution. The revolutionary transformation of the world in Act III takes place with Asia and Prometheus largely absent and in a state of complete passivity. While this is reminiscent of "the annihilation of the selfhood" in Blake's "Milton," it cuts itself off from direct action in a way Blake would find intolerable and unnecessary. Shelley's

version of selflessness points in an intellectual direction that eventually leads to the Symbolist impasse created by the total autonomy of the Mallarméan "Book."

Act IV attempts to push poetic language to its limits in an effort to image the necessary giving up of individual power implicit in Shelley's ethical demand. Similes become much more than unstable and ineffable (c.f., "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty"); they accelerate to the point where the poet and reader can no longer recover referents and instead must passively accept the transformative flux which surrounds and informs them. The "power" of this flux must not be demonized as the terror of entropy. Instead of recuperating this greatest other as an equally great negative stage, we must accept our ultimate insignificance as a means towards an ethical (free of fear) apprehension of the real. This final Shelleyan move has similar demands to Blake's "mental fight," but it leaves action as an illusive and potentially mystified realm. By resisting the desire for such final supersession of the fallen world, Blake, in the final analysis, provides the most useful perceptions and poetic means to construct a theoretical praxis that identifies and meaningfully engages the oppression of ideological violence that it encounters in the world.

Chapter One

Contraries, Negations and Political “Visions”

William Blake’s “Visions of the Daughters of Albion” sets out to make a political argument about the subjugation of English women, circa 1794, but does so based on the assumption that this political critique gains its power, its ethical force, from the fact that it is a poem, an aesthetic object. In other words, not only does Blake discount any distinction between ethical questions and aesthetic practice, he asserts that it is through his use of poetic figures that his critique works. The central poetic principle employed in his political attack is contrariety. For Blake, contraries are oppositional terms or structures that do not resolve themselves into stable, single meanings. They resist synthesis, in the Hegelian sense, and they do not act to suppress half of the diad, as in Cartesian dualism. Instead, Blake develops the poetic idea of “energy” in place of a third term, or Cartesian negation. Blake sees negation as the violence implicit in dualist systems, and sets out to resist it by keeping contraries in play, and refusing to collapse them in the service of intellectual expediency. Furthermore, he sees the “energy” created by the contraries as the generative site of all art including his poetry, and, simultaneously, as the site of social and political resistance to the various power hierarchies that surround him. In political and social terms, contraries destabilize the reductive assumptions of ideological structures. The ability of the institutionalized church, or the political status quo to define and constrain social meaning is negation operating in the social world that Blake experiences around him. He joins in the ongoing debates and critiques of these ideological structures, (“Visions of the Daughters of Albion” defends the feminist views of Mary Wollstonecraft, while amending them in important ways), and, in this, offers a unique method for formulating such social critiques. Blake believes that the language of negation is the constitutive source of political oppression, and therefore can only be resisted through poetic language, and specifically through the use of contrariety. Poetic language is, therefore, considered to be constitutive, the power of creation per se, and the poet’s task is to employ this

language in the service of the beautiful or sublime, aesthetic goals, and, simultaneously, in the service of political justice, ethical goals. In fact, Blake would not see these as two realms at all, but rather as the single subject and aim of art. In order to demonstrate how Blake's poetic, political critique operates, I am going to offer a detailed reading of "Visions of the Daughters of Albion" as an exemplary instance of his method.

Among Blake's sets of contraries, the devouring and the prolific are particularly important to the method I am sketching. Taken as contrary modes of language, they not only mirror the function of the contrary and the negation in generating or limiting meaning, but also represent the tension between constitutive and descriptive theories of poetic language. Tropes, in Blake, are taken to be prolific sites of radical transformation which constitute reality in linguistic terms. The real is created by the multiplicity of poetic language, rather than serving as a material referent awaiting linguistic representation. They (tropes) cannot be reduced to the status of descriptive comparisons without stabilizing the poles of those comparisons, and, thus, without moving towards negation. Allegory, in the typical Romantic formulation, attempts to stabilize poetic relations in a hierarchy of meaning, and, in so doing, devour the surplus meaning of the prolific trope. The prolific, then, is a name for the source of anxiety in de Manian notions of poetic language as falsely privileged sites of meaning. But such suspicion is unwarranted in Blake's formulation because his contrary flux resists the establishment of stable hierarchies and the violence inherent in them, and creates what he calls "sublime allegory." The trope's sublimity exists in its very refusal of recuperation through the hierarchical means of traditional allegory. This formulation is itself a contrary to the various Kantian formulations of the sublime from the period which have recuperation of the moment of crisis as their *raison d'être*. I will address this subject in detail in chapter two. In the example of a synecdoche, if the universal and the particular can be kept in play as contraries, then ideological formation cannot occur, and neither can the self-aggrandizement of the Kantian or Burkean sublimes. In their place is found poetic "energy" generating a multiplicity of meanings. The final complication to be kept in mind in considering Blake's

formulation, is the recognition that the devouring, the descriptive mode of language (such as I am employing), is necessary in making the poem's meanings knowable by providing the form that is presented to the mind. A common error in reading Blake occurs when the devouring is reduced to a term for evil, because without its contrary engagement the prolific is literally meaningless. To see the devouring as evil (or as a name for a naïve view of language, for that matter) is to "become what you behold" and engage in the practice of negation.

To help further clarify the theoretical terms I am using I am going to borrow another one from E. P. Thompson in his study of Blake, *Witness Against the Beast*. In noticing the de-stabilizing force of Blakean poetics, he called that process "anti-hegemony." He argued that Blake was consciously anti-hegemonic in part because of his association with the long tradition of antinomian dissenting sects:

...if we accept the view that in most societies we can observe an intellectual as well as institutional hegemony, or dominant discourse, which imposes a structure of ideas and beliefs--deep assumptions as to social proprieties and economic process and as to the legitimacy of relations of property and power, a general 'common sense' as to what is possible and what is not, a limited horizon of moral norms and practical probabilities beyond which all must be blasphemous, seditious, insane or apocalyptic fantasy...then these antinomian sects (and by extension Blake) were hegemony's eighteenth-century opposition.⁵

Ideology, then, is a name for the "intellectual hegemony" of the age and the cultural forms it takes constitute an "institutional hegemony." While Thompson names the anti-hegemonic force in Blakean poetics, he does little to specify it. I am arguing that Blake's contrariety is the anti-hegemonic in action, and that negation is the violent ideological force that attempts to regulate meaning and thus quash dissent.

⁵ E. P. Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 108-109. Thompson's study of Blake's possible connections to dissenting, antinomian sects has made clear the political resonances of his religious ideas, and corrected the impression (put forward by Kathleen Raine and others) of Blake as a Neo-Platonic autodidact.

In the poem "Visions of the Daughters of Albion," the female figure Oothoon acts on the contrary energy inherent in her sexual desire. The oppositional possibilities of her desire are violently negated by her rape at the hands of Bromion. The poem's narrative unfolds as a record of the negations Oothoon suffers, and the subsequent distortions of her sexual identity and energy. By resisting these negations, she becomes a contrary presence in the poem and unmasks and critiques the structure and violence of the ideological forms which constrain her.

"The Argument" which begins the poem presents Oothoon free from constraint. She does not conform to the stereotypical "virgin" in the virgin/whore dichotomy because she appears in the first moments of sexual awakening. This portrait violates the social taboos against acknowledging female sexual desire and the possibility of female sexual pleasure. Oothoon announces her freedom from such stereotypical (negating) constraints: "I loved Theotormon / And I was not ashamed" (iii, 1-2)⁶. She denies the cultural judgement against her desire. But Blake does not present a simple reversal, the negation of expectations. The next lines, "I trembled in my virgin fears / And hid in Leutha's vale" (iii, 3-4), present a contrary internal drama in which Oothoon trembles in the fear of where her desire leads, but simultaneously trembles with anticipation. Thus Blake transforms the false dichotomy of virgin/whore into the tension between sexual innocence and sexual desire found in the energy produced by the contrary, fear and anticipation. By resisting any external definition of female desire, the poem presents a profound psychological glimpse at the moment of sexual awakening. Oothoon acts on her desire in the moment she "plucked Leutha's flower" and "rose up from the vale" (iii, 5-6). It is important to see that the language of sexual deflowering has been shifted from the rhetoric of male seduction to an act of female volition, a free choice based on the heart's knowledge. The subversive potential of Oothoon's contrary autonomy is immediately recognized and negated by the violence of Bromion's "terrible thunders." He tears her "virgin mantle in twain" (iii, 7-8), and in so doing also attempts to re-define her in line with the ideological

⁶ All references to "Visions of the Daughters of Albion" will be cited in the text by plate and line number.

assumptions of her society.

Bromion's verbal assault following the rape begins by negating Oothoon's "virgin" contrary with the declaration, "behold this harlot" (1, 18). He re-asserts the violence of the distinction and reduces female sexuality to harlotry. His negation of her contrary energy still further reduces her to the status of an object to make others "jealous," an envied piece of property. Bromion's physical power grants him license to perform this negation, but Blake is careful to reveal how it is not an aberrant individual act. Rather, the rape occurs in an ideological context which sanctions it and gives it cultural meaning. The daughters "worship terrors and obey the violent" (1, 23). The dogmatic view of "worship" as a humiliated human relation to a distant and angry God underwrites Bromion's violence. In a conventional religious milieu that sees women as chattel of their husbands, they *must* "obey the violent"; the man takes the place of the God in the power hierarchy.

The word "ENSLAV'D" serves as a subtitle for the human condition described in the poem. Bromion makes a triumphant speech over the prone body of Oothoon:

Thy soft plains are mine, and mine thy north & south:
 Stamp't with my signet are the swarthy children of the sun:
 They are obedient, they resist not, they obey the scourge.

(1, 20-22)

This speech leads the critic David Erdman to take the rape as a synecdoche for the violent horror of the slave trade. He carefully delineates Blake's knowledge of the anti-slavery movement, his engravings of scenes from slave rebellions, and discusses the appearance of a struggling slave in the illumination on plate 2. Looked at from this perspective, the rape's violence unmasks the inherent violence in the emerging mercantile capitalism. Slavery, power over, has as its ideological basis the production and acquisition of objects. It is the most transparent of economic structures in its use of violent negation (subject to object, human being to commodity). For example, Oothoon's value to Bromion as an object is greatly enhanced by his possession of her reproductive capacity--her ability to create the product of his "rage." The synecdochal

quality of the rape therefore allows the reader to recognize the transvaluation of human licentiousness and violence that forms part of the ideological basis of commodity exchange. However, the contrary power of the synecdoche prevents such readings from stabilizing into an allegory in which the particularity of Oothoon's suffering is lost. It is Oothoon's status as a Blakean "particular" which enables social, political and economic readings. The genius of Blake's method is that her human particularity need not be superseded in order to advance a political argument. The poem is able to present extraordinary psychological detail of an oppressed consciousness (oppressed both physically and culturally) as it follows Oothoon's process towards intellectual and political awakening. The psychological profundity of Blake's portrait in turn enriches any synecdoche which takes Oothoon's "particulars" as a pole in the construction of creative and critical energy. In other words, the specificity of Oothoon's psychological trauma and struggle provides the reader with a profound critical purchase on larger questions of oppression.

At the moment of sexual awakening Oothoon had seen her sexual body as "the soul of sweet delight" (1, 9), a recognition which made a contrary of the Pauline division of body and soul. She recognized that the soul was unknowable except as a contrary part of the sensual body, or as Blake says elsewhere, "the chief inlets of Soul in / This age" (34, 4,8). The body/soul contrary is negated by Bromion's rape and his reduction of her to the name "harlot." She is objectified as a commodity and thus reduced to her body. Bromion's violence is then codified, given ideological force, by Theotormon's moral judgement of her. Blake's pun on torah in the middle of Theotormon's name identifies the ideological basis of religious dogma in the alienating hierarchy of God (Theo), law (tor), and man. When he surrounds the "adulterate pair" with "black jealous waters" (2, 4) he judges Oothoon and makes her an adulteress (Bromion's "harlot" negation). His judgement provides a doctrinal basis and justification for male sexual jealousy. The pair are "(b)ound back to back" at the site of the rape, preserving the moment of both offense and judgement and making it impossible for Theotormon to move beyond his moral indignation. He retreats inward into a "religious cave." In the illumination, his head is tucked inside his arms as he creates a cave within the cave. Cut off from any human

interaction, and indifferent to Oothoon's suffering, Theotormon also functions as a synecdoche for moral hypocrisy and reveals the psychological repression at its source (this generalization is made possible by Blake's use of synecdoche to keep the universal and the particular in contrary tension). His self-righteousness cannot be separated from his self-pity. His tears are hypocritical, blinding him to the suffering of "slaves beneath the sun, and children bought for money" (2, 9). Furthermore, the repression Theotormon indulges in (the denial of the body, of desire) creates the perverse forms he presumes to judge. Blake sees sexual repression as an attempted negation which explodes into perverse forms. The social victims Theotormon ignores "shiver in religious caves beneath the burning fires / Of lust, that belch incessant from the summits of the earth" (2, 10-11). The repression and self-denial of "religious caves" create distorted sexual desires; lust is the perverse product of religion. Such attempted negations make the trade in children possible in Blake's analysis. Ideology, in attempting to constrain energy, makes it explosive. The religious and secular institutions which occupy these "summits of the earth" thus violently "belch" the perverse products of their repression. They project their repressed condition into the world as the sinner, the adulteress, and shift their inner violence onto now oppressed objects.

Oothoon at this point is in a state of shock following the rape and Theotormon's rejection: "she cannot weep! her tears are locked up" (2,11). The violence of this double negation causes her to divide herself. Her inner turmoil finds expression as self-hatred and self-mutilation:

But she can howl incessant writhing her soft snowy limbs.
And calling on Theotormon's Eagles to prey upon her flesh.

(2, 12-13)

She accepts Theotormon's religious judgement and locates sin in "her flesh," negating her body/soul contrary, and conforming to Christian doctrine (Pauline dualism). Through self-division and negation, she hopes to escape the body and redeem her soul. She begs:

I call with holy voice! kings of the sounding air.
Rend away this defiled bosom that I may reflect

The image of Theotormon on my pure transparent breast.

(2, 13-15)

She adopts Theotormon's definition of "holy" in her total submission to the vengeful Jehovah/Jupiter, and forgets her Promethean role as the bringer of unconstrained desire to humankind. She disappears in the negation and Theotormon's image reproduces itself in her vacancy. This image reveals the male narcissism operating at the root of the doctrinal Christian view of women. When Theotormon "severely smiles" as his Eagles "rend their bleeding prey," he reveals his negating sadism. Oothoon's experience provides a detailed view of the psychological violence suffered by women as a result of Christian ideology. The chorus of the "Daughters of Albion" repeat the terrible passivity of her reflecting surface when they "hear her woes and echo back her sighs" (2,20). From this point of almost total negation (Bromion's rape, Theotormon's judgement, her religious self-hatred), Oothoon begins her struggle towards cultural self-knowledge, and with it a critique of the negating forces which define her.

Oothoon ultimately escapes Theotormon's containment when the image of the pure surface escapes negation and becomes a contrary. As an image of the uncontaminated soul within her defiled body, it provides her a means to escape the finality of the rape and to challenge Theotormon's judgement. His severe "smiles" are transformed through a simile into the bestial force which "mudded" her "clear spring" (2,19). This impurity is washed away and replaced with the inner spring's own "smiles." Thus begins Oothoon's recovery of her own volition. When Theotormon fails to respond to her recognition of the breaking of a new day, and her call to "Arise my Theotormon I am pure" (2,28), she is forced to realize that for him negation is final and total. She has been reduced to her body; the body is defiled; she has no value. Oothoon succinctly summarizes Christian dualism's erasure of her:

They told me that night & day were all that I could see;
 They told me that I had five senses to inclose me up.
 And they enclos'd my infinite brain into a narrow circle.
 And my heart sunk into the Abyss, a red round globe hot burning
 Till all from life I was obliterated and erased.

(2, 30-34)

Blake has broader targets here than just Christian ideology. Given the poem's relationship to Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Blake and Wollstonecraft were both members of the circle of radicals associated with the publisher Joseph Johnson), this passage suggests that the treatment of Oothoon serves as a metaphor for the retrograde view of women in Rousseau's revolutionary dogma. This was one of Wollstonecraft's favorite targets. The portrait of Sophie in Rousseau's *Émile*, for example, repeats the erasure of the female and presents negation as necessary:

The one [the male] should be active and strong, the other passive and weak: it is necessary the one should have both the power of the will, and that the other should make little resistance.

(Vindication, 48)

Blake's opposition to Rousseau indicates, better than any other instance, the way in which his poetic method does not, in itself, become an ideological structure in its opposition to reactionary political structures. Blake is not part of an ideological counter-force that sees Rousseau as a sacrosanct figure because of his foundational role in radical politics. He resists Rousseau's intellectual violence, as firmly as he resists the growing Pitt terror. In fact, the portrait of Bromion, as I will argue in a moment, addresses not only the issues of male power in Rousseau's *Émile*, but calls into question Rousseau's formulation of "sovereignty," one of the foundations of his proposed social contract.

To return to our story, Oothoon struggles to make Theotormon hear her and thus acknowledge her existence. If she can engage him, she can become a potential contrary and escape his negating silence. She tries a list of rhetorical

questions, concluding that existence cannot be reduced to the materiality of the body:

...and have not the mouse & frog
 Eyes and ears and sense of touch? yet are their habitations
 And their pursuits, as different as their forms and as their joys?

(3, 4-6)

Theotormon does not respond (to do so would rescind his judgement), and remains in his "religious cave." Oothoon plays to his narcissism: "How can I be defiled when I reflect thy image pure?" (3, 16). And she goes so far as to offer to submit to his will in return for his acknowledgment, if he "once would turn his loved eyes upon" her (3, 15). She uses the religious vocabulary of redemption, "the new wash'd lamb" (3, 18) and the "immortal river" (3,19), in an effort to engage his ideology. She argues that she is made pure by the sacrificial blood of the lamb, and the waters of baptism. But in order to make this argument she must also offer to sacrifice herself and become "white and pure to hover round Theotormon's breast" (3, 20). Her hovering immateriality suggests that she remains willing to sacrifice her body if she can redeem her soul in the process.

Theotormon finally "(breaks) his silence" (3, 21) by denying the basis of Oothoon's arguments. He insists on the primacy of his own material condition, "one o'erflowed with woe" (3, 22), and demands material proof that the essential human qualities she has claimed he represses actually exist. He moves through his own list of rhetorical questions, asking in turn for spatial analogues for "joys," "sorrows," "discontent," "woe," and "despair" (3, 24-4, 2). He concludes that the rape has destroyed the material substance of "the joys of old" and "the ancient loves" (4, 4)--his original feelings for Oothoon. In insisting on knowing where these feelings "dwell" (4, 3-4), Theotormon traps himself in his own reasoning. They "dwell" in him, as does everything else under the weight of his negations. He creates an internal realm of solipsistic self-pity (the word "me" dominates the speech). As the word "me" rings throughout the passage, Theotormon is defined by the centripetal violence of his self-absorbtion. He negates Oothoon, and most of the rest of his experience

of the external world, into the solipsism of the closed self. His only connection with the external world is through projecting his jealousy onto Bromion, "the eyes of the envier" (4, 11), and this serves to reinforce his delusion that he is the victim of an irreversible external judgement and powerless to act to change it. Bromion on the other hand responds to this argument about the status of her being (defiled or not) by asserting that his "one law" (4, 22) is the unfettered pursuit of appetite. The body is the seat of all possible value, and each individual thus has a capacity and duty to pursue the gratification of "senses unknown," "spread in the infinite microscope" (4, 15-16). He turns license into a moral imperative, and mocks Theotormon's religious moralism and Oothoon's efforts to escape being negated as a defiled body. It is here that Blake's implicit critique of Rousseau becomes most acute. The passage Wollstonecraft quotes in her *Vindication* presents a male figure indistinguishable from Bromion: "his [the man's] great merit is his power, and he pleases merely because he is strong" (48). But beyond the attack on *Émile*, Blake creates a figure whose self-justifying arguments call into question Rousseau's arguments concerning the source of "sovereignty" in the democratic state. Oothoon's limited choices, physical violence or moralistic judgement, make a mockery of the relationship Rousseau suggests between the individual instinctive will (Bromion as a parody of "the noble savage"), and the collective will that he calls "sovereign" power. Rousseau states at the beginning of "Book II" of *The Social Contract*:

. . . for if conflict between private interests has made the setting up of civil societies necessary, harmony between those same interests has made it possible. It is what is common to those different interests which yields the social bond; if there were no point on which separate interests coincide, then society could not conceivably exist. And it is precisely on the basis of this common interest that society must be governed. My argument, then, is that sovereignty, being nothing other than the exercise of the general will, can never be alienated; and that the sovereign, which is simply a collective being, cannot be represented by anyone but itself--power can be delegated, but the will cannot be.⁷

Blake's two versions of the negating male will make this formulation difficult to

⁷Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston (New York: Penguin, 1968), 69.

take seriously. Bromion attempts to argue that his is the “general will,” and, as such, should be considered “sovereign” (he unambiguously asserts his tyranny using a rhetoric of rulership). Rousseau attempts to argue that his (Bromion’s) arbitrary rule, based on the naked abuse of power, can be replaced by a form of rule based on the distillation of all individual wills into an abstract “sovereign” will. Bromion makes it clear that such “sovereignty” is still the product of violence in its asserting its universality, and that Rousseau’s formulation is still arbitrary, and, thus, subject to tyranny. Theotormon underlines the problem, because his moralism presents itself as social consensus, the working out of “sovereign” will, and his internal distress (jealousy, self-hatred) is projected as the judgement of “common interest.” He speaks as social authority, the codified version of Bromion’s violence. It is important to note this implicit critique of Rousseau, not only because it shows Blake’s independence of thought, but because it points to the thoroughness of his method. If contrariety is used as a reading method in relation to revolutionary theoretical positions, it produces critiques of their negations as readily as it does for the more obvious physical negations produced by the English political status quo of 1794. Many critics have been led into confusion about the attack on Rousseau because of its relation to Blake's portrait of Bromion. Some have cautiously applauded Bromion's rebellion against the chains of religious and political authority because of the repetition in his speech of the final line of "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," "One Law for the Lion & the Ox is Oppression." However, when Bromion speaks the line he does so in an attempt at self-justification, and in the service of the negation of Oothoon. In its original context it proclaimed the contrary energy of the infernal voice. Transposed to this site, it becomes a parody of that original expression, and, at best, can be understood as a indication of the source of Bromion's violent licentiousness in the moralism that attempts to constrain him. It is this portrait of the psychology of repression that appeals to many critics, Bloom in particular, and leads them into a quandary about Blake's attitude towards Rousseau's misogyny. In some cases this confusion diminishes the critic’s ability to read contraries, and derails their efforts after meaning in the poem.⁸

⁸Critics of "Visions of the Daughters of Albion" have wrestled with Blake’s apparent

Oothoon struggles to recognize the fundamental error and violence of the male negations surrounding her, naked violence and inward repression projected as violence, and names their presiding deity, "Urizen." The dual pun on the limit of the self's *horizon* (Bromion's licentious "infinite microscope") and on the limit of external abstraction, *your reason* (Theotormon's ideological box), reflects the violent choices she faces. In order to challenge this "mistaken Demon of heaven" (5,3), she denounces the precise point of error, the process of negation per se:

How can one joy absorb another? are not different joys
Holy, eternal, infinite! and each joy is a Love.

(5,5-6)

Negation distorts or destroys human "joys," and Oothoon, in this context, presents the parson's religious "joys" as repressive and deceitful traps. Her analysis finds its example par excellence in institutionalized marriage:

What are his [the parson's] nets & gins & traps. & how does he
surround him
With cold floods of abstraction, and with forests of solitude,
To build him castles and high spires. where kings & priests may dwell.
Till she who burns with youth and knows no fixed lot; is bound
In spells of law to one she loaths: and must drag the chain
Of life, in weary lust! must chilling murderous thoughts obscure
The clear heaven of her eternal spring?

(5,17-23)

attack on Rousseau. I have tried to point to the likely sources of his unease with Rousseau beyond his defense of Wollstonecraft. This has been a source of some critical confusion. In his essay, "An Original Story," in *Unnam'd Forms: Blake and Textuality*, eds. Nelson Hilton and Thomas Vogler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), Nelson Hilton reads the poem biographically as Blake's involvement in the romantic dispute between Wollstonecraft and Blake's friend, Henry Fuseli. Hilton contends that Bromion and Theotormon may be two parts of Fuseli's character. But instead of arguing that Blake is chiding his friend for his behaviour, Hilton suggests that Oothoon is a portrait of Wollstonecraft as a hysterical virgin. He also asserts that "Wollstonecraft's ad hominen attack," (93) on Rousseau was her revenge on Fuseli who worshipped Rousseau. This reading can proceed only if one ignores the poem. In dismissing Wollstonecraft's critique of Rousseau, Hilton re-inscribes the negating male will that the poem sets out to deconstruct. It is naïve to avoid Blake's critique of Rousseau by pretending there is nothing in the portrait of Sophie for Wollstonecraft to object to other than Fuseli's investment in it. To do so suggests that the critic could not have read *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* with much care.

These are the products of human sexuality under the negation of moral law. Succeeding generations "live a pestilence" in an endless repetition of the same destructive strictures. Oothoon offers a compressed version of her own story, "she who burns with youth and knows no fixed lot" "bound in spells of law to one she loaths." In this new context, the rape is a synecdoche of its ideological form--a loveless, religiously sanctioned, violently enforced marriage.

At this point, Oothoon has moved from self-hatred to a precise critique of the cultural institutions which oppress her. As a result of this contrary movement (her resistance), she recovers the original contrary potential of "virgin bliss" (6, 6). Free from Theotormon's judgement of her sexual volition, she indicts the violence of enforced "modesty" (6, 7). Theotormon creates and "seek(s) this hypocrite modesty" (6, 16), an insight which allows Oothoon to identify and name her oppressor: "This knowing, artful, secret, fearful, cautious, trembling hypocrite" (6, 17). She becomes completely conscious of how she is culturally defined by his negation of her: "Then Oothoon is a whore indeed" (6, 18). This insight enables her to recognize the psychological structure of his ideological limitations. As she says: "Theotormon is a sick man's dream" (6, 19), the product of repressed desire vexed to nightmare and projected on the world. Once free of Theotormon's definition of her Oothoon can declare a return to her contrary state:

...a virgin fill'd with virgin fancies
 Open to joy and to delight where ever beauty appears
 If in the morning sun I find it: there my eyes are fix'd
 In happy copulation; if in evening mild, wearied with work;
 Sit on a bank and draw pleasures of this free born joy.

(6, 20-7, 2)

This marks the pinnacle of her struggle against negation. Oothoon declares her sexuality to be free from Bromion's violence and Theotormon's silent moralizing.

She refuses to be "erased" and made a "shadow wailing on the margin of non-entity" (7, 5). But despite her declaration of freedom, she still has only Theotormon for a sanctioned sexual object, (in other words the social persists)

and therefore is forced to engage his distorted sexual world. In order to avoid the horror of being fixed by his gaze, "a creeping skeleton / With lamplike eyes watching around the frozen marriage bed" (7, 22), she makes a desperate offer:

But silken nets and traps of adamant will Oothoon spread,
 And catch for thee girls of mild silver, or of furious gold,
 I'll lie beside thee on a bank & view their wanton play
 In lovely copulation bliss on bliss with Theotormon:
 Red as a rosy morning, lustful as the first born beam,
 Oothoon shall view his dear delight, nor e'er with jealous cloud
 Come in the heaven of generous love; nor selfish blightings bring.

(7, 23-29)

Following her critique of marriage as a negation of desire, this speech articulates the need for complete sexual liberation. But in declaring herself free of sexual jealousy, Oothoon sublimates her own sexual desire into the process of becoming a procuress and voyeur. Her intellectual breakthrough concerning the negating power of jealousy has a disconcerting contrary meaning in its pandering to male sexual fantasies. The contrary energy produced by the opposition between Oothoon's intellectual and psychological states, reminds the reader that revolutionary declarations or documents cannot be revolutions in themselves, that they risk solidifying into their own ideologies, and, thus, that the poem cannot and should not be taken as a new dogma. There is no apotheosis. Blake's poem begins the struggle by unmasking the negating violence of ideological structures and exploring their psychological causes and effects. This revelation makes the violence apparent and thus resistable; but he equally resists the reduction of his analysis into revolutionary rhetoric by keeping the complex mass of contrary relations in play-- there is also no rhetorical recuperation. Theotormon maintains his isolation, Oothoon attempts to find his contrary in her "wails," and the "Daughters of Albion" remain enchained in their terrible enforced passivity. These are the conditions of female subjugation (circa 1794), and Blake's poem attempts to create a contrary resistance to their negating power in his uncovering of their specific ideological structure and function. To recapitulate, Blake's contraries undermine ideological structures by resisting their ability to affect negations and regulate meaning. They expose the violence that underwrites ideology,

negation. They illuminate the psychological structure of ideological forms, and the psychological and physical violence they produce. And, finally, in providing a critique of ideology, contraries suggest a method for the resistance of ideological violence based on the knowledge of its precise structure and the will to refuse its negations.

The struggle to resist ideological solutions also plagues the interpretive history of the poem. The voyeurism passage I have just discussed has an equally disconcerting history in Blake criticism. The idea that the passage was a declaration of free love had become what Leopold Damrosch Jr. called "the accepted interpretation" (Frye, Bloom, Raine).⁹ In other words the need for an intellectual resolution of the poem led them to negate the psycho/sexual disturbance in the passage. Damrosch was the first to dissent from this reading, but he in turn fell under the power of negation and argued that the passage showed Blake's disgust with the human body. These readings show us how powerful is the pull to negation, and subsequently how difficult is the ethical demand implicit in Blake's poetics. Can we keep contrariety in play and resist the closure offered by negation and the ideological comfort it provides? In the final analysis I do not know whether this recent reception history should be understood as a cautionary tale, or as evidence that Blake's contrary method presents ethical demands we cannot readily meet. Only by being conscious of the pull towards negation (the ultimate, if provisional, triumph of Oothoon's struggle) can we struggle towards a poetics of resistance and the beginnings of the psychological and political conditions necessary for a poetic critique of the structure of violence.

⁹ The most complete account of the "accepted interpretation" and its dissenters, occurs in Thomas Vogler's essay, "in vain the Eloquent tongue," in *Critical Paths*, eds. Donald Ault, Mark Bracher and Dan Miller (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 271-280.

Chapter Two

Without Division Is No Vision

Once he has developed contrariety as simultaneously a poetics and an ethical method, Blake has in place the tools to mount an attack on the aesthetic production of the self. In the disappointment of the post-revolutionary period the crisis becomes finding a means of employing these poetics. The revolutionary optimism of 1794 justified a revolutionary subject—an attack on the subjugation of women, but by 1804 the prospect of success in large social goals seems unlikely. Instead Blake turns to the roots of Britain's political woes in the ultimate failure of the English revolution of the 1640's. The key figure in Blake's visionary politics is John Milton. If Milton's individual failures can be addressed then the psychological weaknesses of the English character per se can, by synecdoche, be addressed, and perhaps even redeemed. Emphasis on one man as the synecdochal representative of all Englishmen follows Blake's profound belief in Jesus' function as such an exemplar. This original and heretical religious position, the saviour as agency in human action, forms the structural basis for his poem "Milton." But, despite his emphasis on individual deeds, Blake must create a poetic structure in which such acts, rather than defining a transcendent self, which is the expected movement in sublime aesthetics, work to undermine and finally annihilate the "selfhood" and with it the hypocritical socio-political structures that exploit transcendence through personal privilege and power. He wants to recover the saviour's selflessness from the hypocritical, institutional homilies that obscure it, and re-vivify it as the fundamental ground for human action. In other words, he wants to redeem Jesus from the theology that sees his selflessness as the sign of the sacrificial victim par excellence, by replacing it with a theology based on his selfless action towards others. This new theology is possible only when the limits of the selfhood are recognized, and its seductive power is resisted.

Blake formulates his critique of selfhood in mythological terms. The cosmic reverberations of the poem take place inside one man, Milton, but even

the identity of that man is radically unstable. Milton remains asleep in eternity as he acts to re-enter the fallen world. The Milton that falls, falls into Blake's foot. Blake, the character in his poem, becomes another name for the one man. Both these *individuals* stand in for the one man, Jesus, as Blake also attempts to re-orient Christianity towards incarnation and the human body and away from transcendence and mystification. All of this division, what appears to be the disintegration of identity, ultimately contains its contrary movement through synecdoche, wherein each fragment contains the whole. Dualism and synecdoche work as contrary forces. In a poem with ostensible characters this process becomes exceedingly complex and often confusing. The reader's struggles with confusion recreate the fall as narrative strategies fail. The redemptive contrary at play is that the power of the selfhood, represented by the various *individuals* in the poem and by the reader, disintegrates. Blake's version of the necessary fall thus involves the very nature of poetic language, and his use of tropes therefore points to the redemptive potential in what otherwise can only be understood as the impossibility of language to signify directly. The "limit of opacity" contrarily suggests both the failure of communication and the multiplicity of meaning generated by that failure. I will discuss this in more detail later in this chapter, but first I want to examine how the disintegration of the selfhood in "Book the First" functions simultaneously as a fall and as the necessary activity for the redemptive poetics of "Book the Second."

Blake begins the poem by extricating himself from its poetic voice. By calling on the poem to be dictated to him by the "Daughter of Beulah! Muses who inspire the Poet's song" (2, 1) he follows an ancient poetic conceit of inspiration, but carries it further by connecting it to the biblical tradition of the prophet filled with the words of God. His role is to passively "record" (2, 2) Milton's journey and he characterizes this as a physical possession:

. . . Come into my hand,
By your mild power descending down the Nerves of my right arm
From out the portals of my Brain, where by your ministry
The Eternal Great Humanity Divine planted his Paradise (2, 5-8).

The poet commands the power to "come," and determines the subject, Milton's

journey, but the poem's voice shifts as the poet makes clear that he does not know the story and awaits its arrival through him. The individual human brain is seen as the poetic site, and, thus, as the only possible place the creation of the eternal, an immanent paradise, can occur. He asks a complex question that sets up the poem's presumed narrative (presumed, because its linear coherence will soon be shattered in the experience of the fall):

Say first! what mov'd Milton, who walked about in Eternity
 One hundred years, pond'ring the intricate mazes of Providence
 Unhappy tho' in heav'n—he obey'd he murmur'd not, he was silent
 Viewing his Sixfold Emanation scatter'd thro' the deep
 In torment—To go into the deep her to redeem & himself perish?

(2, 16-20)

This passage begins to dissolve the boundary between asking about and telling the tale. The voice of the poem speculates on the unknown cause of Milton's act while describing the act, and then suddenly shifts completely and declares the answer: "A Bard's prophetic Song !" (2, 22). As the Bard breaks forth the reader cannot know the voice reporting the song. The poet has evacuated that verbal place and the process of dictation begins. The declaration "Mark well my words! they are of your eternal salvation" (2, 25) may be spoken by the dictating voice, or may be the first words of the Bard's song. In either case, Blake has figured himself out of the poem.

The Bard's song makes a disorienting story. Rather than presenting a single narrative that can explain "what mov'd Milton," the song gives us many synoptic details that do not add up to a narrative whole. The conflicts in the various perspectives presented constantly threaten violence in their negating force and appear impossible to negotiate as each perspective attempts to exclude all others, or, perhaps worse, remains blind to all others. No synopsis can occur in these conditions. This extreme fallen condition, Blake's "single vision," is the nadir of the human fall. He characterizes it as division through generational time, and of the human personality. Los is divided from his sons by generational conflict, and those sons are aspects of himself divided from the possibility of a unified self. Blake describes this fall into time as the fall of the senses (a scene repeated several times in his work beginning with "The Book of

Urizen"). In creating a fallen sensual body for the separated Urizen Los attempts to limit the fall by repairing the mind/body split, but he is implicated in the fall that he gives body to and becomes "what he beheld" (3, 55). This repetition presents one of the central contraries in Blake: the redemptive act of creation cannot be separated from the activity of the fall. In attempting to limit or ameliorate the conditions of the fall, the artist/Los furthers the process of division away from any possible originary moment. This is further complicated by the artist's inability (and Blake's refusal) to conceive of what an unfallen, originary state might be. For example, the "Eternals," who appear to sit in detached judgement, will be revealed, eventually, as another limited perspective. When the senses are created they become a kind of blindness: "two little Orbs, closed in two little Caves" (3, 40). The limited horizon of the self is all. The ears are "petrified" (3, 44) against hearing any external voice; taste is limited by the narrow drive of appetite, the deprivation of "hunger & thirst" (3, 48). These isolated human bodies are incapable of empathy, which in this case would involve memory of a previous unified state, but rather evolve into predictably conflicted relations with one another. The fragmentation of Los that both creatively peoples the earth and begins the disintegration of the eternal self (the fallen Albion) commences with the separation of the female emanation. The isolation implicit in this process makes it inevitable that the divided male form come into being "howling in Jealousy" (3, 62) because the limit of the self can only perceive the other as an objectified fragment to be subsumed by the self. This is a foundational moment in Blake's psychological schema, and it sets up the fallen model of human relations and human desire that Milton must re-engage in order to create a redemptive possibility in the poem. Re-integration cannot proceed through the active accumulation of objects by the self. Rather the self, or selfhood, in Blake's useful coinage, must be recognized as the limited perspective it is, and allowed to become a contrary again in the process of giving up its limited, if understandably seductive, power. It is seductive in its very blindness. If it takes its horizon to be everything, all existence collapsed to the self/center, then any fluidity of being becomes the threat of destruction. Mortal terror becomes the overwhelming drive in human relations. In later sections of this study I will discuss Blake's analysis of how Christianity exploits that terror by shifting the focus of Christian practice

away from love and towards the ideological power inherent in the rites of sacrifice. By coining the term “selfhood,” Blake can distinguish between the limit of the fallen self, (selfhood), the acting self, (conscious of those limits), and the redemptive promise of the reintegration of the originary self, (the recognition of our human participation in the “lineaments” of the risen Albion). Blake, himself, does not use the term self, and emphasizes the function of the selfhood in organizing human experience and the limits of that single view. Again, what I have characterized as the originary self should not be understood as a stable, unified, unfallen state or perspective, but rather as the condition made possible through the giving up of attempts to achieve such stability and certainty--the overcoming of the terror engendered by our mortality. The focus of the poem’s social critique then is on the psychological drives exploited by divisive cultural institutions. The critique of the churches and their “priesthoods” occurs in Blake’s examination of the basic human fear of death and the limited perspective that fear comes to generate throughout the poem.

The disintegration into the various elements of individual consciousness, the separation of the female emanation, and the endless division of generational time all provide occasions for the construction of a narrative. The story in the Bard’s Song thus begins as a way of thinking about the conflicted state of the fallen world. In this fallen condition, or state, even acts that are positive have an apparently contrary negative force. Thus Los’s parental affection towards Satan, his youngest child and the most recent product of division, creates a crisis in its contrary aspect as parental over-indulgence. What at first appears to be a contrary moves towards negation as Los is blinded by his parental concern. Los’s love blinds him to Satan’s overreaching, but neither does Satan see the crisis implicit in trying to know everything, to understand all aspects of the processes of eternity. The desire propelling Satan’s usurpation of the harrow and abandonment of the mill has no apparent source; it simply appears in the poem as the immediate cause of the poem’s action. This inability to attribute a first cause, as we shall see, increasingly becomes the subject of the Bard’s Song and of the poem in general. Palamabron’s response accelerates the crisis (and the process of division) when he hides his jealousy: “lest Satan should accuse him of Ingratitude” (7,

11-12). Jealousy becomes covert and the possibility of vision, including self-knowledge, recedes. Palamabron cannot defend himself against Satan's "incomparable mildness" (7,4) because its appearance as fraternal altruism makes his resistance *seem* like ingratitude:

"He [Satan] intreated Los to give him Palamabron's stations.
For Palamabron returned with labour wearied every evening
Palamabron oft refus'd; and as often Satan offer'd
His service till by repeated offers and repeated intreaties
Los gave him the Harrow of the Almighty; alas blamable
Palamabron. fear'd to be angry lest Satan should accuse him of
Ingratitude & Los believe the accusation thro Satan's extreme
Mildness.

(7, 6-13)

"Extreme mildness" describes the condition of being among the Elect as one in which one's consciousness of oneself as anything but disinterested is impossible. After all, election has no need of external confirmation of its motives. Palamabron's redemptive state is conflicted in its perception of the difference between its fallen (jealousy) and eternal (the process of the Harrow) aspects. Consciousness marks difference and thus produces guilt. The crisis deepens when the jealousy/guilt becomes covert in its fear of parental censure. Palamabron feigns the "extreme mildness" of the Elect which has the opposite effect of deepening the division within him. This satire of the hypocrisy of those who feel themselves redeemed is psychologically precise in its exposure of self-repression, the threat of violent antipathy, and the overall fragility of goodness (to borrow Martha Nussbaum's phrase).

Satan cannot know of his divisive effect on Palamabron because his "incomparable mildness" is also the sign of his lack of reflection. All self-reflection must be banished by the Elect as unnecessary because, to their minds, their action can only be the result of an unfolding perfection. Blake exposes this position as more deeply repressed than Palamabron's conflicted condition which at least flickers between consciousness and unconsciousness. It is little wonder that in this schema the violence of the Reprobate becomes a kind of clarity as it visibly acts out its internal feeling instead of becoming a hidden covert malaise. Satan cannot know his inner distress, an impossible

category in the Elect, but rather projects his “mildness” which in turn becomes a rebuke to Palamabron’s anxious conflicted hunger for redemption (the appearance of election).

Behind these three classes, Los’s originary division, first of his divided emanation Enitharmon and then of her “woven” generations, is radically productive of the fallen condition but simultaneously of the possibility of redemption. The Satanic part of Los denies the fall. For example, his perception of Satan’s request as benign shows us his willful blindness. As the fall is denied so is the category of the redeemed—it collapses into blind election. This aphasia threatens the very meaning of artistic creation as Los loses touch with the redemptive potential in human generation. This potential is what is lost in Los; the Elect negate the fall/redemption contrary.

Disintegration, then, is the immediate context for the crisis that ensues when Los switches the tasks of Satan and Palamabron:

. . . the horses of the Harrow
Were maddened with tormenting fury & the servants of the Harrow
The Gnomes, accus’d Satan, with indignation fury and fire.

(7, 17-19)

If the harvest functions as a metaphor for the redemptive process (as both apocalypse and renovation), then the very means of salvation has been put at risk through the self-expression of Palamabron and false pity of Satan. It is not so much the confusion of tasks, the distortion of redemption understood as the result of various forms of negation, that becomes an increasing crisis, but rather the inability of each participant in the fall to recognize his culpability. Palamabron recognizes this problem in Satan, where self-justification makes self-knowledge impossible:

. . . You know Satan’s mildness and his self-imposition,
Seeming a brother, being a tyrant, even thinking himself a brother
While he is murdering the just.

(7, 20-22)

Aphasia is total; Satan cannot know his crime. The selfhood recognizes only

its own perspective. This is similar to Wittgenstein's description of "aspect seeing" in which each aspect totalizes the individual's experience of the world. In his most famous example from *Philosophical Investigations*, the double figure of the duck/rabbit vacillates between its two aspects, and Wittgenstein notes that the viewer can experience only the duck *or* the rabbit and must move between the two¹⁰. Blake's analysis of the selfhood pushes this condition to the extreme of aphasia. It is as if the selfhood forgets the duck in favour of the rabbit (or vice versa) and cannot recollect the other's existence. The selfhood then becomes a total blindness, a limited aspect that mistakes itself for reality. In Blake's vocabulary, the selfhood negates all other aspects. This suppression of difference must be unstable and threatens to explode as violence. Blake is not suggesting this blindness as the Satanic condition per se, although it becomes an extreme form of pride, but as the inevitable result of the fall into division (dualism). Palamabron's analysis of Satan's delusionary condition, "thinking himself a brother," does not extend to himself. He has no knowledge of his effect on the functioning of the Mill:

The servants of the Mills drunken with wine and dancing wild
With shouts and Palamabron's songs rending the forests green
With echoing confusion, tho' the Sun was risen on high.

(8, 8-10)

This scene, despite its Dionysian energy, also describes the product of division. It may be an extreme result of Palamabron's pity towards the workers, but the results are the same as Satan's inept marshalling of the Harrow—the redemptive process is disabled. So Palamabron's ability to see Satan's delusion, "Satan's self, believ'd / That he had not oppres'd the horses of the Harrow, nor the servants" (7, 39-40), does not prevent him from his own analogous delusion. He has no memory of the drunken revel in the Mills, and therefore his insight into Satan's "aspect-blindness" signals an even more extreme form of aphasia. Palamabron's cautious dissembling when he discovers Satan's effect on the Harrow translates as the limit of selfishness.

¹⁰Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), especially Part II, section xi, 193-229, and *On Certainty*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe and Denis Paul (London: Blackwell, 1969).

He wants to preserve his position with Los, (this repeats his original error), and as a result he suppresses his indignation in spite of the momentary insight that he should have “told Los, all [his] heart” (7, 29). His quick return to cautious silence suggests an inability to hold on to potentially redemptive insights within the entropy of the fall.

Los responds to the crisis with negation. Denial of the fallen condition becomes a violent purgation:

... follow with me my Plow. This mournful day
Must be a blank in Nature.

(8, 20-21)

Rintrah, as the force of wrath in the activity of the Plow, becomes the agency through which Los constructs his denial. The terrible paradox that ensues is that Rintrah becomes the violent force of wrath made explosive by Los as he tries to employ it to repress knowledge of the crisis. The violent activity of making the day “a blank in Nature” results in more violence rather than ending it. If the crisis emerges from the denial of culpability by each participant among the sons (Los accepts blame but reacts by repressing its source and memory), and the inability to see their actions as a denial, then the fall becomes a regress where denial or repression creates violence, which is denied, thereby producing violence, and so on ad infinitum. This vacillation repeats the error it presumes to address. Wrath, a violent bi-product of the poem’s events, explodes with the murder of Thulloh. Satan’s task in the negation of the “mournful day” takes the form of a violent contest with Palamabron. Their rivalry began the crisis and now repeats itself as a renewed rivalry attempting to erase the crisis. Rintrah thus acts as the explosive energy produced in the repression/explosion cycle of their repetitive and circular conflict, culminating in the killing of Thulloh, a figure of the innocent brother:

Satan who drove the team beside him [Rintrah] stood angry & red
He smote Thulloh & slew him, & he stood terrible over Michael
Urging him to arise: he wept!

(8, 38-40)

Satan lashes out without premeditation, and collapses in irrational anger. Will he slay Michael if he arises? Does he weep for himself or for his crime? Can those two things be separated? Are his tears the beginning of the repression of his crime and the commencing of a new cycle? Enitharmon responds to this volatility by creating a "Space" free from conflict, but her creation does not take into account the murder which Los hides "from her sight, lest she should die of grief" (8, 41). His mercy repeats the error of denial and repression and begins yet another cycle. The maternal female creates a false paradise that cannot see that death is its founding principle. "Los secret buried Thulloh, weeping disconsolate over the moony Space" (8, 45), and as a result doomed maternal love to an unconscious denial of death. When the inevitably violent cycle begun in this false paradise emerges, it expresses itself as a terrified anxiety over death.

When the violent contention between Satan and Palamabron comes into the open before the "Great Solemn Assembly" (8, 46), Los conceals it from Enitharmon, further compounding his error. It is in the context of this external judgement that the selfhood takes its ultimate (deluded) form in the self-justification and consequent self-creation of Satan. Blake shows how the potential violence of Rintrah's wrath takes covert forms as the repressed agency driving Satan. "Rintrahs fury hidden beneath his own mildness" (9, 19) creates the ideological products of Christianity:

He created Seven deadly Sins drawing out his infernal scroll,
 Of moral laws and cruel punishments upon the clouds of Jehovah
 To pervert the Divine voice in its entrance to the earth
 With thunder of war & trumpets sound, with armies of disease
 Punishments & deaths mustered & number'd.

(9, 21-25)

His inner violence is codified and projected as "Sins." His "moral laws" repress consciousness of his inner distress, and make it impossible for him to perceive "the Divine voice" he now falsely proclaims to inhabit; *it* should inhabit him. This self-repressed mechanism creates religious ideology and the social violence produced as its symptom. Infernal production is both blind to its sources in the selfhood and destructive of otherness per se as it presumes to

“number” and regulate human “energy” judging it as Sin. Sin becomes a name for that “energy” (including that produced by his conflicted inner state) that escapes the containment of the selfhood writ large. This model is similar to that described by Slavoj Žižek in his Lacanian formulation of the blind production of ideology¹¹. Žižek argues that the fictions produced by the self in order to disguise “lack” as “supplement,” the rhetoric of love as a fulfilling and whole experience, have the identical psychological structure as the sublime fictions of ideology. Ideology is sublime in its assumption of a total view. For example, in Satan’s case Sin becomes a total explanation of human behaviour and relations, and masks the “lack” of integration of the contrary elements at play within him. He denies his fallen condition, in Blake’s terms. Žižek discusses how the self in creating identity “quilts” reality to conform with its internal assumptions and then generates extensive elaborations as it meets instances of experience that require explanation. This is the source of ideological production.

When Satan is faced with an external threat to his self-justifications, he responds in the most extreme way possible—he negates all externality:

. . . Saying I am God alone
 There is no other! let all obey my principles of moral individuality
 I have brought them from the uppermost innermost recesses
 Of my Eternal Mind, transgressors I will rend off for ever,
 As now I rend this accursed Family from my covering.

(9, 25-29)

His negation results in the greatest possible self-aggrandizement as he becomes God in a new closed system of his own creation. This amounts to an ironized version of the Kantian sublime in which “the uppermost innermost recesses” of the mind convert the personal crisis (of culpability and denial) into the God-self. While Kant is conscious of the moment’s fictionality, Satan claims this as the natural working of his “Eternal Mind;” but its eternity

¹¹ *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1992). Žižek goes on to analyze the source of ideological production in relation to Lacan’s four part “graph of desire.” His elaborations on the Lacanian self’s appetite for ideological fictions in the face of the “big Other” (the symbolic order) is complex and interesting, but not directly pertinent to the Blakean moment I am elaborating.

clearly is constructed in the moment of sublime supersession. This passage unfolds as a description of the solipsism at the heart of such sublime figuration. Eternality equals denial of the crisis. Satan's negation thus produces (quilts) the figure of the Kantian mathematical sublime as the ultimate aesthetic fiction. This is aspect blindness on a cosmic scale as he solidifies and becomes "opaque" against external judgement:

Thus Satan rag'd amidst the Assembly! and his bosom grew
 Opaque against the Divine Vision: the paved terraces of
 His bosom inwards shone with fires, but the stones becoming opaque!
 Hid him from sight, in an extreme blackness and darkness,
 And there a World of deeper Ulro was open'd in the midst
 Of the Assembly. In Satans bosom a vast unfathomable Abyss.

(9, 30-35)

In his failure to expand into the agency of the Harrow, Satan experiences the necessary negative phase of the sublime. The violence implicit in his intellectual supersession of that crisis takes form as his attack on Palamabron, the murder of Thulloh, and the denial of the right of the "Eternals" to judge him. The sublime turn that emerges from his violence is immediately ironized in that his transfiguration as "God alone" is completely dependent on his blindness to the "Divine Vision" understood either as an agency that acts through him or as a source of revelation. Furthermore the enormity of his self-creation, his "unfathomable(ness)," is dependent on the completeness of his blindness. He becomes opaque "against" the "Divine Vision" and "to" it. His alienation from the Divine is complete—it exists as the condition of both subject and object. Dualism has a terrible apotheosis where interchange between its poles becomes impossible and mediation cannot proceed. Blake shows us that this destructive dissembling is potentially at the very heart of the Kantian mathematical sublime. The "unfathomable" is revealed as a self-production in which externality as the largest possible other (in the Kantian sense of uncognizable) exists only as a parodic shadow in an enormous solipsism. Blake was unfamiliar with Kant's formulation, but was keenly aware of the self-dramatizations of Edmund Burke and his aesthetic descendents.

Satan's solipsistic sublime reveals the limitations of another of Blake's aesthetic targets—single point perspective. Perspective organizes the visual field in the same way that the selfhood organizes experience, and as a result it requires the same thoroughgoing critique. Blake's allegiance to Michaelangelo has to do in part with the anti-perspectival or multi-perspectival practice (depending on your point of view) implicit in the Last Judgement. Blake's own Last Judgement paintings employ the same radical approach to the representation of space as a set of contrary particulars in a perspectival flux, rather than as a dishonest "copy" of spatial reality. I will examine what is at stake in this point further, in my discussion of his creation of the time/space contrary at the end of "Milton," Book the First. Blake's ideas on these matters are also developed in his annotations to the *Discourses on Art* of Sir Joshua Reynolds¹², the great champion of the artistic representation of space as a *faithful* copy of reality. This argument comes down to a fundamental dispute over the nature and source of our perception of the real. Blake contends that Reynolds's belief in the passivity of the creative mind reproduces a repugnant Lockean theory of sensation. Reynolds indeed follows Locke in declaring that: "The mind is but barren soil; a soil which is soon exhausted, and will produce no crop, or only one, unless it be continually fertilized and enriched with foreign matter" (99). Blake responds to this assertion with a counter-theory of mind as constitutive of the real: "I always thought that the Human Mind was the most Prolific of All Things & Inexhaustible" (310). This model of the generative active mind serves as a gloss on both the insistence on the multiplicity of meaning in the face of the force of negation (Satan's blindness) in Blake's poetics, and on his attack on the falseness of single point perspective. Reynolds claims a single perceptual real that we all passively record. His radical Lockean position claims that without "foreign matter" "on which the mind may work" (310) artistic creation is impossible. Blake responds by asking "Is the Mind Nothing" (310)? Reynolds's position, for Blake, constructs the selfhood's myth of objectivity. By claiming that there is a single real, the selfhood claims direct access to that world. This world is the perceptual

¹² Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975). This edition includes Blake's annotations as an appendix, and I have cited them from that source by page number.

version of Satan's inner abyss, now made outer. Elsewhere in his annotations, Blake declares that: "Every Eye Sees differently. As the Eye, Such the Object" (295). The infinite multiplicity of perspectives in this declaration attempts to explode the foundation of Reynolds's aesthetics and it also works to explode the solipsistic fallen world of Satanic dogma by recognizing the self-creation of "every Eye." Satan's theology of a single distant God governing all reality, the very model and source of ideology, reduces the world through negation to a single perspective. Similarly, in the poem, the Eternals attempt to judge Satan and enforce their perspective, as divine wisdom, and thus repeat Satan's negation rather than remedying it. Blake's postulate of "single vision and Newton's sleep," the reduction of the world to a single mechanistic system, thus defines Satan's blindness, Reynolds's Lockean assumptions, and the "lie" of single point perspective. Blake summarizes the divide between the two positions (which he calls contraries):

It is not in Terms that Reynolds & I disagree. Two Contrary Opinions can never by any Language be made alike. I say, Taste & Genius are Not Teachable or Acquirable, but are born with us. Reynolds says the Contrary.

(313)

Blake does not negate Reynolds's position but accepts the conflict between the two positions. In Blakean terms this conflict is productive and its energy creates the annotations; this creation of difference itself is a repudiation of the basic premise of Reynolds's Lockeanism.

As vexing to Blake as is Reynolds's reliance on Locke is his reliance on Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry Into the Sublime and the Beautiful*: "Burke's Treatise on the Sublime & Beautiful is founded on the Opinions of Newton & Locke; on this Treatise Reynolds has grounded many of his assertions in all his Discourses" (316). For example, in "Discourse V11" Reynolds states, "We will allow a poet to express his meaning, when his meaning is not well known to himself, with a certain degree of obscurity, as it is one source of the sublime"(312). This is a jumble of the verbal and visual sublimes and may signal either sophistry or ineptness on Reynolds's part, but in either case it amounts to a repetition of Burke's notion that human

perception of “obscurity” is the source of the sublime. Burke states that: “To make any thing very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary. When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes” (Burke, 54). This is precisely the view ironized in Satan’s use of sublime figures to describe his “unfathomable” abyss. Blake denies Burke’s formulation by stating that: “Obscurity is Neither the source of the Sublime nor of any Thing Else” (312). Rather than trading on the production of human terror when faced with “obscurity” and calling this effect the sublime, Blake develops a counter-sublime structured as a synecdoche that allows the expansion of mind into the “obscure” only out of the particularity of a given object. While Burke follows Locke in looking for the single sensation that will produce the sublime on the passive brain, Blake suggests a sublime process by which the individual achieves the sublime effect through the detailed attention to specific forms. Blake’s insistence on “the bounding line” in painting calls for the clear delineation of form as a means of resisting the false generalizations implicit in “obscurity,” and the potential abuse of such effects—an obscure God requiring the ideological mediation of a priesthood, for example. The pun on “bounding” also suggests that such attention allows the individual access to sublime transport through a kind of visual synecdoche. This becomes clear in the annotations as Reynolds exhorts his readers to give ultimate preference to the general: “The general idea constitutes real excellence. All smaller things, however perfect in their way are to be sacrificed without mercy to the greater” (300). This is the inverse of Burke’s reasoning that: “a clear idea is another name for a little idea” (58). The image of sacrificial violence as the means to ideological (generalizing) ends reminds us again of the violence of the theological productions of Satan’s aspect blindness. Blake critiques this position by defending the structure of the synecdoche: “Sacrifice the Parts, What Becomes of the Whole” (300)? He makes it clear that the sublime depends on this synecdochal structure in annotations to “Discourse II:” “Without Minute Neatness of Execution The Sublime cannot Exist! Grandeur of Ideas is founded on Precision of Ideas” (296), and “Singular & Particular Detail is the Foundation of the Sublime” (297). The synecdoche between the particular and the sublime exists as a dynamic contrary rather than as a stable allegorical

relation. Elsewhere Blake calls the particular a “vehicular form” that allows sublime transport, but at the same time assumes the fall away from vision as implicit in its structure. In “Milton,” he calls Los the “Vehicular terror” (17, 31), a phrase that catches the possibility of redemption, and the contrary terror of mortality implicit in the instability of this synecdochal relation. The contrary relation is only possible through the careful limiting of the selfhood in order to allow the vast otherness of divine vision, or the sublime, to enter individual consciousness. The synecdoche guarantees this relation with its fluid vertical dynamic that nonetheless simultaneously resists hierarchical arrangement because of its contrary instability—the ultimate source of creative energy. The contrary flux between the particular and the universal creates Blake’s poetry in a material sense as it forms its tropological foundation, and it also establishes the ground for his other main critique of Reynolds over the nature of, or even existence of inspiration.

In “Discourse III” Reynolds argues that the idea of inspiration might produce a kind of paralysis in young artists:

He examines his own mind, and perceives there nothing of divine inspiration with which he is told, so many others have been favoured. He never travelled to heaven to gather new ideas; and he finds himself possessed of no other qualifications than what mere common observation and a plain understanding can confer.

(297)

Blake responds with bitterness:

The Man who never in his Mind & Thoughts travel’d to Heaven Is No Artist. Artists who are above a plain Understanding are Mock’d & Destroyed by this President of Fools.

(297)

This attack follows directly from his critique of Reynolds’s version of the sublime in that it is a response to the collapsing of the synecdoche connecting the artist to “heaven.” Reynolds negates this necessary relation and, in Blake’s view, the artist shrinks into the selfhood. The only relation left between the artist and the work of art is, ironically, commerce. Blake suspects

this conclusion is implicit in Reynolds's emphasis on imitation and the generality of artistic conception:

When a Man talks of Aquiring Invention & of learning how to produce Original Conception, he must expect to be call'd a Fool by Men of Understanding; but such a Hired Knave cares not for the Few. His Eye is on the Many, or, rather, on the Money.

(309)

Learning "Original Conception" can only be a deception of the self and the audience. The trickery of the artist's practice added to the tricking of the eye through perspective becomes an industry of greed and subterfuge. This is not surprising coming from Reynolds, given that his paintings rely on perspective in order to present the illusion of his patron's wealth, and have little subject matter other than property and the patron's power to command a painting. Such narcissistic portraiture was to Blake the nadir of painting and based entirely on the willful blindness of the selfhood. In his spirit of demystification Reynolds ultimately turned to the issue of inspiration per se as a partial means of justifying his treatise on the aesthetic validity of professional painting. In other words, he attempted to expunge all other than technical concerns from the discussion of art production:

To understand literally these metaphors [of the imagination] or ideas expressed in poetical language, seems to be equally absurd as to conclude that because painters sometimes represent poets writing from the dictates of a little winged boy or genius, that this same genius really did inform him in a whisper what he was to write; and that he is himself but a mere machine, unconscious of the operations of his own mind.

(313)

Blake responds directly to Reynolds's mocking conclusions:

The Ancients did not mean to Impose when they affirm'd their belief in Vision & Revelation. Plato was in Earnest: Milton was in Earnest. They believ'd that God did Visit Man Really & Truly & not as Reynolds pretends.

(313)

He sees Reynolds's literalism as a kind of pretending that attempts to justify

his own incapacity. For Blake, dictation is crucial as a means of composing outside the strict confines of the selfhood, and thus avoiding the blindness of Satan's abyss (self-interest taken as universal precept and order). His second comment on this section of "Discourse VII" shows his suspicion of Reynolds's motive in disqualifying inspiration as the *raison d'être* of artistic creation: "How very Anxious Reynolds is to Disprove & Contemn Spiritual Perception" (313). If such "perception" is spurious, then artistic production becomes a matter of mastering the formal conventions involved, of "being conversant with the invention of others" (309). Blake sees through this as a pretext to justify a focus on commerce as the true force behind Reynolds's art: "His Eye is on . . . the Money" (309). Blake's use of the word "Eye" brings us back to the issue of perspective, and thus to the issue of the sacrifice of particularity. He sees the ends that Reynolds seeks in his Discourses to be the creation of a professional class of painters who will agree on the terms of technical merit and will trade on this association by readily capitulating to taste, aristocratic taste. For Blake, this is a displacement of painting by an empty double, a formal abyss or cypher awaiting the insertion of the selfhood of whoever commissions it:

The Enquiry in England is not whether a Man has Talents & Genius,
But whether he is Passive & Polite & a Virtuous Ass & obedient to
Noblemen's Opinions in Art & Science. If he is, he is a Good Man. If
Not, he must be starved.

(291)

For Reynolds to advocate these social conditions for the artists of England is, for Blake, nothing short of a Satanic (Selfhood generated) betrayal of art:

. . . Such Artists as Reynolds are at all times Hired by the Satan's for
the Depression of Art—A Pretence to Art, To Destroy Art.

(291)

Blake extended his views on the limits of perspective in painting (and Reynolds's theorizing) to his use of poetic images in his famous (and notorious) "nature of infinity" passage (15, 21-35). The passage sets the individual perception of a "traveller thro Eternity" (15, 22) adrift in a complex, shifting

conceptual morass. The relationships of one vortex to another and to the individual perspectives caught up in the sheer force of these relations, (despite Blake's bland assertion that a simple description is possible, "the nature of infinity is this") have proven intractable to the most subtle and sophisticated of Blake readers. V. A. De Luca has described this phenomenon in his lucid study of Blake and the sublime, *Words of Eternity*. He demonstrates how critics have attempted to rise to the task of describing (re-presenting) the passage, and in the end have generated confusion (De Luca). De Luca offers us a breakthrough in recognizing in the passage what he calls the "iconic sublime." By this he means that the reader's experience of the passage creates the sublime through experiencing the structure of its images, and that that experience thus depends on the uncognizability (to borrow a Kantian term) of those images. In other words, description must fail; otherwise the passage would not be sublime, and therefore would not participate in the "nature of infinity." This irreducibility of Blake's poetic figures therefore resists any final stabilization into a perspective, critical or otherwise. However, De Luca's neat solution is too neat. A purely iconic reading of the passage comes dangerously close to asserting Burkean obscurity as the source of the sublime. Blake's "nature of infinity" cannot be converted easily into discursive terms (a perspective), but it nonetheless presents instances of the limitation of the human view (and blindness) from within each vortex. In so doing, it collapses the ground of Reynolds's aesthetics and Satan's enclosed universe.

The construction of Satan's solipsistic sublime, his Abyss, solidifies his separation from the eternal, from the particularity of otherness. His generalization out of his selfhood of a self-contained fallen world beholden to him for the promise of redemption has two immediate effects: the creation of mortality, "Eternal Death," as the means of production of human terror and the guarantor of his deity, and his fall into these harsh terms of his own self-creation. The result of this parodic first cause, let there be death, is Satan's self-division. In order to create a scapegoat as a means of defeating death, the relationship sacrificer and sacrificed must be created as the fundamental negation in Satan's system. As his is a closed system based on delusional blindness, then self-division is the only means of creating the necessary

sacrificial victim. If the cause and effect question, “what mov’d Milton,” provides the impetus for the Bard’s Song, then the implied question, what moved Satan, suggests the impossibility of recovering any first cause as causality appears to be an infinite regress. Whether Satan creates the fallen world of single vision, absolute division, or whether Satan is a product of division, the blindness of the elect, cannot be settled. Cause and effect are an absurd circle—solipsism at its most insidious. Further, when cause is associated with culpability then the selfhood must dissemble by inventing sin, the sinner and the sacrificial means of atonement. The search for what moved Satan becomes an evasion of culpability and a parodic double of Milton’s principled descent which can be characterized as a search for personal culpability. By voluntarily falling, Milton can discover the constitutive elements of his selfhood and thus not only overcome the blindness of self-division, but also can accept and recognize his own causal force in the world. This recognition is the necessary moment of vision in the creation of a transformed ethical self—the poem’s *raison d’être*.

Satan creates his false sublime as a function of his denial of his culpability:

. . . Satan stood opaque immeasurable
Covering the east with solid blackness, round his hidden heart.
With thunders utterd from his hidden wheels.

(9, 39-41)

His accusations generate his separated fallen world and make his division (from the divine family, from the eternal, from himself) absolute. Wrath and pity can only function to divide in this system: wrath against the guilty, pity for the sinner. “The Separation was terrible” (9, 49), and produces the need in Satan for an abstract version of the events leading to his fall. Drawn down into the materiality of his own fallen creation, Satan’s Spectre rages in an effort to create an ideology of its fallen condition. An ideology of sin and redemption becomes necessary as a means of defining his own deity and as a way of evading the terrible irony of becoming the first victim of his theology of division. Separating himself as a distant judging God necessitates and thus causes self-

division as a means of generating sacrificial victims in the theological version (repetition) of his cosmic solipsism.

The source of the sacrifice, the need to evade culpability through judgement of the other (self-deification), produces the traditional scapegoat of Christian sacrificial practice—the separated Female. The Female is immediately understood as an agent of the fall implicated in human generation: “The Nature of the Female space is this: it shrinks the Organs / Of Life till they become Finite & Itself seems Infinite” (10, 5-6). The fall into generation, cut off from eternity by Satan’s opacity, causes the human to be reduced to the confines of the body. The “Organs” of perception are also cut off. From this fearful perspective we appear to be finite bodies inside the infinite womb of generation. The female body thus comes to represent our birth into the world as the beginning of finitude. This misrecognition reads an effect of Satan’s selfhood, mortal terror of the limit of opacity, as a cause. This seems clear enough in Blake’s repetition of the vocabulary and architectonics of Satan’s deluded space (his vast self-contained opacity) in the description of Satan’s Female Space:

And Satan vibrated in the immensity of the Space! Limited
To those without but Infinite to those within: it fell down and
Became Canaan: closing Los from Eternity in Albions Cliffs
A mighty Fiend against the Divine Humanity mustering to war.

(10, 8-11)

The process of “closing Los from Eternity” as he is implicated in the fall into Satan’s material limit completes the separation of the material (the world of generation) from the eternal. The immediate result is the development of violence in the processes of negation. The separation makes meaningful exchange impossible and instead two sides are presented “against” one another in the violent potentiality of “mustering to War.” Los comments on female sexual jealousy and repeats the cause and effect confusion of seeing the Female Space as the cause of generation rather than as an effect of Satanic selfhood. He denounces Elynittria for the jealousy of “English Women” and decries the fall from a previous sexual openness. Even though he asks “whence is Jealousy running” (10, 14), he quickly abandons this implied search

for a cause and assumes that it is a function of female agency; that she: “Darkenest every Internal light with the arrows of [her] quiver,” and that: “Ocalythron binds the Sun into a Jealous Globe” (10, 17 & 19). Jealousy, a result of the sexual repression caused by separation, is taken as the cause of the separation (estrangement) of the male and female. Female sexuality then becomes a convenient explanation of the fallen condition. The construction of cultural misogyny begins in the moment when the female space, sexual reproduction, is taken as the first cause of the fallen world of generation. After that, female sexuality becomes the convenient scapegoat in a world in which redemption becomes a pathological desire to escape the limit of mortality. In this world, sin becomes a psychological and theological necessity. Without an external source to cause the fall in individuals, a contamination that can be removed, human terror and despair become complete. The immediate and unfortunate result of this profound need is a theological explanation:

... If the Guilty should be condemned, he must be an Eternal Death
 And one must die for another throughout all Eternity.
 Satan is fall'n from his station & never can be redeem'd
 But must be new Created continually moment by moment
 And therefore the Class of Satan shall be calld the Elect, & those
 Of Rintrah the Reprobate & those of Palamabron the Redeem'd
 For he is redeem'd from Satans Law, the wrath falling on
 Rintrah.

(11, 17-23)

This theology comes from the “Great Solemn Assembly” (11, 15) in the Bard’s narrative as an improvised solution to a problem that ironically eludes the power of those “Eternals.” Eternality appears to be limited as well by its separation from the fallen world, and they can only offer explanations for what has occurred. This theological pronouncement is therefore subject to the same infinite regress as the rest of the poem’s action. The motivating question “what mov’d Milton?” proliferates endlessly as the questions “what moved Satan?,” “what moved any individual in Satan’s fallen world?,” etc. The “Great Solemn Assembly” that the Bard addresses in Eternity reproduces itself throughout the fallen world as the Assembly that proclaims the institution of the three classes of men. The three classes of men, that appeared to cause the

fall through a kind of Blakean aspect blindness, now become understood as a result of the fall, and, yet, are on the point of causing the theological tradition of the fall with the invention of sin. The very form of this theological pronouncement is a syllogism which repeats the circularity of the fall in the form of an ultimately meaningless repetition of the Reason. The syllogism states: the guilty must be condemned forever and cannot be redeemed, the guilty must be created continually (they cannot be transformed), therefore the three classes of men are created in order to account for these differences between individuals. The two premises and conclusion have force (are true) only in so far as the Eternals exercise the power to assert their reasonableness. There is nothing intrinsically true about the form. The authority of the form thus collapses along with the authority of the Eternals who appear powerless to influence events, and so on. This pattern of infinite regress *is* the fall, and the limits of syllogism display its effect on language. There is no constitutive force present at this point. All meaning is belated—the Eternals establish religion after the fact of the fall. The culture of sacrifice is such a belated attempt to make meaning:

Where Satan making to himself Laws from his own identity.
Compell'd others to serve him in moral gratitude & submission
Being call'd God: setting himself above all that is called God.

(11, 10-12)

Satan is a parody of a constitutive force in that he never leaves the solipsistic confines of the selfhood. In addition, his identity is the product of his negative relation to others. He *is* the humiliated relationship of others to him.¹³

As a means of securing power over death another must die in place of the self. The poem explores the expression of this deep need through the invention of "Sin." Satan's sexual desire is separated from his selfhood and projected as the female other, Leutha. She in turn offers herself as the necessary sacrificial object. In order to justify this violent relationship she declares herself to be culpable in the events of the fall delineated in the Bard's

¹³ In philosophical terms, this is Hegelian negative being, and Blake unmasks here the violent exploitation of the other implicit in it.

Song. After the fact, in the poem's narrative, she offers yet another version of cause and effect that supersedes Satan's original transgression of his place in the "harvest" and of his subsequent subterfuges and denials:

But when Leutha (a Daughter of Beulah) beheld Satans condemnation
She down descended into the midst of the Great Solemn Assembly
Offering herself a Ransom for Satan, taking on her, his Sin.

(11, 28-30)

The Bard is conscious of the sacrificial substitution of Leutha for Satan ("taking on her, his Sin"), yet proceeds by burying that recognition and taking Leutha's narrative as an explanation of the fallen condition. In psychological terms, the female body becomes the site of necessary violence. Leutha's tale of sexual jealousy denigrates sexual desire as "Sin." Not only does the female body come to be associated with mortality (the cycle of birth and death) and the source of human anxiety and terror, but now Satan's desire for the other causes him to split and project that desire onto an external sexual object. Leutha describes this process and reverses its terms; she is the sexualized object and the cause of his sexual desire. In other words, she is the projection of his libidinal self and alienated from the rest of his personality, "her Parent power" (11, 36). In this divided state sexual desire becomes "cupidity" (12, 8), and Leutha's narrative rewrites the story of Satan's fall as the result of this "Sin."

She spoke: I am the Author of this Sin! by my suggestion My Parent
power Satan has committed this transgression.
I loved Palamabron & I sought to approach his Tent,
But beautiful Elynittria with her silver arrows repelld me.

(11, 35-38)

Desire cannot be recognized in this divided state and becomes a covert "suggestion." The process of division and denial creates the ground for the idea of "transgression" in that they constitute the psychological/libidinal limit that is transgressed. Leutha's revised history of events assumes that the agency is hers, but this assumption simply marks the limit of her perception. She is trapped in the blind action of her selfhood just as Satan is in his. Whereas his

blind ambition is nothing short of cosmic, Leutha aspires only to setting the story straight. Her assertion of causal force appears to be a contrary to Satan's because it claims her culpability in the fall whereas Satan evades his, but it is still a negation in its effort to create a total explanation of the poem's events. Satan's "transgression" is explained as "cupidity," his desire for Palamabron. Sexualizing the "transgression" feminizes desire. Satan's feminine portion desires Palamabron and this translates as Satan's conscious desire for Palamabron's station in the process of the harvest. His psychical disintegration makes this separation of covert and overt motives possible and presents another version of his aspect blindness. His sexuality is denied, made other, and finally cast out as an external source of sin. The new narrative concerns female sexual jealousy between Leutha and Elynittria. The latter's proprietary view of Palamabron creates the violent conflict of the "transgression." This story externalizes Satan's (and Palamabron's) sexual desire as other. Love is denounced as a feminine contaminant in the repressed masculine psyche. Through repression, this masculine consciousness puts its feminine subconscious under extreme pressure and the result is the explosion of the transgressive act. Satan redoubles his alienation by then casting Leutha out from the "inmost Palace of his nervous fine wrought Brain" (12, 41):

Wild with prophetic fury his former life became like a dream
 Cloth'd in the serpents folds, in selfish holiness demanding purity
 Being most impure, self-condemn'd to eternal tears, he drove
 Me from his inmost Brain & the doors clos'd with thunders sound.

(12, 45-48)

Once this separation occurs the aphasia of Satan's aspect blindness makes his solipsistic universe inevitable. He is "self-condemn'd" to the opacity of his selfhood and the conditions of its inward fallen abyss. Leutha even allows Satan to escape culpability by seeing her desire as debased, the "Sick Couch" (13, 1), and as the cause of the mortality "infolding" (13, 1) him. Taken as a whole this morass of psychological repression, "Sin," false causality, blame and so on constitutes an ideology of female sexuality as the source of temptation, death and sin. Leutha becomes the perfect scapegoat because she gives

Satan sacrificial power over death. The female womb becomes a site of masculine anxiety if not terror because it creates the limit of the material self (the limit of contraction). In asserting power over this force, Satan must also deny his own sexual desire as an equally terrifying drive towards this mortal realm. Sexuality becomes cupidity, feminized and driven from the selfhood. In the midst of this anxiety, love is lost as a human possibility because its necessary vulnerability (the voluntary limiting of the selfhood) is an impossible risk. Love is sacrificed and any outward move towards the other paradoxically condemned as selfish, jealous. This, then, is Blake's quarrel with Christian practice: love has been replaced by an anxious, fearful ideology of sin and sacrifice. Doctrinally derived institutions depend on this shift in order to trade in the need for salvation. Furthermore, Blake successfully diagnoses the history of misogyny implicit and at times explicit in this ideology from the Hebrew construction of Eve to St. Paul's Platonist hatred of the body in general and the sinful female body in particular. In Blake's day this tradition took the form, for example, of a taboo concerning the impropriety of discussing female sexuality. The responses to Mary Wollstonecraft's violations of this taboo in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* provide ample evidence of the currency of these submerged cultural assumptions. It is not surprising that Thomas Taylor, the author of the viciously misogynist pamphlet *A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes*, preferred to be referred to as Thomas Taylor, the Platonist.

Before I further discuss Blake's critique of (and resistance to) this tradition it is necessary to explore more deeply the effects of the fall on language itself. The tangle of cause and effect cannot be settled from within the fallen condition, and as a product of the divisions of Reason (dualism) it cannot be escaped. We are in the fallen world and cannot lever ourselves up into a place where cause can be definitively differentiated from effect. The conceit that such a thing is possible is the means the self-righteous employ to judge others and assign culpability (the dark double of cause), and construct their ideological hierarchies (the three classes, for example). It is this subterfuge that delivers the female body into the hands of the sacrificer. Blake insists that this pattern of blindness and limit exists in language itself. At the

end of *The Bard's Song* then we find ourselves in a fallen world which is defined by both its limits, the Satanic Abyss, and its blindness to its limits, the selfhood. Which is cause and which is effect is impossible to determine. Leutha's declaration of culpability is impossible to evaluate and can only be understood as arbitrary. Her willingness to become a sacrificial "ransom" for Satan signals Blake's awareness of the violence at the heart of religious judgement. Such judgements attempt to settle cause and effect questions by means of negation. This drive to stabilize a particularly vexing contrary finds form in religious dogma through the ideology of sin and redemption, in the creation of the three classes of men, etc. *The Bard's Song* exposes the arbitrariness of these ideological negations, and that recognition provides the possibility of self-knowledge—the recognition of the selfhood as it operates within and organizes individual consciousness. When the Song concludes, the representative individual (the site of the poem's action) shifts from the deluded Satan to Milton, whose voluntary journey into the fallen world serves as the exemplar for all individual action in relation to the contrary issues of fall and redemption and as a contrary response to Satanic limit.

In the wake of *The Bard's Song* the poem struggles to come to terms with the dualistic disintegration characteristic of the fallen condition. Division dominates experience. At the same time the poetic voice of the poem undergoes an elaborate process of re-integration in the image of the single voice of Milton acting through Blake. Milton falls into Blake's (the character in the poem's) foot, and Blake ties on "the sandal of Los." This condensation provides a site in the poem where the redemptive possibility can occur. In an effort to overcome the divisions of the fall and thus create such a possibility, Blake uses the end of *Book the First* to attempt to theorize a poetic language beyond the attempted negations of "Natural" cause and effect:

. . . the various Classes of Men are all marked out determinate
 In Bowlahoola; & as the Spectres choose their affinities
 So they are born on Earth & every Class is determinate
 But not by Natural power but by Spiritual power alone. Because
 The Natural power continually seeks & tends to Destruction
 Ending in Death: which would of itself be Eternal Death
 And all are Class'd by Spiritual, & not by Natural power.

And every Natural Effect has a Spiritual Cause, and Not
 A Natural: for a Natural Cause only seems, it is a Delusion
 Of Ulro: & a ratio of the perishing Vegetable Memory.

(26, 37-46)

Blake's theorems take the form of a series of three connected syllogisms. The first states that "Spiritual power alone" determines class. Natural power is not Spiritual. Therefore Natural Power cannot determine class. The argument follows that anything which ends in death cannot determine class. Natural power ends in death. Natural power cannot determine class. The final syllogism moves to connect the process of determining class to the process of determining cause. It repeats the major premise of the second syllogism by saying that causality cannot be determined by a "ratio of the perishing Vegetable Memory" (26, 46). Natural power ends in death. Therefore, natural power cannot cause. As reasonable as this theory appears, Blake has earlier shown that syllogisms are empty forms whose formal validity is often perniciously confused with truth claims. In an effort to extricate his poetic argument from the arbitrary morass of "Natural" cause and effect he employs the very form he sets out to supersede. Asserting "Spiritual power alone" is a negation of the "Natural" and sets up the same infinite regress he struggles to overcome. Blake can identify the intellectual problem he faces, but formulating a manifesto against it only reinscribes its terms.

In an effort to overcome this crisis in his attempt to employ rationalist discourse, the speaker of the poem (a composite of the narrator Blake, the Bard, Milton, the character Blake and Los) generates a series of speeches and arguments beginning with the word "but." These sections end Book the First and represent the conflicted nature of contradiction ("but") struggling to become contrariety. Blake's poetic contraries cannot supersede "but" by

subscribing transcendent identity to “and.” That would re-create the entropy of the syllogisms in its use of negation. The necessary contrary must keep “but” and “and” in oppositional tension. In this procedure Blake seems to intuitively distrust the implied transcendence of an idealist sublime that converts the conflicted experience and personal doubt of “but” into the unity-making power of “and.” This repeats at the level of poetic language his suspicion of the figural sublime of Satan’s “unfathomable,” “immeasurable” “Abyss.” The power of sublime transport in the construction of a delusional/deluded selfhood must be resisted. While “but” suggests the conflicted violence of negation, it escapes the aspect blindness of Satan’s total negation, single vision. Each “but” signals a shift in perspective, and thus has the potential of moving from two-fold vision (the acknowledgement of otherness) to three-fold vision (the creative contrary tension with otherness). This contrary relationship between “but” and “and” thus constitutes an extremely complex version of De Luca’s “iconic sublime” in which the structure of Blake’s poetic language becomes a manifestation of the Blakean sublime rather than a description of it. An example of the “energy” created in this productive conflict, even within a single perspective created by a “but,” occurs in the passage describing the “Sons of Ozoth” and the nature of the “Optic Nerve” (28, 28-442). As the creators of material vision, they construct human perspective. But, while they supply the false value of “artificial riches” (28, 30), they also create the possibility of an eternal vision in creating a potentially redemptive site in the “Optic Nerve” even as they solidify around it in a blindness reminiscent of Satan’s in the Bard’s Song. Despite the extreme dereliction of this visual site (it shuts out externality and collapses on itself), a contrary synecdoche can nonetheless operate within it. The “Nerve” is “like the black pebble on the enraged beach” (28, 34), self-contained and awash in the vast external forces it denies; yet that “pebble” can open within into a “mine” (with an obvious pun on mind) that contains equally vast contrary potential. In fact the materiality of the “Optic Nerve” is necessary for any vision (there can be no other possible human site), and therefore the potential exists within any perspective, no matter how debased, to explode the trap of single vision and, via synecdoche, to open into a multi-perspectival vision of vast potentiality. Inside the “pebble” of the first simile describing the “Optic

Nerve,” is a second simile which “opens” it:

While the poor indigent is like the diamond which the cloth'd
In rugged covering in the mine, is open all within
And in his hallowd center holds the heavens of bright eternity.

(28, 35-37)

Even within the impoverished condition of the “indigent” is the potential vision of “bright eternity.” This is reminiscent of Blake’s contrary use of the word “bound” simultaneously to show us the limit of our view (the “circumference”), and the potential of that line (whether of an engraving or of a poem) to “bound” beyond single vision into a synecdochal transformation of our perspective.

Ozoth labours to stabilize this perceptual site (the place of his sons) as he: “builds walls of rocks against the surging sea / And timbers cramped with iron cramps bar in the joys of life” (28, 38-39). Barring in joys both preserves them from “fell destruction” (28, 40), and constrains them. This is the contrary at the heart of poetic language. Poetic form creates the possibility of joys at the same moment it limits them. Ozoth simultaneously builds a perceptual prison and organizes the expansion of the “hallowd center” (28, 37). The pun on the *hollowed center* makes the contrary nature of this activity clear.

Against the limiting aspect of the construction around the “Optic Nerve,” the poem generates another section beginning with “But.” This engagement prevents the fall of the previous section into single point perspective (Reynolds’s discourse), single vision (“Newton’s sleep”), the selfhood (Satan’s Abyss). Out of the process of these oppositional sections comes a “moment” of temporary identity in the cumulative effect of ten lines beginning with “And” (28, 44-56), and ending with a line beginning with “All” (28, 59). This passage describes time, “Moments & Minutes & Hours” (28, 43), and in the act of description creates a contrary out of time/space. Time is given an impossible architecture to embody it and to give it literal form. It is impossible because it cannot be imaged in the mind. In that disjunction between literal and visual description, Blake creates a kind of architectonic sublime that simultaneously marks the limit of material vision (the failure to

make a visual analogue) and the visionary potential of poetic language. While this sublime is reminiscent of Kant's crisis of the imagination and subsequent self-expansion at the moment of the recognition of the dimensions of that crisis, Blake's formulation here shows that such moments depend upon their very temporality. His vision of the visionary "moment" occurs out of the flux of "Buts," and can only be a temporary relation inside that flux, and its visionary aspect can only be known through its material manifestation in the body. So while he constructs a visionary habitation for time, that time can only occur in the body. The parentheses around the line, ("A Moment equals a pulsation of an artery") (28, 46), visually marks it as a contrary to the rest of the ornate description:

But others of the Sons of Los build Moments & Minutes & Hours
 And Days & Months & Years & Ages & Periods; wondrous buildings
 And every Moment has a Couch of gold for soft repose,
 (A Moment equals a pulsation of the artery)
 And between every two Moments stands a Daughter of Beulah
 To feed the Sleepers on their Couches with maternal care.
 And every Minute has an azure Tent with Silken Veils.
 And every Night & Day, has Walls of brass & Gates of adamant,
 Shining with precious stones & ornamented with appropriate signs:
 And every Month, a silver paved Terrace builded high:

And every Year, invulnerable Barriers with high Towers.
 And every Age is Moated deep with Bridges of silver & gold
 And every Seven Ages is Incircled with a Flaming Fire.

(28, 48-57)

The increasingly sublime description of the buildings of time occurs within the physicality of the "moment"/"pulsation" and therefore details the potentiality of that "moment." The description opens out into a cumulative sublimity built in the rush of "Ands" and the repetitive insistence on "every." Blake's sublime moment occurs as a temporary condition of overwhelming unity (the construction of "every" out of the "And"), and it is an experience in and of language. Unlike Kant's sublime turn, it emerges from the oppositional flux of the successive "Buts," rather than as a recognition of their failure. Blake's contrary then has a rough equivalence to the Kantian notion of the "free play" of the imagination, but does not share its aesthetically necessary failure.

Furthermore, the flux out of which the “visionary” emerges is not in fact stabilized. The radical sense of opening out into infinitude (the standard figuration of the sublime) collapses upon itself. This is signalled by the word “Incircled,” in the final line of the architectonic section. It suggests a containment of the infinite potential of the imagery and turns the momentum of the passage inward. This culminates in the lines:

Every Time less than a pulsation of the artery
Is equal in its period & value to Six Thousand Years.

For in this Period the Poets Work is Done: and all the Great
Events of Time start forth & are conceivd in such a Period
Within a Moment: a Pulsation of the Artery.

(28, 62-29, 3)

The smallest unit of time, a moment experienced in the body, becomes greater than the standard theological date for the age of the earth. The infinite expansion turns and becomes an infinitesimal sublime. This is synecdoche pushed to its very limits as a verbal structure, and yet it holds (images) sublime transport in the moment of the reader’s experience of the sheer density of its content and despite the vertigo-inducing instability of its form. Following Blake’s description of a parallel and contrary construction of “Space” (29, 4-26), the visionary moment collapses back into the oppositional activity of the next section beginning with “But.” And, it should be remembered that it emerged out of Ozoth’s efforts to create opacity at the “Optic Nerve.” Blake’s verbal sublime therefore cannot be employed as a means of self-aggrandizement because it is dependent on a radical sense of instability that would appear to be perpetual crisis in Kantian terms. Furthermore any effort to stabilize this flux leads immediately to the fall into single vision and Satan’s solipsistic deluded parody of the mathematical sublime—the Abyss.

It seems then that Blake takes as the starting point for his theory of poetic language the same point that serves as the endpoint in the theory of Paul de Man. The de Manian notion of “blindness,” in this context, looks like a version of Wittgenstein’s “aspect blindness.” The total failure of language to achieve transparency is the inevitable end of any denotative, descriptive

theory of language, but what this malaise of failure fails to recognize is the potentiality implicit in tropes as verbal structures, and even more importantly the potentiality of opacity as a generative gift in the production of poetic meanings (to which de Manian theory must remain theoretically “blind”)¹⁴. This is a constitutive theory of language which escapes the trap of de Man’s conclusions. Blake names one of his two human limits “opacity” and calls it “Satan” (29, 39), but as we have just seen/experienced that limit is the only possible site of visionary “moments.” De Man would decry this as an example of the miraculous symbol that he finds so suspicious, but it seems clear that rather than his suspicion signalling a recognition of some sort of mystification it actually marks a confusion about the relationship of poetic verbal structures to individual consciousness.

If Blake’s poetic method thus makes impossible the construction of the “selfhood” as a deluded site of personal power, this must also be understood as an ethical position and demonstration. The “redeemed” cannot be a constructed theological category, but rather must become a possible point in a field of shifting relations: a moving point in a vortex blind to the vortices it must inevitably engage. This emphasis on the extreme temporality of the visionary “moment” prevents the solipcism of the religious sublime, yet retains the redemptive possibility of the contrary nature of that “moment.” The synecdoche created out of the “moment” creates the infinite as possibility. The potential enormity of the “moment’s” sublime architecture occurs in its potential for infinitesimal collapse. Fall and redemption are a single contrary process; the pathos of loss must remain and not be superseded in a Kantian moment. The Blakean sublime can only function as a contrary pathos/sublimity: “The most sublime act to set another before you” (“Marriage,” 7).

In order to see this poetic method as an ethical method it is useful to look at the figure “Ololon” and her experiences of Blake’s poetic (aesthetic) structures. She first appears in the poem as Milton’s alienated emanation, the

¹⁴ For a full discussion and analysis of this self-defeating circularity in de Man’s conclusions, see the concluding chapter in Hazard Adams’s *Philosophy of the Literary Symbolic* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press), 355-362.

poetic figure for the long-suffering wives and daughters of the poet. They are located “in Eden” and understood metaphorically as “a sweet River, of milk and liquid pearl” (21, 14). They create the river through the tears of their incessant lamentation, the outward mark of their alienated condition, the condition of loss. It is they who recognize the meaning of Milton’s choosing to fall, and they respond despite being confined in Eden, a paradise of limited vision. Milton’s defense ruptures this closed system and Ololon (still understood as a collective “us”) responds to the artificiality of their alienated state:

And Ololon said, Let us descend also, and let us give Ourselves to death in Ulro among the Transgressors. Is Virtue a Punisher? O no! how is this wondrous thing: This World beneath, unseen before: this refuge from the wars Of Great Eternity! unnatural refuge! unknown by us till now! Or are these pangs of repentance? let us enter into them.

(21, 35-40)

The recognition of their “unnatural refuge,” the paradisaic contrary to the limit of Satan’s infernal Abyss, allows Ololon to act voluntarily and thus rupture the “dark tomb” (21, 32) that maintained her alienation. Her confinement in a false paradise was a function of the selfhood as it divided, categorized and stabilized the fallen world in response to its own terror. Once the selfhood no longer maintains this power of separation, Ololon reverses her passive role as an aggrieved party artificially compensated by a divisive and paternalistic “Pity,” and becomes the agent of revelation. She opens the way for “the Divine Family” (21, 41) to recognize the providential nature of Milton’s fall as his recognition of the “Universal Dictate” (21, 43). In this process she functions like a synecdoche that allows the perception of an individual to be momentarily continuous with the providential will. In other words, she enables vision. This in turn aligns her with the process of conflation in the evolution of the poem’s narrative voice. In place of the fearful selfhood creating the self through the violent delimiting of otherness, Ololon becomes part of the poetic self (the poem’s voice) which is simultaneously the experience of others. The many become the “One Man even Jesus” (21, 48), and her agency produces this moment:

Uniting in One with Ololon and the appearance of One Man Jesus the

Saviour appeared coming in the Clouds of Ololon!

(21, 49-50)

As Ololon enables this moment of unity by making it visible in the world of experience, her synecdochal function would be, for Blake, redemptive. Redemption cannot work as a theological postulate debased in the process of constructing anxious religious selfhoods, but rather must be a process—provisional, momentary. Jesus functions as the ultimate name for the individual, incarnate (in the material body), that enables a synecdochal expansion into the final immateriality of the divine. This dizzying synecdochal relation with its radical instability clearly defines the poetic self as a site where the individual can only be understood or known through its potential for otherness; this is after all the contrary at the root of Jesus' incarnation. The poet's task then is profoundly ethical in that it concerns the displacement of the self (as a narrow selfhood) in the service of otherness, and further that necessary relation in turn allows poetic participation in the divine and the recognition of the greatest possible self (as part of the infinite expansiveness of the divine). In classical aesthetic terms, the expansion realized in the sublime moment can only occur if the poet fiercely opposes the desire to recuperate it. This is still a very abstract version of Blake's aesthetics/ethics contrary, but it becomes much more clear in Book the Second where the collective abstraction named Ololon becomes a more simple figure of a single alienated female in relation to Milton. In this condensation, a fall into a single body, she functions as a person struggling within the cultural symptoms of the deluded selfhood, the institutional forms of ideology (the constructed Abyss).

Book the Second opens with a motto: "Contraries are Positives, A Negation is not a Contrary" (30). The subject then will be the recognition of contraries, and thus the overcoming of the closed limits of negation. Yet the Book begins by describing Beulah, a place in the fallen world "where Contrarieties are equally true" (30, 1). Despite this seemingly redeemed condition, Beulah is nonetheless limited by its separation from Eternity and from the rest of the fallen world. Its respite from violent strife appears (contrarily) as an evasion of mortality. Contraries have a benign force in

Beulah, but cannot constitute a Vision—they lack “energy.” It exists as a benign contrary to the violent negations of the equally separated Satanic Abyss. Inside the limits of Beulah, Ololon’s descent can only be understood as a destruction of their closed space, and thus as the coming of death. Ololon’s lamentation, the repetition of the divided condition punned on in her name “all alone,” causes weeping in Beulah at what seems like “affliction” (31, 12). They are terrified even though the promise of redemption is clear:

. . . They saw the Lord coming
In the Clouds of Ololon with Power & Great Glory!

(31, 15-16)

This betrays the limitation of their perspective: “they know not of Regeneration, but only of Generation” (31, 19). As a result, the entry of Ololon into their formerly (formally) closed system can only be interpreted as violence. Their understanding of the Divine is based on the terror engendered by their desolate separation from it:

These are the Gods of the Kingdoms of the Earth, in contrarious
And cruel opposition, Element against Element, opposed in War
Not Mental as the Wars of Eternity, but a Corporeal Strife.

(31, 23-25)

Amidst all this terrified weeping, Blake inserts the metaphoric passage describing the overwhelming influence of “the Lark” in renovating (re-awakening) the earth. Even though the passage reads as an extended metaphor, it works like a synecdoche in its presentation of the particularity of the Lark and its function as a “vehicular form:”

Thou hearest the Nightingale begin the Song of Spring.
The Lark sitting upon his earthly bed, just as the morn
Appears, listens silent; then springing from the waving Cornfield, loud
He leads the Choir of Day: trill, trill, trill, trill,
Mounting upon the wings of light into the Great Expanse,
Reechoing against the lovely blue & shing heavenly Shell,
His little throat labours with inspiration; every feather
On throat & breast & wing vibrates with the effluence Divine.
All Nature listens to him, & the awful Sun
Stands still upon the Mountain looking on this little Bird

With eyes of soft humility & wonder, love & awe,
 Then loud from their green covert all the Birds begin their Song:
 The Thrush, the Linnet & the Goldfinch, Robin & the Wren
 Awake the Sun from his sweet reverie upon the Mountain.
 The Nightingale again assays his song, & thro' the day
 And thro' the night warbles luxuriant, every Bird of Song
 Attending his loud harmony with admiration & love.
 This is a Vision of the lamentation of Beulah over Ololon.

(31, 28-45)

The activity of the Lark in response to the Nightingale's song creates a naturalized image of the renovation of the earth—the awakening of bird song with the dawn as metaphoric revelation. By placing the Lark's song before the Sun's rise, Blake creates a moment of arrest. The Sun is momentarily stilled, and that becomes the renovating moment which paradoxically releases time. This figure of the immanent potential of the moment repeats the synecdochal relationship of the particular to the universal in temporal terms. The Lark's singing has an extraordinary particularity in the description of its physical transport (both journey and emotive condition): "every feather / On throat & breast & wing vibrates." This spatial particularity (the bird's body) works as a contrary to the temporal subject of the passage. Remember that the "lamentation of Beulah over Ololon" is based on mortal terror—the fear of temporality. The "vision" of the Lark effects a contrary transformation of the sound of lamentation into its immanent potential as renovating song. Ololon renovates Blake's mythic landscape in the same way as the Lark renovates the natural imagery of the passage. This is the metaphoric content of the passage, but tropologically the passage also effects a contrary conversion of the emotion delineated and insists on the synecdochal function of both Lark and Ololon—the necessary particular in the opening of a vision of the potential renovated whole. Metaphor is therefore an inadequate description of the trope employed in the passage, and Blake suggests a name for it in the final line when he calls it "a Vision of the lamentation of Beulah over Ololon." A Blakean "Vision," in its formulation, is not a personal revelation peculiar to the poet, but a poetic structure combining the forms and functions of metaphor and synecdoche, employing Blakean contrariety to create a highly subversive (in its instability) relation between the particulars of perceptual experience and

the universals of all modes of cognition (including for Blake divine revelation). The overall structure of this part of "Milton" is such that it implicates the reader in its complications. The abstract vision of "the lamentations of Beulah over Ololon" is embodied in the sensual imagery of the Lark. The auditory experience of the song is heard *as* the lamentation, the renovating joy of the song effects its contrary transformation of the lamentation through the site of the poet's perceptual consciousness (itself a contrary), and transposed in the reader's consciousness through the cognitive experience of this complex trope Blake calls a "Vision." For Blake, this is what revolutionary consciousness must be. Not a set of internalized ideological theorems, but rather a complex fluid set of relations between interiority and exteriority, self and other, experienced through poetic language, and acted on as a necessary individual struggle within its (both the set of relations and their reality in poetic language) contrary flux. As I have argued above, this sense of poetic language as a transaction (trans action) simultaneously creates precise particular critiques of cultural forms (the productions of the selfhood), and establishes the limits of the self and as such the ground for an ethical practice (action).

Blake recapitulates his poetic/ethical structure with his discussion of "states." His distinction of "States from Individuals in those States" (32, 22) insists on the temporality of the specific human characteristics and conditions that are often taken to be the sum total of the self. The material "Lamb falls by the Knife" (32, 37), but materiality is a state through which the Lamb passes (Christ's incarnation clearly informs this passage and conceptualization) and therefore its Form "Eternal Exist[s], For-ever" (32, 38). This passage has been employed (by Kathleen Raine and others) as evidence of Blake's Platonism, but it is an odd Platonism that relies on the temporary "State" (the material Lamb) in order to guarantee the "Form." And furthermore, there is no *real* barrier between the "State" and the "Form." Recognition of one's present "State" as a temporary manifestation enables knowledge of the "Form Eternal." The two are not alienated as in Platonist or Pauline conceptions, but rather recapitulate the particular/universal contrary and their potential synecdochal structure as delineated above. The "State" is transitory, but is the only possible "particular" site of transformation. Thus

Blake continues in Plate 34 to create the “Four States of Humanity” (34, 8) as a means of literally embodying the various “States” of the human condition (our materiality). The distinction between “States” and “Forms” avoids negation and instead emphasizes the necessity of vision—both physical visual perception and the transformation of that perception through the literary imagination’s marshalling of poetic language. Our task is to recognize: “What is Eternal & what Changeable? & what Annihilable” (32, 31)! This vision of the self both explodes the limits of “States” through the perception of those “States” as “States,” and insists on the Imagination as the mode of perception that makes this possible: “The Imagination is not a State: it is the Human Existence itself” (32, 32). The Imagination is the force of the individual that acts, perceives and recognizes “States” for the limited perspectives they are. This is another vocabulary to apply to the “nature of infinity” passage from “Book the First.” The schematics of intersecting vortices, each appearing as a self-contained, all-encompassing sphere from within (also the structure of Satan’s inner Abyss), but which nonetheless passes into another new vortex, serves as an iconic representation (a complex poetic figure) of the nature of “States.” Blake’s poetics of “States,” then, does not point to some transcendent Platonic self (Raine’s misreading), but rather to a radical immanence in which the present pretensions of the self are exposed as the limited delusions of the selfhood—“States” are not to be transcended; they must be experienced. Vision means that we recognize the limits of that experience rather than reifying it as self-righteousness or one of its ideological forms (the church, the state, the Royal Academy, etc.).

The passage through “States” makes knowledge partial and provisional, and therefore philosophical certainty is absurd. However, this is not a kind of self-defeating nihilism. Even error is potentially renovating if it entails action rather than paralysis. Ololon’s willed descent into the very nadir of fallen human existence demonstrates this point in great detail. She appears to descend along “Milton’s track” (a likely pun on “tract”) in response to a male “Divine Voice . . . heard in the Songs of Beulah” (33, 1). The “Divine Voice” delivers a diatribe against female sexual jealousy and glories in his jealous revenge: “I show my Jealousy & set before you Death” (33, 10). The violence

in the male voice is unmistakable as is its castration anxiety:

. . . now thou art terrible
In jealousy & unlovely in my sight, because thou has cruelly
Cut off my loves in fury till I have no love left for thee.

(33, 5-7)

Out of this physical terror emerges violent retribution which the voice takes, erroneously, as the meaning of Milton's descent:

Behold Milton descended to Redeem the Female Shade
From Death Eternal; such your lot to be continually Redeem'd
By death & misery of those you love & by Annihilation
When the Sixfold Female perceives that Milton annihilates
Himself: that seeing all his loves by her cut off: he leaves
Her also: intirely abstracting himself from Female loves
She shall relent in fear of death.

(33, 11-17)

The male voice confuses annihilation with negation, and the speech thus reflects his mortal terror both through the persistent castration anxiety and his notion that death is a form of physical judgement employed from without to regulate behaviour (this is a good summary of the ideological strategies of religious institutions that Blake has set out to critique). Despite its identification as the product of a "Divine Voice," this speech cannot escape the limits of its "State," Beulah, and therefore distorts the *truth* of Milton's descent into what can best be understood as *error*. The designation, "Divine," is produced from the perspective of the fallen male will. The male fantasy of the end of jealousy expressed as the humiliated female submissively supplying sexual partners to her husband is thus a garish parody of the necessary giving up of jealousy (the annihilation of the selfhood) that the poem moves towards. But even within the limited perspective of the conflicted sexual body, the possibility of vision exists. Through a contrary turn Ololon can hear in the violence of the male voice its necessary contrary. The "Songs of Beulah" are astonished and ask the question: "Is terror changed to pity O wonder of Eternity" (34, 7)? The "terror" of negation (the anxiety that is mastered in the production of the sublime) is transformed into its contrary "pity" (the capacity

for pathos, or the refusal of the sublime). The individual body must then contain many “States” if such a contrary perception can occur. Even though Beulah is a limited “State,” it provides the particularity of the body, and, thus the potential site of redemption. Ololon produces evidence of vision in as much as she moves between (at least) two “States” in her perception of the male voice. This point is made manifest in Plate 34 with the creation of the physiognomy of “the Four States of Humanity” (34, 8). The “Fourth State” is the most terrible as it represents the consuming force of “the Stomach & Intestines” (34, 16). Yet, it is from this most debased (seemingly) of bodily “States” that the individual can achieve vision. By acknowledging (“opening” the “Gates” to) our mortality at its most visceral we can also “open” a “view of all these wondrous Imaginations” (34, 18). What appeared to be a violent humiliation to the male Divine Voice in Beulah “opens” into the visionary through the act of the individual will: “But Ololon *sought* the Or-Ulro & its Fiery Gates” (34, 19) (emphasis mine). Humiliation, the product of negation, becomes the beginning of annihilation, the product of contrary capacity (“pity”).

By seeking the human body as the site of renovation, Ololon follows Milton into the violent contentions of the voices in Beulah:

A long journey & dark thr’ Chaos in the track of Miltons course
To where the Contraries of Beulah War beneath Negations Banner.

(34, 22-23)

It is the violence of negation that she must enter in order to resist. The male voice in Beulah confuses this violence, the total humiliation of the female will, with annihilation, the willed descent of Ololon into these contentions. In following “in the track of Miltons descent” she *chooses* to re-engage her alienated emanation. The confusion of negation and annihilation, and the mortal terror that it produces, marks the effects of their alienated existence. Her descent “opens” a view “from Miltons track” (34, 24) of the fallen Blakean cosmos. In doing this she ruptures the closed structure of this vast cosmological solipsism—the Satanic selfhood generated out as the very universe. The closed nature of this structure had made its own limits invisible

to it, and negation and violence are the logic of its internal regulation of meaning. This process of regulation is a complex Blakean example of the functioning of ideology, and is reminiscent of Žižek's description of the "quilting" of meaning based on the progress of the internal logic of a closed ideological system as it moves into individual experience. In this regard it is crucial to see that the cosmological register of this section of the poem cannot be understood as some neo-Platonic abstraction. Instead, its unstable synecdochal logic insists on the existence of the cosmological condition in the particularity of ideological forms (political and social institutions), and its perception can only take place in the specificity of the body. Once this structure is ruptured, its totalizing power collapses and Ololon can perceive and name its violence *as* violence rather than as the overwhelming logic of dualism:

. . . How are the Wars of man which in Great Eternity
Appear around, in the External Spheres of Visionary Life
Here rendered Deadly within the Life & Interior Vision
How are the Beasts & Birds & Fishes, & Plants & Minerals
Here fixed into a frozen bulk subject to decay & death?
Those Visions of Human Life & Shadows of Wisdom & Knowledge

Are here frozen to unexpansive deadly destroying terrors.
And War & Hunting: the Two Fountains of the River of Life
Are become Fountains of bitter Death & of corroding Hell
Till Brotherhood is changed into a Curse & a Flattery
By Differences between Ideas, that Ideas themselves, (which are
The Divine Members) may be slain in offerings for sin.

(34, 50-35, 6)

The "Interior Vision" of the closed fallen world reduces intellectual conflict, what should be the contrary well-spring of human existence, to violence and the "terror" of material death. The interior logic of this system (difficult to differentiate from its anxiety as I have argued above in the discussion of the collapse of causality in the Bard's song) has a rationalist form as it separates things into various taxonomies and endeavours to introduce a logic of contradiction in order to further regulate meaning. In this system, two oppositional ideas can only be a contradiction necessitating the destruction of one or the other. Power inheres in this violent process as mortal terror at the end of the logic of negatives guarantees the logic of sacrifice as the foundation

on which reason is built. This anxiety contaminates the very basis of human relations. Love cannot operate in a system where otherness can only be a threat, and therefore the value of "Brotherhood" must be reduced to subterfuge, "a Curse & Flattery," strategically employed to entrap the other in the position of victim. This violent dichotomy has complete sway in a closed system from the cosmological (the largest perceivable outside and the invisibility of its limits), to individual cognition (ideas may "be slain as offerings for sin"), and finally to the conditions of the particularity of the body (incarnation).

Once descended to her body, Ololon chooses to confront, through acceptance, her mortality. In order to view Golgonooza, the possibility of redemption, it is necessary to pass through the materiality of human existence, the Polypus:

A wondrous journey not passable by Immortal feet, & none
 But the Divine Saviour can pass it without annihilation.
 For Golgonooza cannot be seen Till having passd the Polypus.
 It is viewed on all sides round by a Four-fold Vision
 Or till you become Mortal & Vegetable in Sexuality
 Then you behold its mighty Spires & Domes of ivory & gold.

(35, 20-25)

Christ, as the incarnate Jesus, is the only immortal exception to this process because he literally embodies the human while also retaining simultaneous access to "Four-fold Vision." The perception of Golgonooza is figured as an extreme contrary of either an all-encompassing view (the Four-fold circumference), or the intensity of the sexual body (the center of incarnation). Only Christ/Jesus contains this synecdochal flux. Once Ololon fully experiences incarnation, she can see its limit and thus her own relation to the eternal. This perception of her own fallen condition ruptures the solipsism of the Satanic Abyss as it was developed in the Bard's Song. She can see the Mundane Egg not as the entirety of human existence but as the limit of materiality. Her perception of the realm of death and the "Immortal Starry-Ones" (35, 30) surrounding it produces a humiliated relation. Her perception is organized around the body of Milton (whom he has followed into incarnation and

death), and her vision of immanent Immortality surrounding him produces in her a recognition of her false conception of her own horizon as the entirety of existence—she recognizes her selfhood. Ololon’s “confession,” made with “humiliation and sorrow” (35, 33), is unlike Leutha’s deluded efforts to claim culpability in Satan’s actions because it is not dedicated to the preservation of the solipsism of the selfhood’s enclosed universe, but rather to its rupture. “Humiliation” is not a recognition of the smallness of the self so much as a recognition of the selfhood’s deluded attempt to create a closed system out of that smallness. Once ruptured, that false limit collapses and Ololon is transfigured as a kind of living, unstable synecdoche. She performs the function of opening vision along the “track” of the fall so that it is transformed into the perceptual contrary of fall/redemption:

And now a wide road was open to Eternity,
By Ololons descent thro Beulah to Los & Enitharmon.

For mighty were the multitudes of Ololon, vast the extent
Of their great sway, reaching from Ulro to Eternity
Surrounding the Mundane Shell outside its Caverns
And through Beulah, and all silent forbore to contend
With Ololon for they saw the Lord in the Clouds of Ololon.

(35, 35-41)

The fall into the materiality of the body is transfigured as necessary for her to function as a site of angelic mediation between Ulro and Eternity. For Blake, synecdoches in their largest register are angels.

Blake naturalizes this miraculous influence, the opening created by Ololon’s willed descent, by re-introducing the Thyme and the Larks as images of the renovating process; the Thyme’s influence is pervasive and invisible, and the double Lark’s vast and cosmological. All religious history is renovated in the contrary processes of the Larks’ flights, and the error and presumption of the selfhood is cleansed away at the moment of every completed flight. Thus time/space is renovated by removing the limits on our perceptions of it. Contrarily, this is made possible by Ololon’s perception of her limits. Humiliation is transformed into annihilation and finally into the possibility of vision.

It is important to see that the ethical relation implicit in the annihilation of the selfhood is not contained in the narrative of Ololon's descent, it is not described so much as enacted by the poetic structure itself. The logic of synecdoche, taken to its fullest possible extent by Blake, reveals the necessary ethical relation as inherent in the trope. The key to this Blakean figure is its contrariety which prevents closure into the universal and the resultant exploitation of the particular. Vision, the possibility of redemption, can only occur if particularity is preserved and the hubris of the universal (another way of saying "the selfhood") is thus evaded. This necessary instability is seen in the particular per se. Ololon begins as a river in Beulah, is partially embodied as the condition of alienated emanations, is further embodied as the collectivity of Milton's wives and daughters, is transfigured as an angelic "multitude," and is finally embodied as a young woman in Blake's garden. Each of these Ololons is the particular in a synecdoche, and together inscribe a trajectory into the ultimate particularity of the poet's immediate view. Blake's garden is thus the only possible site for the poem's revolutionary (renovating) poetics, but Blake clearly shows that his representation of these events is not equivalent to his experience of them. Blake can only be another poetic figure in his poem. He is the ultimate particular. When the poem arrives in his garden, he begins by re-insisting on the synecdochal structure of vision/Vision:

. . . & the Twenty-eighth bright
Lark met the female Ololon descending into my Garden
Thus it appears to Mortal eyes & those of the Ulro Heavens
But not thus to Immortals, the Lark is a mighty Angel.

(36, 9-12)

Blake's perception of "a Virgin of twelve years" (36, 17) is figured as a material perception of a particular that contains the "mighty Hosts" (36, 16) of eternity. The synecdoche overcomes the "delusion" of "Satanic Space" (36, 20) that would confine perception to the mortal girl. Ololon's descent has ruptured "Satanic Space" for the poet as well and he can address her "as a Daughter of Beulah" (36, 27). Despite his visionary moment, Blake makes no claim for ultimate knowledge of the eternal, but instead shows his unfolding perception as a struggle towards knowledge—poetic knowledge. He struggles with the

meaning of Ololon's descent:

What is thy message to thy friend? What am I now to do
 Is it again to plunge into deeper affliction? behold me
 Ready to obey, but pity thou my Shadow of Delight
 Enter my Cottage, comfort her, for she is sick with fatigue.

(36, 29-32)

Vision is a process in which the particular is informed by the universal in the relation between them itself rather than through a process of indoctrination. Blake, as a particular, has already been unconsciously changed by the opening to the universal. He acts to comfort his particular emanation, his "Shadow of Delight," Catherine, and in so doing analogically repeats the necessary gesture towards the other that began Ololon's descent and its rupture of the selfhood. Blake's marital woes are the biographical particular, the only site where renovation can occur. Seen as the fallen product of individual selfhoods, the William/Catherine marital conflict works as an example of the Satanic. Blake identifies his own self-pity as much as her jealousy as visible signs of the selfhood. When the power of the poem's figuration is brought to bear on the specificity of this personal site, we experience an almost visceral (its still a figure) version of its necessity and force, and in the process the human stakes implicit in Blake's poem. It is this critique of Blake's selfhood, and there is no other possible site for the critique, that is overlooked in readings of the poem that see it as a kind of mystified revenge text employed against Catherine. This critical view can only be characterized as an impoverished use of biography given the poem's internal structure and tropological logic.

The *events* of the poem descend into Blake's garden and finally into Blake himself. He engages Ololon directly with his questions and her response penetrates him and the rest of creation including Milton:

The Virgin answered. Knowest thou of Milton who descended
 Driven from Eternity; him I seek! terrified at my Act
 In Great Eternity which thou knowest! I come to seek.

So Ololon uttered in words distinct the anxious thought
 Mild was the voice, but more distinct than earthly.

(37, 1-8)

Again, Ololon's visionary power is dependent on her "Act," and the "mild[ness]" of her voice. She does not claim visionary knowledge, but instead acts despite being "terrified" and her words are "distinct" despite her "mild" "voice." Her giving up of her selfhood ruptures the solipsism that defined her, and this loss of certainty (no matter how deluded that certainty was) produces terror; it looks like death. Her provisional and temporary vision, a literal breakthrough, gives her speech its transformative power while insisting on its "mild" resistance to the violent exercise of power. She escapes the realm of negation and becomes a conflicted, and consequently productive, contrary. She does not desire perfect knowledge, but rather enters the world as the very model of contrary energy and struggle epitomized by the phrase: "I come to seek." It is this humbled yet active relation to otherness that opens the visionary, and Blake joins in the vision that this relation produces because he too has carefully put himself in a humbled active relation throughout the poem's narrative. This relation to the other, then, reveals itself as the necessary prelude to the annihilation of the selfhood which increasingly looks less like death and more like the redemption of the self from the terror of death.

What is revealed is the repressed internal structure of Christian ideology. "Milton's Shadow" contains the conflicted violence of all religious history. It had remained coherent as a closed totality, its Satanic solipsism, and is now opened by the act of Ololon's descent and the agency of her "mild" voice. Its sacrificial violence is seen in "the Wicker Man of Scandinavia" (37, 11), a figure that embodies both the violence of the scapegoat, and the repressed denial of false ideological forms (literal straw man arguments). Blake can see Milton and "in him" "the Monstrous Churches of Beulah" (37, 15-16). In other words, Ololon's descent opens the superficial, otherwise impenetrable, logic of religious ideology and reveals its sacrificial structure—

“Religion hid in War” (37, 43). The violent negation on which such a system depends is figured as a set of unproductive and violent gender confusions. The “Hermaphroditic” (37, 37), the “Male-Females” (37, 42), relocate the problem of negation in the sexual body, Blake’s present moment, and in the crisis of alienated emanations. The final *event* of this moment of vision is the descent of Milton along Ololon’s now material track, “a Paved work of all kinds of precious stones” (38, 6), into Blake’s garden.

This descent ends the *action* of the poem as the rupture of the selfhood reveals the conflicted nature of Milton; he sees that Satan is his spectre, a part of him falsely externalized in a foolish and violent moralist drama. Similarly, he can recognize Ololon as his emanation and begin the process of thinking in contraries and thus begin removing the violence of negation, made visible as sexual jealousy, from human sexual love beginning with Blake’s marriage and extending out by synecdoche to represent a genderless eternity where the self and other are in a constant flux of mental interpenetration—four-fold love. These are the great ethical achievements of the poem: the recognition of the selfhood as the source of division, sacrificial violence and the codification of terror in ideological forms (political and religious institutions as externalized forms of aspect blindness). The internal distress of the terrified selfhood is constantly reciprocated by the cultural forms around it. As a result, once the selfhood is ruptured by Ololon’s descent, the nature of socio-political violence is also revealed and subject to the poem’s withering critique. For example, in Plate 37 the process of Milton’s descent brings with it the history of religious error. The Satanic selfhood is revealed as a complex conflicted version of historical time/space, and that nature becomes clear to the reader in the moment of Milton’s descent. Unlike the infinite regress of cause and culpability of Book the First, the reader now has a critical purchase on historical events, ideological forms and interpersonal conflict that could not be achieved through the dualistic logic of difference. Blake’s critical logic is tropological, yet it is not the duplicitous symbol as de Manian analysis would have it because it refuses, rhetorically, to dissolve difference even in eternity where contraries continue to operate.¹⁵ What it does is disrupt the violence implicit in relations of difference

¹⁵ See, for example, *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota

by removing mortal terror as their defining principle. Eternity means a free interpenetration of difference, a constant contrary flux of difference/identity that refuses to settle in either term.

The final resistance of negation in the poem, then, is, not surprisingly, a moment of recognition because recognition per se has been freed from the violent production of the other necessary to the sacrificial economy of the Satanic (solipsistic) world-view. Milton recognizes Satan as a part of himself, the pull towards negation in each individual, and also recognizes his power to negate Satan by giving in to that Satanic impulse. This negation has functioned as the trope of revolutionary violence, in acting you become what you behold. But in this instance Milton's recognition of Satan includes the knowledge of his own role in producing the selfhood because that is the closed system ruptured by Ololon's descent and Blake's poetic logic. As a result, Milton not only sees Satan's violence for what it is, but is able to describe himself as the site of negating violence and refuse its self-defeating logic of culpability, sin and sacrifice:

Satan! my Spectre! I know my power thee to annihilate
 And be a greater in thy place, & be thy Tabernacle
 A covering to do thy will, till one greater comes
 And smites me as I smote thee & becomes my covering.

(38, 29-32)

Milton recognizes the cycle of violence implicit in negation, annihilation of the other, and also recognizes the covert victory of the other in such an operation. He would become a "covering" for the now denied Satan and thus repeat Satan's aspect blindness and its consequent violence—the gesture of negation

Press, 1983), where de Man declares that contemporary theory has mounted: "a methodically motivated attack on the notion that a literary or poetic consciousness is in any way a privileged consciousness, whose use of language can pretend to escape, to some degree, from the duplicity, the confusion, the untruth that we take for granted in the everyday use of language," 9. I respond by pointing out that the fact of the "attack" does not make the position tenable, and that what de Man calls "duplicity" is as easily read as multiplicity, what he calls "confusion" is as easily read as the mark of the generative nature of poetic language, and that his version of "untruth" implies a version of truth that Blake would have found abhorrent in its ideological presumption. In short, de Man's formulations mark his own anxieties about meaning and truth claims, but say little about poetic language.

itself internalizes the violence it presumed to oppose. By recognizing this as an infinite regress of violent supersession (a kind of reverse, infernal, Hegelianism) Milton/Blake can attempt to refuse its seductive power:

. . . I come to Self Annihilation
Such are the Laws of Eternity that each shall mutually
Annihilate himself for others good, as I for thee.

(38, 34-36)

This moment of refusal reveals the psychological structure of Churches and doctrinal authority in precise terms:

Thy purpose & the purpose of thy Priests & of thy Churches
Is to impress on men the fear of death; to teach
Trembling & fear, terror, constriction; abject selfishness
Mine is to teach Men to despise death & to go on
In fearless majesty annihilating Self, laughing to scorn
Thy Laws & terrors . . .

(38, 37-42)

Once again, Blake's poetic structure provides him with a critical purchase in exposing the violence of the institutions that surround him, and in forcing his readers to examine whether they as individuals participate in such destructive cultural forms. He wants to expose "Self-righteousness / In all its Hypocrite turpitude" (38, 43-44) so that he can open "every eye" (38, 44) to the actual structure of the false spectacle of the religious sublime, "these wonders of Satans holiness" (38, 45) that enthrall society with their solipsistic (and empty) grandeur.

Milton refuses the apparent solution that negation offers and thus escapes the reproduction of a selfhood that such solutions, in turn, engender. Satan cannot recognize the sterile infinite regress that negation necessitates; indeed his blindness to the implicit structure of his violence defines him *as* Satan. His response to Milton's recognition is a predictable assertion that he is the original element in the universe in relation to which all others are subordinate and must: "therefore fall down & worship" (38, 52). The selfhood's delusion demands that Milton's inspired speech be circumscribed by his. This

is the logic of ideology: "submit thy supreme / Dictate, to my eternal Will & to my dictate bow" (38, 52-53). All possible explanations of experience must be subsumed in a single meta-explanation that rhetorically stabilizes cause and effect. Once the Miltonic dictate has submitted to the Satanic dictate, it becomes a manifestation of Satanic ideology, an effect. Satan thus becomes a kind of monstrous accretion of all things collapsed into the absurd solipscism, "I alone am God" (38, 56): "others tremble and bow / Till All Things become One Great Satan" (38, 57-39, 1). His attempt to violently impose this logic fails because it has been "opened" by Ololon and recognized by Milton. The result is that his violence is revealed as the figure of the "covering." Once apparent, such attempted negations are resistable; their internal logic no longer governs possible responses, and, for a moment at least, vision can occur. Satan's ideology rages around his own body which he cannot negate. Such an attempt would rupture the abstract surface of his selfhood, and force him to recover his mortal (denied) self, a process that could only be understood as physical pain, "torment unendurable" (39, 20). In mythological/theological terms this plays out as a delineation of the influence of such presumption. This vast multi-perspectival sweep, that reveals the artifice of theology and national mythology alike, resolves itself in Blake's garden as a false outside. Perceptual limit is no longer a cause for mortal terror and theological explanation. Such responses are revealed as "a fallacy of Satan's Churches" (39, 61).

Despite the rupture of this closed system, its effects still operate. Annihilation still means material self-destruction and can still produce terror. Ololon can now see the abstract fallacies of "this Newtonian Phantasm" (40, 11), but Milton's surrender of his negating power, of his own theological "Phantasms," still looks like defeat and destruction, "giving thy life to thy enemies" (40, 8), and she fears his and, consequently, her own destruction:

. . . O where shall I hide my face
 These tears fall for the little-ones: the Children of Jerusalem
 Lest they be annihilated in thy annihilation.

(40, 14-16)

Her knowledge still takes a negative form. She can recognize the fictionality of

the world around her as an “impossible absurdity” (40, 13), but she can only question its status and her role in its creation and maintenance. She still labours under the rhetoric of cause and effect, sin and culpability: “Is Ololon the cause of this?” (40, 14). She recognizes the ideological structure around her, her mortal terror and its theological uses, but cannot see how her language reproduces the “impossible absurdity” as logical propositions. This marks a crisis in the poem because even recognition of the Satanic Abyss as a limited cosmos does not preclude the reproduction of sacrificial violence. In the instability of the moment, Ololon tries on the position of sacrificial victim, the sacrificable cause—religion’s necessary fiction. The poem turns then on Milton’s response.

Milton refuses Ololon’s offer of herself as a necessary victim, and as an explanation, and removes the very ground of sacrificial logic by declaring that instead of one dying for the many, all must die for all and each for each. The individual self must go willingly to annihilation in order to destroy the selfhood and its pernicious coverings. This movement entails the recognition of contrary energy, and the giving up of negation and its intellectual comforts:

All that can be annihilated must be annihilated
 That the Children of Jerusalem may be saved from slavery
 There is a Negation & there is a Contrary
 The Negation must be destroyed to redeem the Contraries
 The Negation is the Spectre; the Reasoning Power in Man
 This is a false Body: an Incrustation over my Immortal
 Spirit; a Selfhood, which must be put off & annihilated away
 To cleanse the Face of my Spirit by Self-examination.

(40, 30-37)

The “Self-examination” must discover the nature of the individual selfhood and its internal deceptions (the certainty of solipsism). This is not accomplished through a Hegelian negation of the negation which would reproduce the problem yet again, but by destroying the foundation of such logic by refusing to turn away from death and our ultimate powerlessness. Annihilation is a paradoxical (contrary) act of powerlessness. Once human insignificance is recognized as a given, the pressure to construct the “false Body” of an ideological system recedes. The “Reasoning power” that created these grand

systems out of our pride and, in its negative form, denial, can now be reintegrated into the new human possibility, and the cultural manifestations of these violent anxieties can be “cast off” as part of a superficial rhetorical surface rendered visible and thus resistable. Blake has constructed a moment of revelation in which Milton’s speech “opens” the ideological and rhetorical boxes that confine him. Unlike conventional claims of religious inspiration and the authority derived from them, Blake refuses the miraculous as the source of Milton’s speech. Such religious inspiration functions as cant in society as it moves from personal revelation to dogmatic postulate to ideological formation. Blake’s revelatory speech comes “in Self-annihilation & the grandeur of Inspiration” (41, 2), that is to say it is a product of a hard-fought contrary procedure in which the self is interrogated as the source of sacrificial violence and self-dramatizing and dishonest self-divisions. The constructed, superficial nature of these socially-sanctioned delusions—the selfhood—is not defeated through some external divine intervention, but by “Self-examination” that reveals the negations implicit in it, and recognizes that it is implicated in the violent manifestations of its internal logic as they occur in the social world. Inspiration, for Blake, is not an external visitation but rather an intellectual procedure that recognizes its own conceptual limits, and stages itself in the medium of poetic language, figuration and tropes. Vision occurs in the contrary opening of the moment of such a recognition. Understanding the limits of the particular contrarily “opens” it to perception of its universal manifestation, but this can only occur if the self resists the reproduction of the selfhood in the enlarged site of the universal, collapsing it into a self-aggrandized particular. This amounts to a refusal of the ostensible rewards of the sublime, and a resistance to Hegelian versions of progress. The final stage then of Blake’s procedure, as it unfolds in the poem’s language, is the image of Blake, the character in the poem, fainting as he is overwhelmed by the visionary moment:

Terror struck in the Vale I stood at that immortal sound
 My bones trembled. I fell outstretchd upon the path
 A moment, & my Soul returnd into its mortal state
 To Resurrection & Judgement in the Vegetable Body
 And my sweet Shadow of Delight stood trembling by my side.

(42, 24-28)

No sublime “terror” affects a move to transcendence. Rather, the mortality of the body remains, and must remain, the only possible site of Vision. The perspectival flux of Blake’s visionary moment returns Vision to the body, to the capacity to perceive. The conflicted problems of self/other that the poem has staged in mythological terms returns to the “trembling” tension of two sexual bodies, and the poet Blake’s recovery of Catherine as the “sweet Shadow of Delight.” The “opening” of the violent conflicted forms of ideology has its ultimate effect in the personal as Blake recovers, through the poem’s procedures, the necessary reciprocity of the Milton/Ololon relations.

The personal is not, however, the only renovated site. By rupturing ideological closure the forms generated by it lose their internal logic, aspect blindness as a total explanation, and are revealed as sites of violent negation. Thus the possibility of a renovated revolutionary politics is created, if even for only a moment. Blake lists the “false bodies” that can now be “cast off” (41, 3-12), and moves between the systemic and the specific. “Faith in the Saviour” (the positive articulation of the annihilation of the selfhood) casts off “Rational Demonstration” (41, 3) as the totalizing source of meaning. The specific negations entailed by “Rational Demonstration” include the individual rationalist who abuses his rhetorical power by converting it into personal power over another:

. . . the idiot Questioner who is always questioning,
 But never capable of answering; who sits with a sly grin
 Silent plotting when to question, like a thief in a cave;
 Who publishes doubt & calls it knowledge; whose Science is Despair,
 Whose pretence to knowledge is Envy, whose whole Science is
 To destroy the wisdom of ages to gratify ravenous Envy.

(41, 12-17)

Blake attacks the notion that negative knowledge is knowledge or simply a performance of the rationalist’s selfhood. He includes not only his most obvious general target, those who employ rationalism as a weapon in the service of political authority, but also those who use it as a violent means of regulating aesthetic practices—Reynolds and all those who: “. . . mock with the aspersion of Madness” (41, 8). They mask their lack of inspiration by denying

its very existence, and make a virtue of their limitations: “the tame high finisher of paltry Blots, / Indefinite, or paltry Rhymes” (41, 9-10) (c.f. the section on Reynolds’s *Discourses* above). By including “paltry Rhymes” he extends his critique to the limitations of contemporary poetic practice which he specifies, in particular, as the Wordsworthian: “imitation of Natures Images drawn from Remembrance” (41, 24). Wordsworth’s sense of immanence inheres entirely in those images, whereas Blake takes those images as particulars in a radical flux between particular and universal. Wordsworth’s poetry attempts to feel its way to some sort of participation in the unity of the natural world, a process it then valorizes in memory, but Blake sees this as an elaboration of limit. The natural world per se, despite the poet’s intellectual/emotional engagement with it, can only be understood as “the Sexual Garments” (41, 25), the material limit which “Jesus rent” (41, 27) in his transfiguration of his body, and which Blake has “rent” through his poetic procedures in the poem. The possibility of a Blakean critique of Wordsworth on these grounds is taken up in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Abundant Recompense

In “The Old Cumberland Beggar” Wordsworth offers the figure of the beggar as a means of creating and sustaining the ethical relations of the social world. His argument runs that morality is *natural* in the village economy in that it is *naturally* produced by the circulation of the beggar amongst the citizens who comprise this *natural* social scene. I emphasize *natural* both for the obvious reason that it is the central figure in Wordsworth’s poetic thought and also because of its implied distinction with artificial. It is the artificial morality of revolutionary theory that the poet flees in his return to *natural* coherence of village life. Wordsworth presents a series of instances from the beggar’s rounds in which various individuals of differing economic means are moved for various personal reasons to contribute to the beggar’s maintenance. The most striking example is the local gentleman, “the sauntering Horseman” (26)¹⁶, who moderates his, presumably, habitual pattern of scornfully casting coins on the road and instead, “stops,—that he may safely lodge the coin / Within the old Man’s hat” (28-29). The implicit critique of the arrogance and barely sublimated violence of this class is submerged in the rhetoric of the beggar’s ameliorating influence—even the landlord is effected. This and the other examples offered in the poem, “she who tends the gate,” “the post-boy,” and so on (30-43) only gain moral force beyond the purely anecdotal, as a potential ground for an ethics, when the poet deduces from them a general principle of human generosity and altruism. Wordsworth argues that these behaviours are signs of a general human attribute by including the widest possible range of examples of the old beggar’s ameliorating influence: “the cottage curs” (61) to “the sauntering Horseman.” This evidence justifies his emphatic address of the poem to “Statesmen!” (67). His political stakes are clear enough: demonstrate the part played by the beggar in the human economy as a means of resisting the purely utilitarian economy of human value promoted by statesmen, and one that motivates them, “to rid the world

¹⁶ All references to “The Old Cumberland Beggar” will be cited in the text by line number.

of nuisances" (70). In order to secure his political goal, Wordsworth attempts to deduce from his examples a general principle of human altruism demonstrated by the beggar's social function, but independent of it:

Where'er the aged Beggar takes his rounds,
The mild necessity of use compels
To acts of love; and habit does the work
Of reason; yet prepares that after-joy
Which reason cherishes. And thus the soul,
By that sweet taste of pleasure unpursued,
Doth find herself insensibly disposed
To virtue and true goodness.

(98-105)

This is a very skillfully nuanced argument. The "mildness" of the external impetus (the beggar's presence) nonetheless "compels" action. The "acts of love" themselves are thus presented as more intrinsic to each individual than externally caused. The "habit" produced by the repetition of the beggar's rounds displaces "reason" and the result is a natural morality. This is a crucial turn in the poem because it marks Wordsworth's break from his radical past when he was an avid reader of "reasoned" justifications for human generosity, and a believer in the rationalist dream of the evolution of an equitable society. Here "reason" is envisioned as a reflective mode that allows an "after-joy" as it observes and speculates on the wonder of natural morality. "Reason" is always belated in this system and cannot serve as the impetus for the generosity of the individuals in the poem, nor for the general principle of altruism he is attempting to deduce. He locates these values within "the soul," which he defines as the site of those feelings free of the motivation of self-interest. The "pleasure" of altruism must be "unpursued" in order truly to be altruism and therefore rather than being consciously created by an act of the will (a response to radical thought), it must be discovered, "found" "insensibly." Humans therefore must be naturally "disposed to virtue and goodness." This article of faith, paradoxically presented as a rational deduction, argues for the insufficiency of radical thought and plans of action, yet it is not a clean break from those goals. It is consistent with Godwin in its faith in the natural ameliorating tendency exhibited in human behaviour; Godwin would simply

define “virtue and true goodness” in rationalist terms. What it does create, however, is a set of potential crises around the issues of the human will and action that also plague Godwinian theories of perfectibility.

Potential fractures in Wordsworth’s system are implicit from the very outset of the poem. The headnote claims that “the class of Beggars” described in the poem “will probably soon be extinct,” yet the reasons for their extinction are unstated. Does the poet fear the enforcement of laws prohibiting begging, or does he fear the disappearance of the rural economy in which the beggars circulate? In his address to “statesmen” he argues for the utility of the beggar, “deem not this Man useless” (67), and constructs his elegant deduction of natural morality as a proof for his claim, but this does not supply analysis of the causes of either the beggar’s distress nor of the fragility of his class. As an address, the poem is mystifying. Are the “statesmen” to take it as a plea for the maintenance of rural poverty as an economy which promotes goodness in its participants? This inability to offer any guide to action for his audience underscores the central problematic in Wordsworth’s poem: because “reason” can only properly be employed as a mode of reflection on the existence of morality in nature, the poet discounts and cuts himself off from any prescriptive analysis of the social milieu he observes. In fact, such analysis violates his very poetic system by interfering with the natural sensibility of the rural inhabitants by introducing external moral and ethical judgements into the scene. Wordsworth insists that moral judgements are naturally caused, and thus analogous to poetic sensibility, not the products of political analysis. This idea reaches its most extreme manifestation in the poem with the example of the poor woman who is moved to moral action by what can only be considered desperately shoddy thinking or even false consciousness:

. . . though pressed herself
By her own wants, she from her store of meal
Takes one unsparing handful for the scrip
Of this old Mendicant, and, from her door
Returning with exhilarated heart,
Sits by her fire, and builds her hope in heaven.

(156-161)

This description points to a potential crisis in Wordsworth's construction of natural morality in that it is so easily confused with self-delusion. The affected state of her "exhilarated heart," the poet's evidence of her moral transformation from within, marks an actual lack of meaningful reflection on the beggar's lot or on her own. Seen from this fault line, the whole trope of naturalness reaches a grisly apotheosis when the aged beggar finally succumbs to his harsh material conditions. By asserting the moral rightness of the beggar's ultimate fate, "So in the eye of Nature let him die" (197), the poem glorifies death from exposure in quasi-religious terms. Judgement is deferred to Nature just as it was traditionally deferred to God. Human action is abrogated as, at best, artificial, at worst, against nature.

The extreme quietude demanded by Wordsworth's model makes sense in the context of the failures of revolutionary France and the continuation of the oppression of the Pitt terror at home, but ultimately this absolute division of moral questions and political analysis causes the poet to withdraw from engagement in or even with political questions. As a result his moral sensibility increasingly has little to do with political questions. It is difficult, for example, to conceive of any useful response by the "statesmen" addressed in "The Old Cumberland Beggar," in that analysis and action on their part would function as a contradiction of the poem's key conceptual terms. A more complex example of this conundrum is Wordsworth's 1801 letter to Charles Fox, the Whig reformer, that accompanied his gift of a copy of the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth drew Fox's attention to two poems in particular, "The Brothers" and "Michael." It was his aim to demonstrate both the value and "the rapid decay of the domestic affections among the lower orders of society" (451)¹⁷. In order to make his point, he employs social analysis that shows clear evidence of familiarity with Godwin's *Political Justice* and probably *Caleb Williams*:

But recently by the spreading of manufactures through every part of the country, by heavy taxes upon postage, by workhouses, Houses of Industry, and the invention of Soup-shops &c. superadded to encreasing

¹⁷ The letter to Fox is quoted from *English Romantic Writers*, ed. David Perkins (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1995), and will be cited by page number.

disproportion between the price of labour and that of the necessaries of life, the bonds of domestic feeling among the poor, as far as the influence of these things has extended, have been weakened, and in innumerable instances entirely destroyed.

(451-452)

Wordsworth is clearly aware of the causes of landlessness and rural poverty, and is conversant in the language of political critique. But, despite his professed belief in the value of what is being lost, he seems powerless to protect it. An air of defeatism permeates the letter in the same way as the headnote to "The Old Cumberland Beggar." Wordsworth believes that the natural grandeur of the independent peasantry, and the natural eloquence of their speech is of the greatest possible value:

These people could not express themselves in this way without an almost sublime conviction of the blessings of independent domestic life. If it is true . . . that this spirit is rapidly disappearing, no greater curse can befall a land.

(452)

The crisis in Wordsworth's formulation of these social conditions becomes clear in his offered poetic examples. In "Michael," "the sublime conviction of the blessings of independent domestic life" is given poetic form in the failure of the process of building the sheep-fold. The sheep-fold is a symbol of the family's independence and of the necessary conditions for that independence. The ritual of Michael and Luke laying the foundation of the family covenant should protect Luke by profoundly integrating him into the system of "domestic affections," yet he is dissipated and lost in a matter of fifteen lines once faced with the corrupting power of the city. What exactly is Fox to make of this? It is an eloquent representation of the terrible pressures being brought to bear on small freeholders throughout England. Michael's fate is sealed by the twin evils of absentee landlordism and the expansion of the agriculture industry (his farm reverts to sheep pasture). The power and beauty of the sheep-fold as a poetic symbol has little force in this world. The poem then is an occasion for mourning not a call for action. The economic conditions that create its tragedy are presented as irresistible; no amount of "sublime conviction" can save Luke

from the debasing power of the city. Just as in “The Old Cumberland Beggar,” moral and ethical judgement can only be deduced after the fact through reflection. Wordsworth offers “Michael” to Fox as an object of reflection, but its belatedness makes effective action impossible. The extraordinary beauty of the integration of the poem’s natural imagery, its poetic logic, and its pathos, the ultimate failure of that logic, ensures its place as a profound work of art, but also ensures its impotence as a political document. In other words, Fox cannot use the poem; its political message is one of paralysis teetering on the edge of a dangerous nostalgia.¹⁸

Wordsworth sees his own political crisis as a failure of his rational powers to conceive of an ethical set of relations that can be successfully imposed on society. His powers of analysis (Godwinian, Jacobin, or whatever) have failed to provide solutions. His response to this crisis was to abandon political solutions, and, instead, seek a model for ethical relations in the innate morality of the uncorrupted rural poor. The rhetoric of the value of “rustic speech” in The Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* has political resonances in both its levelling claim of innate human value (and the inversion of that value by locating it most prominently in the poor), and its dismissal of his own past participation in the artificial and corrupt milieu of urban political strife. He sets out to replace his political analysis with evidence of his own innate sensibility and its growth. Only through poetic sensibility can we correctly conceive of ethical questions. The project of “The Prelude” is to demonstrate “the growth of a poet’s mind,” and this is in part the story of how he discovered an essential moral core within himself in the midst of the collapse of the hopes of the French Revolution and their aftermath. Wordsworth, then, divides the realm of ethical questions (at least as a subject of direct inquiry) from the realm of aesthetic questions. Only in our ability to conceive of and recognize beauty can we find evidence of morality. Morality cannot be imposed after engaging in ethical reflection (Godwinian analysis of political justice, for example), but must be discovered by attending to the minute details of

¹⁸Hazard Adams points out that nostalgia can serve an effective rhetorical purpose. This opens the possibility that Wordsworth is employing it strategically as a means of winning over Fox (private correspondence).

individual human existence. The ground for morality moves away from the consideration of others (his youthful Utopian dreams) and into the terms of the self. In order to establish human morality (and personal hope for the future), he must shift all value into the creation of poetic sensibility; and “The Prelude” presents the biographical record of that shift. The focus on sensibility shifts his emphasis onto aesthetic formulations: the recognition and production of the sublime and the beautiful, and his meditation on their influence on the creation of his moral self. This shift eventually creates what Keats (following Hazlitt)¹⁹ called “the Egotistical sublime.” What I have attempted to show is that despite his withdrawal from direct contemplation of ethical questions, Wordsworth’s poetics have defined ethical goals. Those goals cannot be prior to the discovery of natural morality, the proffered ground for all ethical determinations, but rather must be deduced along with the rest of his ethical program. Ethical questions are subsumed by aesthetic exploration and the hope is that as objects of reflection they will be revealed in their *true* aspect at some future date. I want to turn now to Wordsworth’s biographical record of his political/moral crisis in Books 10 and 11 of “The Prelude” as a means of showing how aesthetics becomes necessarily prior to ethics and how this attempted solution creates its own set of future crises. The movements between morality, ethics and politics become complex tangles with no apparent solution. I will end the chapter by looking at “Tintern Abbey” as the quintessential example of both the moral system of Wordsworth’s poetic project and the seeds of its inevitable failure.

At the end of the 1805 “Prelude” Wordsworth sums up his poetic creed as an educational project with the most extreme of aesthetic goals and the subordination of ethics clearly implied:

¹⁹ See “On Genius and Common Sense,” reprinted in Perkins, 743.

Instruct them how the mind of man becomes
 A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
 On which he dwells, above this frame of things
 (Which, mid all the revolutions in the hopes
 And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)
 In beauty exalted, as it is itself
 Of substance and of fabric more divine.

(13, 446-452)

This extreme self-expansion (“a thousand times more beautiful than earth”) is not only a recognition of the ultimate capacity of the human mind, but also the direct result of a Wordsworthian aesthetic education. The mind “becomes” “more divine” through a complex aesthetic process of supersession. The value of nature is negated in the creation of the “exalted” human. “Beauty” and “beautiful” are the aesthetic terms employed, but the process of exaltation suggests more properly a system of sublime substitution in which nature is capitalized into a thousand-fold return, an extreme version of “abundant recompense.” The phrase is from “Tintern Abbey,” and both poem and phrase serve as apt descriptions of Wordsworth’s poetic project. His Kantian version of the sublime entails recognizing his failure to cognize or intellectually assimilate the magnitude or dynamical intensity of the objects of nature, and then turning that recognition into self-expansion with the discovery of another higher order of human intellection—his “abundant recompense.” Nature per se becomes a source of raw objects that are sacrificed in the construction of the sublime self. Despite his insistence on the term “beauty,” Wordsworth’s aesthetic products belong with the Kantian sublime rather than with the harmonious quietude of the Kantian beautiful. Beauty (in Burke as much as in Kant) brings the mind into harmony with nature, but at the end of “The Prelude” Wordsworth calls for an aggressive supersession of nature and insists that the mind is “of substance and fabric more divine.” The motivation behind this violent aesthetic process (violent in its supersession of nature) is hinted at in the parenthetical conditional clause in this, the poem’s final, passage. The poet recognizes that it is “the earth” that “remain(s) unchanged” in the face of “all revolutions in the hopes / And fears of men.” “The Prelude” details Wordsworth’s “hopes and fears” in the face of earthly objects of awe, and in the

process constructs the necessity for, and means to, the isolated grandeur of his final “exalted” self in the face of the fact of his mortality. The rhetoric of the discovery of his moral self in nature, first established in “The Old Cumberland Beggar,” is revealed as an aesthetic method in which the self, the poet’s sensibility, is constructed by employing a Kantian model of necessary negative stages in which the imagination (in the Kantian sense of the term as a process of the understanding) fails and is superseded by a greater self that recognizes the former self’s limitation, and is in fact constituted from that recognition. The “growth of the poet’s mind” that is the stated subject of the poem is as much a growth by the accretion of these aesthetic moments as it is a biographical history of personal growth; poetic sensibility is the only means to that growth and entails the creation of a series of superseded selves.

The poet’s aesthetic history unfolds as a series of negations—sacrificial moments in which earlier selves (as well as certain others and othernesses) are constructed and systematically superseded in “the growth of the poet’s mind.” These negations are analogous to Blakean negations in that they construct the self (Blake’s selfhood) out of the process of the violent assertion of difference. The self becomes a self through the violent negation of the other. This Kantian practice of capitalizing crises reveals the idealist underpinning of Wordsworthian poetics. The poet’s growth takes place through the construction (by means of negation) of transcendent selves, through processes similar to those in what Georges Bataille would call the creation of a “closed economy.”²⁰ Sacrifice is necessary to such a system as the means of capitalizing the crisis and creating a self-enclosed space. Such a psychical space writ large is Satan’s solipsistic Abyss in Blake’s “Milton.” But whereas Blake was attempting to critique such aesthetic structures as delusional expressions of the self’s limits, misrecognized as the grandeur of the sublime, Wordsworth is offering them as a record of the growth of the innate moral sense identical to that which he discovered in the villagers’ responses to the old beggar. While this pun on the economic sense of the word, “capital”, is largely

²⁰I take the concept of “closed economy” from Bataille’s *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), and his essay “Hegel, Death and Sacrifice,” trans. Stoekl, *Yale French Studies* (1991).

Bataille's, it is apt in discussing Wordsworth in light of the rhetoric of investment and "recompense" that permeates his poetry, from "The Old Cumberland Beggar" to "Tintern Abbey" to "Home at Grasmere," and throughout "The Prelude." In Kant, the imagination fails to cognize the magnitude or dynamism of the sublime and in that moment of crisis the mind capitalizes the moment's negative force by the very recognition of its uncognizability. The greater the negative stage, the greater the personal expansion achieved.²¹ This aesthetic process, the conversion of terror into grandeur, is the example par excellence of Bataille's "closed economy,"²² and is the fundamental building block in the development of Wordsworthian sensibility. Against this system Bataille develops the concept of "expenditure without return" to describe the possibility of a gesture that would be purely lacerating and thus free from supersession or the negative stage.

Wordsworth's poetic attempts to argue that the basis of ethics is in natural morality, and, further, that it develops as the sensibility develops in relation to the natural world and our experiences in that world, cannot be taken in itself as an ethically neutral formulation, in light of this analogy to Bataille's formulations. This concern with the ethics of representation may have been a poetic concern of Blake alone among Wordsworth's immediate poetic contemporaries, but Bataille's re-formulation of the problem via his critique of Hegel shows its persistence as a philosophical problem. If Wordsworth hopes to establish morality as an innate human attribute, he must also demonstrate its natural functioning in the world (his goal in "The Old Cumberland Beggar"). Yet his poetic means to these ends entails an extremely rigorous and self-conscious method of self-expansion. As a result, he must naturalize his aesthetic process and present it as the natural means by which the mind mediates individual experience (presents it to the self). Part of this process is to confound Kant's distinctions between the beautiful and the sublime, and

²¹ This is more properly the case with Wordsworth. In Kant, the sublime is what allows the rupture of the egotistical self. Without the sublime, all that would exist is natural morality. The sublime, in Kant, does not necessarily mean recuperation as self-aggrandizement, but rather makes judgement reflectively possible (rather than determinate). I am indebted to Daniel Burgoyne for this point.

²² Bataille's chief target in this critique is Hegel, and, especially, the central subterfuge of the dialectic that the animal self can be isolated and sacrificed in the aesthetic creation of an essential self.

between their effects, harmony and awe/self-expansion. Wordsworth's crises do not, in most cases, take the form of traditional sublime figuration (the crossing of Simplon pass and the ascent of Snowdon in "The Prelude" are exceptions) because his poetics do not require natural grandeur to produce sublime effects. The moral confusion he experienced during his falling out with revolutionary politics in 1796 and his subsequent re-invention of himself as "a poet" produced an extraordinarily rich source of crises, deftly transformed into sacrificial moments and finally converted into the aesthetic telos of "the poet's mind." His original impetus of discovering a stable ground for ethics in the evidence observed in the commonplace of unpremeditated moral acts led him to create a method by which this ground could be intellectually secured. His "abundant recompense" would consist of the creation of a new personal identity as a poet defined as someone whose sensibility allowed him or her to "see into the life of things" and therefore observe the moral ground of human existence. The circularity of this system, depending as it does on both the innate status of his sensibility and its aesthetic production or growth (his gift and his art), ultimately creates a crisis that cannot be superseded, as his poetic career bears out. I do not intend this as an attack on Wordsworth's morality, but rather the converse. He consciously set out to create an ethical system based on his observation of moral action, but his chosen method in this project engendered its own ethical crisis. By making ethics a matter of reflection rather than action, and by further asserting that action based on ethical reflection obscured the ability to perceive natural morality, he set forth both the method and subject of "The Prelude." What will become a poetics of isolation and perpetual crisis, begins as a highly integrated intellectual project. The poetic structure follows his ethics argument. "The Prelude" consists of recollections of particularly dense past experiences followed by passages of reflection that secure the moral and poetic meaning of each episode after the fact. His conversion of "spots of time" into the growth of his poetic sensibility (which *is* his moral sense) has an aesthetic superstructure. It poetically represents crises that are systematically converted into moral/spiritual growth—the sublime effect. This growth however is supposed to be simply discovered in the common interactions of the poet with the natural world. The extraordinary thing then, in aesthetic terms, about Wordsworth's poems is the

process of naturalizing the sublime effect by investing descriptions of the natural world that would normally be associated with the beautiful or the picturesque with the force of sublime self-transformation. He is able to extract maximum aesthetic effect from common experiences and his representation of them. In this process, Wordsworth as “the poet” becomes the exemplar of the natural moral agent, but this identity is easily misrecognized (or re-interpreted) as the egotistical sublime, and judged as ethically suspect at the very moment of its internal confirmation of its ethical force (which can only be perceived in personal terms). This history of the misrecognition of Wordsworth’s motives begins with Hazlitt and Keats and has experienced a recent revival following from Jerome McGann’s influential *Romantic Ideology*. Wordsworth may set out to secure a ground for ethics removed from the fret and confusion of his radical past, but in the process he sets a course that ends in self-dramatization and isolation. Seen in this light, the extremity of the aesthetic statements which close “The Prelude” are the endpoint of an aesthetic trajectory set in motion and systematically followed to its logical conclusion—the superiority of the individual’s mind in relation to any exteriority or other, natural or not. Wordsworth’s response to the political challenges of the late 1790’s is the precise opposite of Blake’s, who endeavored, in “Milton,” to actively limit the organizing power of the selfhood as the creator of solipsistic closed worlds based on self-dramatization. Wordsworth meanwhile set out to establish the poetic self as the only possible arbiter of morality available in the midst of political chaos, and thus made the greatest possible virtue out of solipsism by arguing for its innate basis in natural goodness and thus in the production of moral action. The natural self, left to its own circular devices, will act morally.

One of the more striking uses of sacrificial imagery in “The Prelude” occurs in Book 10:

. . . —I took the knife in hand,
 And, stopping not at parts less sensitive,
 Endeavoured with my best skill to probe
 The living body of society
 Even to the heart. I pushed without remorse
 My speculations forward, yea, set foot
 On Nature's holiest places.

(10, 872-878)²³

This strange passage deliberately confuses his history as a young man employing reason in probing the social questions of the day with the imagery of "holy" blood sacrifice. In this tropological transformation, agency shifts and the "heart" becomes his own, fatally probed with a rationalist knife. He becomes sacrificer and victim in the sacred moment of merged identity—the simultaneity of death and the triumph over death.²⁴ The primitive (sacred) source of aesthetic supersession thus underlies and structures the recollection of his ultimate biographical crisis. He manipulates the terms of his relationship to the source of sublime terror—the recognition of our mortality. In the face of this crisis, Wordsworth collapses into moral exhaustion and confusion:

. . .—till demanding proof,
 And seeking it in every thing, [he] lost
 All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,
 Sick, wearied out with contrarities,
 Yielded up moral questions in despair.

(10, 896-900)

In other words, the ultimate result of his probing is the destruction of his own heart and thus the ability to address "moral questions." This passage shows remarkable candor in its self-lacerating recognitions,²⁵ but its ultimate effect is

²³All quotations from "The Prelude" are from the 1805 edition unless otherwise noted and are cited by Book and line numbers. Quotations are drawn from the Norton Critical Edition, *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, eds. Jonathon Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979).

²⁴This complex moment is carefully (and brilliantly) theorized by René Girard in his seminal work *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1979). This is also the ultimate subterfuge in Hegelian dialectics against which Bataille mounts his fiercest attacks.

²⁵The pattern of lacerating moments that Wordsworth creates in "The Prelude" is

self-division in which his past use of reason is given an identity as the failed (“wearied out”) self who seeks political solutions by rational probing. This youthful self is to be superseded by the poetic self; it is a negative stage in a sublime structure. In order to affect this sublime turn the self must be divided into sacrificer and victim. This takes place in a subtle shift of responsibility from his probing mind to the rationalism it employs and is “betrayed” by:

And the errors into which I was betrayed
 By present objects, and by reasonings false
 From the beginning inasmuch as drawn
 Out of a heart which had been turned aside
 From Nature by external accidents,
 Misguiding and misguided.

(10, 882-888)

“Misguiding” sacrificer becomes “misguided” victim—the “betrayed.” He had been “turned aside from Nature,” part of an earlier sacrifice, and now attempts to sacrifice the rationalist sacrificer. Culpability is at stake here. If the sublime fiction collapses and all these actors are seen to be versions of Wordsworth, then supersession will have failed.²⁶ In order for his morality to be seen as a natural part of his sensibility, he needs to demonstrate the unnatural and contaminating influence his use of reason had on it, but that is accomplished by means of a complexly structured aesthetic moment. The fictional quality of his recognition scene, its staged performance of the sublime crisis and corresponding self-expansion, is hard to see as either innate or natural. His essential self, found in nature, must be preserved by removing the stain of the contaminated self, identified as his use of reason. Put another way, he identifies his innate moral sense as his essential self and, by virtue of its being innate, views it as natural. His use of reason obscured this self when he made various intellectual investments in the political ideas of the day. He was

thoughtfully discussed in a recent book by David Collings, *Wordsworthian Errancies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1995). Collings, however, emphasizes the destruction of the self implicit in such moments, but does not discuss how that destructiveness is harnessed in its transformation from a negative stage to positive self-expansion—the sublime turn.

²⁶This is the precise aesthetic fiction that Blake’s Milton refuses when he recognizes Satan as a part of himself and resists the temptation to sacrifice that contaminated portion in a violent subterfuge (he resists employing violence as a means of asserting moral authority)—he refuses to “become what he beholds.”

thus a false version of himself overlaying the essential self that remained intact beneath the taint of politics. This conflict between the two selves produced by his self-division follows the aesthetic pattern of the Kantian sublime in that it presents the reason-dominated self as a crisis (the exhaustion of the free play of the Kantian imagination), a negative stage, in the creation of (rhetorically the “recovery” of) his essential self in nature. Paradoxically, this constructed moment attempts to recover something that is supposed to be already present, his innate sensibility. If reason has simply obscured his natural ethical sense, why must he reproduce it through aesthetic means? Why is self-division and sacrifice necessary? The gap between his innate sensibility and this aesthetic version of its primary value is the subject of “Tintern Abbey” and will be discussed shortly. The difference between his initial feelings during his past experiences, as recorded in “The Prelude” (his experience of his morality), and their meaning upon reflection (his recognition of ethics, religious certainty, etc. in those feelings) creates the need in Wordsworth’s poetics for a means to create “abundant recompense” out of the gap between nature and his reflection on nature. The crisis that he initially identifies as his inability to recognize the moral ground for ethics in the natural world creates a second crisis when he discovers that he cannot recover that originary experience because it is necessarily obviated by his very reflection on it. This is the tight conceptual circle that he has created for himself and that he attempts to address in “Tintern Abbey.” By moving from “misguiding” to “misguided,” in the passage quoted above, he removes the probing knife from his hand and prepares an aesthetic defense against its violent attack on his own heart, but this will only serve as a provisional solution to the greater crisis created when he attempts to re-secure something that presumably was not lost and never could be.

Following a brief interval of trying to purify his rationalism through the abstract world of “mathematics, and their clear / And solid evidence” (10, 903-904), Wordsworth affected his final supersession of the crisis with the aid of Coleridge (although he discounted this influence in the 1850 edition), and more especially through the agency of Dorothy. She is figured as a reservoir of his natural sensibility. By returning him to his element she enabled his

simultaneous transformation and recovery. What had appeared to be a sacrificial victim, his natural and essential self, had in fact only been obscured, “as a clouded, not a waning moon” (10, 917), and his sister’s agency allowed him to preserve his essential self in the newly constructed identity of “a poet” (10, 919). This identity formation, figured as a recovery of his ability to perceive nature and locate himself in that perception, follows the same aesthetic pattern as the sacrificial descriptions of his rationalist errors. In order to construct the “poet,” the rationalist version of himself must be sacrificed. Dorothy is given the agency in this maneuver as she “made [him] seek beneath that name [poet] . . . and nowhere else” (10, 919-920). Total supersession brings stability and peace by evading the terrible confusion of the “degeneracy” and “degradation” of the age. As the “poet,” he will be “never more . . . disturbed” (10, 926) by the morass of the social (the state of moral confusion rationalism had created in his mind). This is the ultimate aesthetic construct in the poem. Wordsworth discovers the aesthetic means to transcend the social by identifying his own rationalist body as the source of pollution (that which impaired his innate sensibility and poetic vision), and systematically casting it off in the recovery (but actually the construction) of the poetic body. The rhetorical force of this aesthetic procedure is formidable, but its effective force (in transforming Wordsworth) seems less than convincing. His assertion that he will “never more be disturbed” is difficult to reconcile with the obvious bitterness in his description of the crowning of Napoleon. His efforts to cast “opprobrium” (10, 934) on these events with the metaphors of “the dog / Returning to his vomit” and the revolutionary dream “turned into a gewgaw” (10, 934-939), make it clear that his aesthetic machinery cannot yet isolate (or insulate) him from the conflicted events of the socio-political world, or from the attendant morass of emotions that accompany such events. In short, the declaration that he will “never more be disturbed” is a declaration more of his personal withdrawal from the world than a declaration of success in discovering a solution to his vexing ethical problems in his aesthetic practice. This passage signals that the crisis implicit in the contradictory desires of “The Old Cumberland Beggar,” the need for a stable ground for moral determination and ethical action, and the assertion that such determinations and actions could only be discovered after the fact in reflection

and not through action, persists. Ethical reflection cannot equal ethical action, and therefore the desire for political change can only be internalized as a feeling of disgust over events in France, and serve as a sign for the paralysis implicit in his ethical formulations themselves. He becomes bitter and withdrawn at the moment when he should see through the superficial evil of political events to a common natural core of human goodness. His angry outburst betrays the failure of his ethical program. This recollection of his response to specific political events is characteristic of Wordsworth in two ways: his habit of making totalizing statements and personal attachments (his use of the word “all” would make an interesting study), and the inability of his rhetorical and aesthetic figures finally to create the “closed economies” (in Bataille’s phrase) such totalization presupposes. He cannot manage to sustain his withdrawal from the world into the enclosed selfhood (in Blake’s vocabulary) where such complex questions are domesticated as objects of reflection and converted by that very reflection into the moral self. This point will be elaborated when I turn to “Tintern Abbey.”

Wordsworth’s aesthetic withdrawal from the social realm, while unstable, nonetheless succeeds in constructing and then sacrificing a rationalist version of himself. This operation, made possible by the shift from “misguiding” to “misguided,” hinges on his use of Godwin’s social philosophy, first as a means of retaining hope, and then through the violent repudiation of that philosophy as the source of pollution that must be eliminated in order to construct the “poet.” The result is the complex construction of a Godwinian sacrificial body for the rationalist self separated off from the essential self and then superseded as a negative stage in the sublime construction of the “poet.” The editors of the Norton Critical Edition of “The Prelude” identify Godwin’s *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* as the work that Wordsworth characterized as:

. . . the philosophy
That promised to abstract the hopes of man
Out of his feelings, to be fixed henceforth
For ever in a purer element

(10, 806-809).

Godwin's theory of rational perfectibility provided hope for an inevitable evolutionary change in the political structure of society based on revolutionary co-operation as the natural telos of human social interaction. As the Norton editors point out, this theory provided a good deal of solace for British radicals during a difficult period. However, the editors' vague generalization about "things . . . going wrong" (p. 402, note 6) following the execution of Louis XVI (widely accepted at the time as being brought on in part by British-backed royalist intrigues²⁷), obscures the more serious problem radicals faced with the advent of the Pitt terror, which reached an early crescendo with the 1794 treason trials. The spectre of arrest without charge, and the prospect of indefinite imprisonment in Newgate prison, where typhus was epidemic and survival a matter of chance, drove revolutionary thought and thinkers underground. Wordsworth was among this company. Godwin's belief in the inevitability of revolutionary change without the need for revolutionary action provided a source of hope for people for whom action could easily mean death at the hands of state oppression and political violence (John Thelwall was attacked by pro-government mobs, for example).

Wordsworth himself marked his crisis as occurring at the beginning of the war with France. His idealism continued unabated "till with open war / Britain opposed the liberties of France" (10, 758-759). As a result of these events he commenced his search for a rational means to preserve his revolutionary hopes in the face of a complex and dangerous political climate. In "The Prelude," Wordsworth's search is as carefully qualified as it is constructed. As he describes the intellectual milieu on which he drew, he takes care to ultimately distance himself in retrospect from its errors while still claiming his sincere and total commitment to the rationalist project of that time. He does not deny participation, but rather seeks retrospective absolution from past political errors. This conflicted rhetorical strategy takes various forms in the poem, ranging from his explicit declaration that "juvenile errors

²⁷This political milieu and Wordsworth's place in it has been carefully researched and reconstructed by Nicholas Roe in his study *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (London: Oxford, 1988). Roe demonstrates, for example, that neither poet was dismayed by the execution per se, and in fact easily assimilated it as necessary or in any case inevitable given British interference.

are [his] theme" (10, 637), to the subtle shift from "misguiding" to "misguided" discussed above. The poet must construct a sacrificable body that the self can be temporarily defined as and then evacuated at the moment of sacrificial transformation—of sublime self-aggrandizement. Self-aggrandizement is not Wordsworth's goal; he wants to establish a natural moral ground in his poetic sensibility, but by presenting the self as the only possible site for moral determinations and judgements, self-aggrandizement is an inevitable effect of the process. By characterizing his as a "novitiate mind" (10, 682) Wordsworth shows remarkable candor about his youthful enthusiasms, but he also claims that this naïveté is akin to his natural sensibility, the uncontaminated ground that reason and rationalism will obscure. This process is figured at first as benign or even complementary. His natural sensibility is initially enhanced by his revolutionary idealism as it extended his natural ethos into the world:

Diffusing only those affections wider
That from the cradle had grown up with me,
And losing, in no other way than light
Is lost in light, the weak in the more strong.

(10, 753-756)

This complementary tension collapses in the face of political crisis, and Wordsworth splits the inexperienced self into a potentially violent dualism rife with the conditions for sacrifice. He amends his earlier light imagery to reflect the new danger he faces:

. . . not, as hitherto,
A swallowing up of lesser things in great,
But change of them into their opposites,
And thus a way was opened for mistakes
And false conclusions of the intellect,
As gross in their degree, and in their kind
Far, far more dangerous.

(10, 762-768)

It is with this new opposition of "false conclusions of the intellect" and their dangerous effect on his essential self that he first accuses his reasoning self of sacrificing his natural self. He finally reverses the process with the sacrificial creation of the "poet" out of the wreckage of his rational self and by the same

means. In Blake's terms he "becomes what he beholds" and negates the reasoning part of himself just as he claims the reasoning part had negated his natural or essential part of himself. This is the cycle of sacrificial violence that Blake critiques and resists in "Milton." The paradox in Wordsworthian poetics then is that in setting out to evade the morass of ethical theories and their unforeseeable negative effects, he reproduces their most vexing problem, the habit of seeking total explanations and the subsequent violence such totalizations generate. If the young mind flounders when confronted with the various competing theories of human social and political behavior, it is no further ahead in negating all those theories in favor of a claim for the innate nature of human morality. This claim *is* such a theory *not* its exception, and as such it participates in the violence of the morass it seeks to evade; the claim that his is the only possible ground for morality repeats the most pernicious (and morally suspect) feature of social theory and ideology per se, the idea that all other theories fall away in the face of this new total explanation.

In order to make this sacrificial system complete Wordsworth borrows rationalist content from the intellectual milieu around him, a Godwinian sacrificial body. He turns to these intellectual currents, "wild theories" (10, 774), for solace during the political crisis while still taking care to separate himself from them by noting that in the past he "had but lent a careless ear" (10, 776) to such theorizing. This equivocation allows him to claim that his rationalist self was an introduced foreign agent (a contagion) and argue that he retained a portion of his prior natural self, the essential kernel that Dorothy rehabilitates as the "poet." The belief "that time would soon set all things right" (10, 777) gave Wordsworth the strength to continue and prefigures Godwin's theory of perfectibility that he temporarily adopted. The word "soon" calls attention to the fact that the desire driving Wordsworth's adoption of Godwinian principles moves beyond Godwin's range of concerns. Godwin's theory suggests that human rationality is part of our inevitable natural evolution, and that what he takes to be the manifest irrationality of absolutist politics must therefore in the end wither away. There is no provision for "soon" in such an evolutionary model. Wordsworth's poetic goals follow his ethical goal, the discovery of a moral ground in human behaviour through observation

and reflection. He seeks to discover, in the process, the ground for Godwin's revolutionary optimism. These do not begin as antagonistic projects, but come to be figured as such as Wordsworth negates his own rationalist means to achieving these ends in favor of his poetic means of achieving them. In fact, Godwin's theory precludes any action that seeks to hasten the process of political evolution as unnecessary or even counter-productive,²⁸ and, in this, it is similar to Wordsworth's ethical assertions in "The Old Cumberland Beggar" and elsewhere. Thus the almost total quietude implicit in Godwinian social theory served British radicals like Wordsworth well in the short term. They retained hope while constrained from action by Pitt's political oppression, but in the longer term it became a form of political paralysis exacerbated by the disintegration of their political organizations through that very inaction, and at the hand of state-sponsored political violence. Thelwall's political isolation of 1797 prefigures Wordsworth's personal isolation. Wordsworth's hopes were dashed along with those of all British radicals, and his turn to Godwin thus took place in the midst of profound psychological need. He sought "evidence / Safer, of universal application, such / As could not be impeached" (10, 788-790). Godwin held out the promise that it was possible:

. . . to abstract the hopes of man
Out of his feelings, to be fixed thenceforth
For ever in a purer element.

(10, 807-809)

Wordsworth rushes to this dream, but characteristically takes care to provide self-justification in the midst of his error. He inserts the phrase that the dream "was flattering to the young ingenuous mind" (10, 815), and this characterization is made to serve as the cause (created after the fact, in retrospect) of his fall into the errors of reason. At first his attachment was enthusiastic as he saw a system that confirmed his greatest wish, a

²⁸Roe shows the potential problems of this quietist position in his discussions of Thelwall's and Coleridge's responses to it. Thelwall ignored Godwin's complaints that he was making matters worse and appropriated "perfectibility" for use in justifying his radical calls for action (117 and 167). Coleridge, on the other hand, objected to Godwin because his emphasis on rationality left no place for Coleridge's vision of Christian altruism as a conscious revolutionary choice of action (115-117).

“magisterial” power for the “independent intellect” (10, 828). In retrospect, he characterizes this period as one that requires he speak “more in charity” (10, 814), but as the editors of the Norton point out he nonetheless adopts a partially mocking tone towards Godwinian theory. This is what I mean when I say he created a Godwinian sacrificial body. He slips away from responsibility for his errors and thus shifts the object of ridicule to Godwin. Nonetheless, it is difficult not to find irony in Wordsworth’s attacks on the limitations of political theory. His objection to Godwin is not to the disabling quietude of the theory of perfectibility, an inevitable crisis his poetics share, but to the fact that it does not work—the desired result does not occur during 1794-95, and, as a result of the failure of his and Godwin’s radical methodology, he turns to poetry.

Wordsworth briefly takes advantage of the theory’s failure to justify his lack of interest in political action during this period, and then seems disappointed that change did not occur anyway and in a form he could recognize and embrace. It is difficult to determine how much of this presumed attack on Godwin is Wordsworth (there is a lot of equivocation) and how much his editors. Coleridge began a critical tradition of reading Wordsworth, in *Biographia Literaria*, that attempted to excise the political from the poetic project, from all poetics in fact. In Chapter 17, he makes a distinction between the appropriate objects of philosophy and art, asserting that philosophy takes truth for its object, while art takes pleasure for its. Abrams, Gill and Jonathon Wordsworth are happy to follow Coleridge’s lead and create a scapegoat for Wordsworth’s youthful follies. His radical politics are thus trivialized as the problem rather than seen as part of the development of his poetic sensibility. Even if that part is structured as a negative stage in the production of the poetic self it is nonetheless necessary in the creation of that self, and, in retrospect, is a sign of his innate sensibility. In other words, his involvement in radical politics, despite its insufficiency, is based on the impetus of his moral being. It is interesting to note that the critical tradition of devaluing the poetic role of political attachments is repeated verbatim in discussions of the presumed negative influence of Leigh Hunt on Keats.²⁹ Wordsworth takes an historical

²⁹This tradition has been challenged during the Keats biennial of the past year (1995/96) as evidenced by the papers delivered by Nicholas Roe and Jeffery Cox at the MLA in Chicago.

theory of evolving social change and demands results. This points out the problems of employing a revolutionary theory, but his attack on it for not unfolding in its entirety in eight months seems extreme. Wordsworth's condescension towards Godwinian theory, considering it was created in retrospect, is better explained as symptomatic of the extreme psychological pressures driving him. His dismissive generalizations are interesting in what they tell us about the desperate and unstable nature of his political enthusiasms, and provide us with a glimpse of the appeal of Godwinian theory, its impact on radicals of the period and its ultimate failure as a potential solution to their political (and simultaneously personal) crises. On the face of things, it is difficult to know if Wordsworth even had a clear understanding of the system to which he claimed temporary allegiance, but the pressures driving him to make such an allegiance are marked by the depth of his final disappointment. The true importance of his reflection on his rationalist errors is in the role it plays in his aesthetic strategy, his attempt to internalize, and thus stabilize, ethical questions. He characterizes the effect of rationalism as a contamination of his essential "comprehensive mind" (10, 844):

. . . I was perplexed and sought
 To accomplish the transition by such means
 As did not lie in nature, *sacrificed*
 The exactness of a comprehensive mind
 To scrupulous and microscopic views
 That furnished out materials for a work
 Of false imagination, placed beyond
 The limits of experience and truth.

(10, 841-848, my emphasis)

Rationalism is a failed aesthetic, "a work of false imagination," that produced its effect by sacrificing the natural sensibility of the poet. The rhetoric of supersession is clear, but Wordsworth manages to partially disown the sacrificer's role in his aesthetic creation by repeatedly characterizing, throughout Book 10, his innate vulnerability (itself a sign of his natural sensibility) to such contaminating ideas, and by shifting the ownership of those ideas onto Godwin. He represents the philosopher as the cause of the poet's errors. This strategic division of the self in turn makes possible the succeeding

sacrifice of the contaminated portion in the construction of his ultimate aesthetic product—himself as a natural moral agent, “a poet.”

Wordsworth’s aesthetic apparatus, the recollection of crises followed by self-expansion and moral growth, makes his subtitle, “the growth of a poet’s mind,” particularly complex. “The Prelude” records the biographical growth of his mind, a kind of secular pilgrim’s progress, but that growth is achieved by selecting moments of crisis that can be converted into this morally and aesthetically expansive self—growth by the accretion of such moments. Furthermore, the sacrificial nature of this process creates the paradox of having an ethically suspect practice at the center of his means of achieving moral certainty. Much of the sacrificial dynamics at play in the poem concern a series of successive selves that are created and then destroyed in the general movement towards the creation of the poet and Wordsworth’s extravagant claims for the total value of his refined sensibility (seen as a general human potential available to all, observers of nature and readers alike). He confuses the issue however by not restricting his method to himself. If it is to be understood as a means to true self-knowledge that heroically re-examines past failures and employs them to grow beyond such folly through honest recognition of its limits and his own, the courage to re-stage such self-lacerating moments as a prelude to growth, then his goals can only be diminished by confusing the crucial issue of culpability and evading responsibility, even partially, by shifting it onto Godwin. He cannot have it both ways; either he takes responsibility for his failures and harnesses them as negative stages in sublime recognitions, or he evades them and limits his growth by collapsing into a pattern of self-justification. I am not saying he is culpable, in the sense of being guilty of some act which he now conceals. He creates the figure of his own culpability as part of his aesthetic apparatus, necessary, as a negative stage, in producing the sublime effect. Evading culpability dilutes his aesthetic power. This tension between self-disclosure and self-delusion becomes even more problematic in examining the other necessary sacrifice in the construction of his post-revolutionary self, Robespierre. The sacrificial moment of Robespierre’s execution is carefully prepared for in the development of the poem’s narrative. The coincidence of

Wordsworth having visited Arras, Robespierre's birthplace, in 1790, provides an opportunity to employ recollection as a means of preparing for future historical events by commenting on the infamy to come for the hapless village's famous son. In a passage that suggests the operation of a Greek sense of moira the town suffers the pollution of this accident of birth:

. . . the town of Arras—place from which
 Issued that Robespierre, who afterwards
 Wielded the sceptre of the atheist crew.
 When the calamity spread far and wide,
 And this same city, which had even appeared
 To outrun the rest in exultation, groaned
 Under the vengeance of her cruel son.

(10, 455-461)

In his role as the source of pollution and tyrant, Robespierre becomes a classic example of the necessary sacrificial victim in an unfolding Sophoclean tragedy.³⁰ Wordsworth is not safely outside this drama. He has at least partially followed Robespierre's radical path and as a result shares in the pollution. His recollection of the place functions to "mock" him "under such a strange reverse" (10, 465). What ostensibly begins as a description of a specific part of the 1790 tour becomes an aesthetic construction of the self in the compositional present. His recollection of the events of the tour are transposed onto the unforeseeable fate of the town, and the tragedy is converted into personal moral growth signalled by his ability to recognize it *as* a tragedy. His self-laceration is soon capitalized in an attempt to make it part of a political sublime as revolutionary violence becomes a source of sublime terror.³¹ From the sacrifice of the tyrant must spring personal and political renovation:

Great was my glee of spirit, great my joy
 In vengeance, and eternal justice, thus,

³⁰See, for example, Girard's analysis of the Oedipus story in *Violence and the Sacred*.

³¹Comparing Wordsworth's negative construction in this section of the poem with Burke's celebrated abuse of sublime figures in *Reflections On the Revolution in France* provides evidence for the role of his political apostasy in the poem's composition. W.J.T. Mitchell provocatively discusses Burke's abuse of his own aesthetic strictures regarding the ethical employment of the specular sublime in his chapter on Burke in *Iconology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

Made manifest. Come now, ye golden times,
 Said I, forth-breathing, on those open sands
 A hymn of triumph, as the morning comes
 Out of the bosom of the night, come ye.

(10, 539-544)

“Vengeance” and “eternal justice” are made equivalent and inevitable in the poet’s apocalyptic rhetoric. His call for the renovating “golden times” conflates with the description of the natural sublimity of the new dawn. In the darkness of the Terror past, he can hope for the “mighty renovation” (10, 556) to come. Wordsworth’s figures reproduce standard revolutionary rhetoric. Descriptions of the apocalyptic significance of the fall of the Bastille or of the execution of Louis XVI employed similar rhetorical figures. Wordsworth’s exultation at the sacrifice of Robespierre cannot avoid a certain ironic subtext as an example of the cyclical violence of the revolution. He decries violence while exploiting it in the process of self-expansion. His recognition of his own sacrificial practice is evaded with a weak appeal to subsequent historical events: “From this time forth in France, as is well known, / Authority put on a milder face” (10, 567-568). “Put on” indeed; the falsity of his claim is built into the phrase’s equivocation. His argument is that his participation in sacrificial violence, his “joy” of “vengeance,” is justified by its historical necessity. Robespierre’s death was necessary to the development of the French state as it was to his moral growth. But as I have argued above this historical event is only midway in his political apostasy; he had not yet turned away from political solutions, and his comments are thus partly disingenuous in characterizing them as the same as his current views during the composition of the poem. This raises the difficult question of when the growth of the poet’s mind occurred: during the events recollected in the poem and their immediate aftermath, or during the re-staging of them in the composition of the poem? This interpretive difficulty reflects the problem of defining what we mean by Wordsworth’s political apostasy and how we date it. I have argued that despite falling out with radical theory and methodology, he retained his political motives. He continued to abhor the social abuses of private property, for example, but abandoned his belief in the efficacy of his methods of addressing such issues. He sought to fill this vacuum with a doctrine of innate human morality operating beneath the corrupt

surface of politics and political theory. Wordsworth misdates his more moderate views of 1804 when he transposes them onto his responses to political events of 1794. The lack of analysis of Robespierre's successors and the cycles of revolutionary violence is shocking if taken at face value because these are crucial events in the disillusionment that necessitates his shift away from revolutionary politics and the re-creation of himself as "the poet." When Wordsworth puts the values of that subsequent poetic self into a place in his historical record where it cannot logically occur, he betrays a tension between employing those past events as an aesthetic means of creating that poetic self (a negative stage), and evading his culpability in those events. Much of the power of Wordsworth's recollection comes from the pathos created by the depth of his disclosure. The natural terror and pity of having experienced those dark days is made palpable, and then superseded as the terror and pity find their aesthetic register in the sublime. It is psychologically confused and self-defeating to claim consistency of belief when such consistency would elide the very production of that view by removing its necessary negative stage. Wordsworth's recovery of his essential self, in its new guise as "the poet," is diminished if the crisis that caused him to become lost is rendered as superficial. The profundity of the crisis needs to be recognized if the subsequent self-expansion is to be taken seriously. The critical tradition of dismissing Wordsworth's radical politics, following Coleridge's lead in the *Biographia Literaria*, parallels a subtle pattern of evasion in "The Prelude." This dismissal works against the poem. When I read the poem, I often wish the poet would leave a recollection uncommented on, un-secured, so that I can make my own evaluation without being asked to participate in his subsequent self-dramatization (as exhilarating as that vicarious self-expansion can be). But, occasionally, as in the death of Robespierre, I resist the use of sacrificial violence for a different, and contrary, reason. It obscures Wordsworth's personal culpability, as described in the poem, and thus disables the sublime effect by undoing its negative stage. While I recognize the limits of my conflicting responses as a critical stance, I believe it points to a basic contradiction in the poem's goals: the need to establish a new moral ground and the need to evade culpability. The idea that each individual could be revolutionized through observation and reflection risks being lost in the

aesthetic method that achieves that personal revolution in Wordsworth. Over the course of his poetic life he appears to lose sight of that original ethical impetus for the method of poetic individuation he employs. As he becomes increasingly conservative and (inevitably in my reading) more isolated, his political apostasy unfolds as more a process of forgetting than a conscious ideological shift. Wordsworth has no allegiance to the post-Robespierre period in France that soon in the course of the poem's composition will be superseded along with the rest of the radical and rationalist contaminants in his past. Historical justifications of this kind function in part to disguise the aesthetic dynamics of self-justification;³² a personal crisis, his implication in revolutionary violence, is superseded by sacrificial means heavily nuanced by the rhetoric of a political sublime based on the terror of revolutionary violence, a "mighty renovation."

This is a particularly complex moment in the construction of "the poet's mind," but it is also typical. To re-capitulate, the compositional method of "The Prelude" consists of recollected details of past experiences that are systematically capitalized and superseded as occasions for intellectual expansion. The recollection/intellection pattern, the "spots of time" economy, almost always creates a recollected negative stage superseded by sublime intellectual expansion.³³ The most overtly sublime (and therefore instructive) of these moments occurs in Book 6 with the crossing of Simplon Pass. Commentary on this passage is, for good reason, still dominated by Geoffery Hartman's brilliant reading in his chapter "Via Naturaliter Negativa."³⁴ The critic's careful delineation of Wordsworth's negative method has much in

³²The "Vaudracour and Julie" episode is fascinating in this context. The Norton editors make the extraordinary suggestion that this story "stands in lieu of an account of his relationship with Annette Vallon" (340). But there are stark differences between the episode and the affair. His pursuit of an imprudent marriage leads to death and madness in Vaudracour's case. Is this the fate Wordsworth avoided by not marrying Annette? The episode was ultimately excised from the poem and re-situated as a separate tale (somewhat Gothic in its excessiveness), thus removing it from consideration as a part of the poet's "growth."

³³Collings emphasizes the negative moments in this process as instances of "dismemberment" that the poet fails to elide. My approach differs from his by emphasizing the eventual re-integration of these fragments of the poet's identity into Wordsworth's production of sublime self-expansion.

³⁴*Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964).

common with the aesthetic pattern I claim to be the dominant structure of these poetics. However, in asserting that Wordsworth discovers “the autonomy of his imagination, its independence from present joy, from strong outward stimuli” (41) in his 1804 reflection on his 1790 walk, Hartman obscures the fundamental dependence on the past crisis (the negative stage in the negative method) that the sublime turn entails. The recollection of the disappointment of losing his way and missing the walk’s singular moment (crossing the Alps) is disrupted in the compositional present by the famous lines on the power and autonomy of the “Imagination:”

Like an unfathered vapour, here that power,
 In all the might of its endowments, came
 Athwart me. I was lost as in a cloud,
 Halted without a struggle to break through,
 And now recovering, to my soul I say
 ‘I recognize thy glory.’

(6, 525-530)

The experience of recognizing the power of the imagination repeats the language of losing his way in the pass. In that re-situated crisis Wordsworth discovers the “glory” of the magnitude of his “soul” in the exact magnitude of the abyss he faces. The “strength of usurpation” (6, 530-531) translates directly into the “greatness” (6, 536) of the self as “infinite” (6, 539) finds an “abode” (6, 536) in the poet’s mind. This is a precise rendering of the Kantian mathematical sublime transferred to purely verbal terms. The self-expansion the poet achieves does not occur in the presence of the natural sublime (in Simplon Pass), nor in the recollection of the natural sublime, but in the purely intellectual supersession of these past events in the poet’s compositional present. Thomas Weiskel argues that the chronology of the original crisis that Wordsworth suffered on the walk was fictionalized through the creation of the story of becoming lost. He argues that the crisis occurred in the descent of Gondo gorge.³⁵ Whatever the case, the description of the gorge displays the

³⁵Weiskel argues that losing his way is a “screen memory” employed to evade the true crisis in the descent. In his study *The Romantic Sublime* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1976), he brings forward biographical details from Dorothy’s journal of the 1820 return visit to suggest the gorge as the most likely crisis site. More recently, in *Bearing the Word* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), Margaret Homans has followed Weiskel’s

aesthetic power of the intervening construction of the “Imagination.” The tension between the anxiety of mortality and its supersession permeates the passage. Whether the rather mundane disappointment at becoming lost, or the sublime landscape of the descent of the gorge triggered Wordsworth’s anxiety and crisis is an interesting area of speculation but moot in the aesthetic construction of the poem. As I have argued above (and will demonstrate further in my discussion of “Tintern Abbey”), Wordsworth’s poetics work to produce the maximum aesthetic effect (sublime self-expansion) from the most common natural materials. “The stationary blasts of waterfalls,” and “the sick sight and giddy prospect” (6, 558-564), contain both the terror of the power of the gorge and the intellectual harnessing of that terror in the movement between “blast” and “stationary,” and “sick” and “giddy.” These contraries are described as “tumult and peace,” and then more abstractly as “the darkness and the light” (6, 567), and finally become an almost manic reiteration of their sublime unity in the poet’s mind:

. . . like the workings of one mind, features
Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,
Characters of the great apocalypse,
The types and symbols of eternity,
Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.

(6, 568-572)

reading in constructing her own reading of Dorothy’s response to William’s 1820 responses to the landscape (see her chapter, “Building Refuges: Dorothy Wordsworth’s Poetics of the Image”). Trying to establish a sublimated critique of William out of a nuanced reading of Dorothy’s *Journal* of the 1820 trip is an interesting project although Homans confuses whether the critique is implicit and covert or an active aesthetic challenge. An obvious problem arises when she bases her argument on Weiskel’s unsupported and unsupportable conjecture. The unwarranted assumption that she knows where the crisis occurred, and can thus read Dorothy’s response to William’s anxieties directly makes her re-construction difficult to evaluate. Her valorization of what she calls Dorothy’s “refusal of poethood” makes a virtue out of her secondary role in the production of William’s poems (her function as passive recorder of the natural world) even though this very passivity has been relentlessly critiqued by Homans’s feminist colleagues (in particular, Wolfson and Levinson) as the very sign of her exploitation. The claim of an active resistance to William’s influence is hard to see when it is identical to what is usually taken as her acquiescence. Furthermore, Homans’s insistence that Dorothy is critiquing William’s universal claims about the meaning of that landscape is to assume that Dorothy was naive about the very nature of the poem and misrecognizes its use of “spots of time” as examples of aesthetic moments in the development of poetic sensibility (his new ground for human meaning) as simple egoism, and furthermore that she would presume to judge William on the basis of this confusion. Frankly, I find this reading preposterous and clearly unsupportable.

The conflicted equivocation of the natural images that begins the passage gives way to contrary abstractions, and is finally resolved into “without end.” The interplay of contraries is decidedly unBlakean in its focus on resolution into the higher realm of “without end,” the sudden experience of a sense of immortality in the timelessness of the achieved moment, and thus in producing a quasi-Hegelian structure in its movement towards the Wordsworthian equivalent of pure spirit. Wordsworth clearly asserts that his poetic strategy enables him to create an atemporal realm through the use his aesthetic “Imagination.” He begins in the gorge and ends in the symbols of eternity, and finally transcends mortality in the apprehension of the self as a part of eternity and thus free from time. Human terror has been converted into the redemptive promise of apocalypse. Symbols of the “one” in the poet’s mind replace the conflicted torments of the walk. Regardless of whether the original crisis took place when he was lost on the wrong path, or in the natural terror of the gorge, or in some suppressed unknowable event (Weiskel’s contention), its meaning is constructed by the interjection of the aesthetic force of the “Imagination” at the time of composition. The crossing of Simplon Pass is both a biographical record of “the [historical] growth of a poet’s mind,” and an instance of growth by aesthetic accretion in the sublime moment of composition. Cause and effect wane in importance. The confusions of where and when the crisis occurred, or whether the intervention of the “Imagination” is a recollection of an aesthetic experience during the walk or a new aesthetic experience created by the poet’s recollection, become secondary in importance in relation to the magnitude of the self-expansion in question. If sensibility is the product of the accretion of such powerful aesthetic moments, then their temporal sequence is a less significant matter.

In order to examine in more detail the specific structure of these aesthetic fictions that form the heart of Wordsworthian poetics, I turn now to one of the most celebrated of his aesthetic creations, the construction of “abundant recompense” in “Tintern Abbey.” To fully understand Wordsworth’s poetic motives in “Tintern Abbey” it is necessary to keep in mind the psychological pressures of the political context in which they emerged that I have sketched above. The profound crises Wordsworth experienced following

his participation in the revolution in France and his subsequent descent into moral and political confusion created an enormous pressure on any new system of belief that was to emerge in the vacuum. His habit of making total investments in such systems, in the power of reason during his revolutionary period, for example, caused an equally total collapse in which he “yielded up moral questions in despair” (10, 900). He totally negated his troubled past and with it the possibility of discovering moral certitude through rationalist means. Dorothy mediated in this final crisis and returned him to his essential self which presumably had been obscured by reason, but was now recovered through the sacrifice of past selves, Godwin, Robespierre, et cetera. He declared that she had “preserved me still / A Poet, and made me seek beneath that name, / And that alone” (11, 346-48, 1850 edition). The emphatic force of the 1850 phrase, “and that alone,” puts an end to the possibility of equivocation, and re-asserts his total investment in his future as a “poet.” The totalness of his investment is important both because it intensifies the aesthetic effect, his reward, and because it becomes its own crisis as he cuts himself off from any solutions to moral or ethical questions outside the self-expansion entailed in the creation (and re-creation) of “the poet.” This total system is very close to Blake’s selfhood in its potential for error and self-deception. That Wordsworth escapes such self-deception is one of the great achievements of “Tintern Abbey.” He attempts to elide all doubt but, in the end, fails, and, in failing triumphs.

“Tintern Abbey” constructs through poetic means the new system of values Wordsworth sought. This “saving intercourse” (10, 914) allows him a means of surviving in the terrible world of circumstance he had discovered in France and upon his return to England. That hurtful environment has its approximate equivalent in the poem in “the din / Of towns and cities” (25). It is against this external threat, which has caused him to become alienated from his earlier unmediated apprehension of the world, his essential self, that the poet constructs a closed economy of value (to use Bataille’s phrase) that both insulates him from *urban* pressures and rejects *urban* solutions to “moral questions.” Having already “yielded up moral questions in despair” as the result of the failure of rationality he needs a new source of moral certitude, a

new way to be in the world. In this context, Wordsworth sets up a dichotomy between the corrupting influence of human habitation and the restorative power of nature in the landscape, “green to the very door” (11).³⁶ He repeats, in personal terms, the logic of “The Old Cumberland Beggar.” The inner peace of the first verse paragraph depends on the condition of the landscape. The “orchard-tufts” (11) that signal human habitation “lose themselves” (13) in the general wildness of the scene. This slow visual dispersal into undifferentiated green (“one green hue”) verbally reproduces the central effect of picturesque aesthetics by bringing potentially discordant elements into overall harmony. The use of the picturesque achieves the desired harmony, usually associated with the Kantian beautiful, by harnessing the aesthetic power of the vagrants, as rough elements in the landscape, in the compositional balance of the scene. The dangerous potential of the “vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods” (20) is reduced to the aesthetic balance of the grey contrast of their “wreaths of smoke” (20) against a green background. Creating aesthetic detail out of the misery of the vagrants who roamed the Wye valley at the time of Wordsworth’s return visit provokes the indignation of Jerome McGann and serves as an important point of departure in Marjorie Levinson’s critique of the poem.³⁷ Nicholas Roe usefully amends these critical views in pointing out that the poem is struggling to create a method to re-engage the social ills that surround Wordsworth³⁸ (as I have argued above, a central aim of his entire poetic project). In order to be sustaining, his recuperative turn must provide a means of mediating this dichotomy. In other words, the poetic solutions offered by the poem must provide him with the power to resist the corruption of the urban milieu *and* create a sustaining new aesthetic and ethical self in the process (there must be a positive re-creation). Otherwise he risks the total isolation of the “hermit” and the collapse of any hope of finding a recuperative possibility in human interaction. This is the psychological pressure driving the

³⁶All references to “Tintern Abbey” will be cited in the text by line number.

³⁷McGann’s brief reading of the poem is in his *The Romantic Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). Levinson’s argument is a crucial moment in her more complex reading of Wordsworthian aesthetics in her chapter “Insight and oversight: reading ‘Tintern Abbey’” from *Wordsworth’s Great Period Poems* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

³⁸This detailed argument appears in the chapter “The Politics of the Wye Valley” in Roe’s *The Politics of Nature* (London: Macmillan, 1992).

poem. Without a new total system of value, the poet risks a life of meaningless drift and isolation.

Wordsworth's proposed economy of nature is explicitly stated in the second verse paragraph of the poem. He has spent the psychological capital he received on his last visit to the landscape of the Wye valley while in the city:

But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them [beauteous forms]
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration.

(25-30)

Memory of the landscape has given him pleasure, and enabled a purifying influence from the body's "blood" to the emotion's "heart" to the "purer mind." This process (spending the capital of remembered nature) delivers "tranquil restoration" which amounts to much more than a mere respite from the destructiveness of urban life. "Restoration" makes it possible for him to act as a moral exemplar despite the city's dehumanizing force. It enables "that best portion of a good man's life / His little, nameless, unremembered, acts / Of kindness and of love" (33-35). Wordsworth has recovered the ability to discriminate "moral questions" (the realm destroyed by reason) through this practice of recovering the germ of his essential self (the innate morality that underlies his temporarily confused and confounded being) by recollecting its existence in the nurturing power of the natural world.

Wordsworth totalizes his investment by making the reward equally total. "Tranquil restoration" relieves his despair (his unhappy history in France, for example), "the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world" (39-40), and connects him with religious calm and moral certainty based on the meditative force of his "tranquillity":

—that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,—
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood

Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
 In body, and become a living soul.

(41-46)

The description of bodily arrest is reminiscent of the Burkean sublime and the language of supersession (“soul” over “corporeal frame”), and, furthermore, suggests a quasi-Hegelian movement towards pure spirit as he moves towards being “a living soul” that escapes the confines of the body. His relation to nature is the source of this spiritual capital, here named “the power of harmony” (48), and enables him to overcome his human weaknesses and participate in a *true* vision of the very “life of things” (49). The conflation of his “body” into “living soul” into the spiritual totality of the “life of things” represents a moment of equally total self-aggrandizement. His *urban* suffering constitutes a quasi-Kantian negative stage, and Wordsworth’s sublime turn constructs positive value out of the moment of crisis. He goes further in the poem and attempts to stabilize the aesthetic terms of such crises and thus supersede their power to harm him; and he goes further yet in insisting that the severity of such crises is always convertible into the grandeur of the self, a move that aligns him with the Burkean sublime. This two-part system is the great difference between the poetic solutions offered in “The Old Cumberland Beggar” and “Tintern Abbey.” In the earlier poem his essential self was assumed to be identical to his innate natural self, but in the latter poem he discovered that his original intense relationship to nature was unrecoverable and therefore must be converted back into his essential self through aesthetic means. The essential self was a made, not found, thing. The making of the essential self is recorded in “The Prelude” as “the growth of a poet’s mind,” a pattern wherein the poet must simultaneously record the power of childhood sensibility (the natural self) and convert that power, now lost, into “abundant recompense” (the essential self). What is essential then slips as Wordsworth’s poetics develop; it begins as the original kernel of moral being that exists in all of us, but over time it comes to be understood as the development of that kernel, by aesthetic means, into “the poet.” The crisis, in the poem, is remembered, as is the landscape. The poet evades an actual re-encounter with the Wye, and the potential crisis to be found there, and replaces it with the

aesthetic construction of the self, safely isolated in his reflective mode.

Nature underwrites his moral certitude inasmuch as it creates a foundation for the poetic sensibility he derives from the sublime power in which he participates. He converts this sustaining realm into psychological, moral and religious capital by abstracting his poems from it through a pattern of sacrificial substitution. This system is identical in structure with his new poetic sensibility because it *is* the necessary means of reflection and the source of poetic meaning. It is totalizing because it provides him with his sole means of determining knowledge, psychological happiness and religious belief—and of creating his poems. The first stage of the substitution pattern entails the conversion of his ecstatic, childhood apprehension of nature into the intellectual capital of “abundant recompense.” With his return to the Wye valley he hopes to receive “life and food / For future years” (63-64). He has changed from his youthful days when he “bounded o’er the mountains” (68):

. . . For nature then
(The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
And their glad animal movements all gone by)
To me was all in all.

(73-75)

Wordsworth identifies in his childhood a way of existing in nature that, though composed of “coarser pleasures,” constituted a system of value that in itself seemed total; it was “all in all.” The child’s mind did not understand its participation in the landscape as value or capital, and only now can the mature poet see that earlier unconscious apprehension as a realm of loss. The enormity of that loss is signalled by the language Wordsworth uses to describe it:

. . . I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite.

(75-80)

The sense of being “haunted,” of being moved without an apparent cause, shows the child as an undifferentiated part of nature. The poet cannot “paint” this sense of immediacy with the world because he cannot undo consciousness, and because it is beyond representation. The best he can do is describe it as an “appetite,” a drive more basic than intellection and, as such, necessarily prior to language. In that lost realm he had no need of anything “by thought supplied” (83) in order to experience what was of primary value. He is thus in a condition of loss, a lost natural economy which required no “interest / Unborrowed from the eye” (82-83); and the pain of that loss comes through in the emotional doubling of the lines: “And all its aching joys are now no more, / And all its dizzy rapture” (84-85). By combining the ecstasy of “joy” and “rapture” with the “aching” reality of their temporariness, Wordsworth creates a moment of pathos in which the condition of loss is fully articulated as a quasi-Kantian negative stage preparing the way for the construction of a superseding sublime moment. It is only quasi-Kantian because there is no real crisis here; the present tense Wye never appears. The negative source of sublimity in the poem is the poet’s experience of loss.³⁹ As he attempts to recover the ecstatic moments of childhood, he creates a negative stage in the magnitude of their loss which he expresses as his desperate “appetite” for their potential “all in all.” In attempting to overcome the animal self of his youth, Wordsworth creates an aesthetic fiction akin to that produced by Hegel in his division of the animal self and the essential self in the dialectical process towards “pure spirit.” Bataille vigorously attacks this process as a violent subterfuge in his essay “Hegel, Death and Sacrifice.” I am not arguing that this movement from the animal to the intellectual is equivalent to Hegel in its cognitive procedures, but rather that the poem exhibits an Hegelian telos even as it negatively re-experiences the value of the animal self.

In order to capitalize on this moment, Wordsworth must move to devalue childhood’s immediacy as a product of his “thoughtless youth” (90). He creates a moment of recuperation by claiming that the immediacy of childhood is insufficient compared to his mature construction of value, his Kantian

³⁹ Wordsworth’s evasion of the Wye was pointed out to me by Daniel Burgoyne, and I am indebted to him for that discussion.

sublime turn, that the recollection of childhood days enables. Against the very pathos of his poem he asserts:

. . . Not for this [loss of immediacy]
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur.

(85-86)

In enacting this substitution Wordsworth creates a Hegelian pattern in which the mind, faced with loss (death itself in Hegel, loss of immediacy here), substitutes in order to preserve the self. Such a substitution creates a moment of self-aggrandizement in the sublime turn towards “pure spirit” in Hegel and towards “the one life” in Wordsworth. It is this sacrificial substitution and its implicit violence which Bataille most wants to critique with his examination of “closed economies,” and challenge with the theoretical postulation of “expenditure without return.” By theorizing a gesture, characterized as an “expenditure,” that cannot be re-integrated into the self, Bataille exposes the self-aggrandizement at the heart of sublime aesthetics (including Wordsworth’s) and unmask the production of aesthetic moments of supersession. A paradox appears in Wordsworthian poetics when the ethical impetus of the poems to provide incontrovertible evidence of an innate ground for moral expansion in the natural world is compromised by the violent aesthetic means of achieving that expansion. In the context of Wordsworth’s poem, Bataille’s critique exposes a poetics which hardly required a future *German influence*, but rather operated at the very crux of an idealist project—a parallel aesthetic development pre-dating Coleridge’s appropriations of Kant and Schelling. Wordsworth denies the value of what is lost and thus substitutes for that loss by creating a realm of intellection that constructs “for such loss . . . abundant recompense” (87-88). The ecstatic apprehension of the “all in all” gives way to a newly constructed Nature:

. . . And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:

A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things.

(93-102)

The “joy of elevated thoughts” replaces the “aching joys” of childhood (and their entanglement in loss). His sublime expansion is predominantly intellectual in its movement from the natural specificity of “the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,” towards the generalities of “suns,” “ocean,” and “sky.” On the one hand, “far more deeply interfused” sounds like an ironic boast as it claims that his sublime expansiveness penetrates more “deeply” into things than the experience of being non-differentiated from them (the lost realm he seeks to supersede). But, on the other hand, this is the very heart of the poem’s psychological thrust. The poem moves to locate this now abstract nature inside the “mind of man” as part of a universal condition of thought. The repetition of the word “all” intellectually connects “all” things as “objects of thought.” This repeats the “all in all” in purely intellectual terms and simultaneously stands as a description of Wordsworth’s *new* sensibility. The once primary nature of childhood becomes the enabling raw material of its new capitalized successor. Consciousness, rather than being a fall, makes possible the conversion of nature’s particularity (he is “still a lover of the meadows and the woods” (102-103)) into a recuperative realm of permanent value. The recuperative drive capitalizes superseded selves (the childhood economy of nature, the reason economy of his radical years) by negating them and thus making them the sources of abundant capital. In the context of this supersession, the repetition of “all” signals Wordsworth’s habitual pattern of making total investments that inevitably become their own crises and succeeding negative stages. The seeds of the crisis of “The Immortality Ode” are sown in the aesthetic productions of “Tintern Abbey.” This process, Wordsworth’s pattern of total investment (the construction of a Blakean selfhood, or a Bataillean closed economy), and the force of this recuperative structure attempts to guarantee the present investment by making an inherently temporal realm permanent.⁴⁰ It is in the anxiety of this desire that

⁴⁰This an apt description of the Hegelian project as well.

the poem's next crisis occurs.⁴¹

After sacrificing immediacy by employing its loss as a negative stage, Wordsworth cannot free himself from the memory of its power and therefore fails to completely elide the feeling of loss. This unassimilated feeling destabilizes the rhetoric of the poem's redemptive function, the creation of "abundant recompense" through converting his loss. In the anxiety caused by this rupture of his newly constructed economy of mature poetic sensibility (ironically caused by his ability to feel the loss of immediacy despite his rhetoric of redemption), he enacts a second substitution that allows him to manage the fear of a future that contains the possibility that he: "should . . . the more / Suffer [his] genial spirits to decay" (112-113). Against this fear that his aesthetic means to developing his sensibility may erode or even collapse, he creates a guarantee by substituting his sister Dorothy's childhood for his own:

. . . and in thy voice I catch
The language of my former heart and read
My former pleasures in the shooting lights
Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while
May I behold in thee what I was once,
My dear, dear Sister!

(116-121)

By recapturing his childhood in her ecstatic apprehension of the landscape, Wordsworth is able to substitute directly for his loss through his efforts to extract his "former pleasures" from her "wild eyes." This is perhaps the most stark example of the ethical risk at play in the aesthetic structure of the Wordsworthian sublime. He exploits Dorothy's childhood in order to secure a source of "abundant recompense." By exploit, I do not mean to suggest that she was physically or psychologically harmed, but rather that Wordsworth valued her childhood not for its intrinsic value but for its use value in his

⁴¹Such anxieties are the occasions for composition in the Wordsworthian version of Romanticism. He attempts to represent the complex details of the inner life. The "Ode" and "Resolution and Independence" are the two exemplary poems in this Wordsworthian mode as personal crisis and growth become the primary subject for Romantic versification. However, it is crucial to note that this formulation of Romanticism is not characteristic of Blake's poetic practice or goals, and, as we shall see, Shelley struggles to resist this very formulation.

poetry. His exploitive relation to Dorothy has been thoroughly and provocatively discussed by Margaret Homans in *Women Writers and Poetic Identity*, and less successfully by Susan Wolfson in her essay "Individual in Community" in *Romanticism and Feminism* edited by Anne K. Mellor. Homans describes and discusses the "occlusion" of Dorothy's view of her own poetic possibilities (36) in relation to William's aesthetic project. It is true that William created a poetic system that fed on Dorothy's natural sensibility; it was necessary that she not convert her observations into poetic capital and instead serve as an unspoiled source of images and recollections. And, furthermore he clearly gendered this active/passive relationship between them. However, Homans takes Dorothy's embedded place in this aesthetic domestic economy and claims that her acquiescence is actually a resistance to "poethood" (41-42). In other words, she claims that Dorothy's role in Wordsworthian poetic production is critical of that production. This claim seems dubious in that it suggests a secret attitude towards the work that remains invisible in its covertness. I cannot find evidence that Dorothy believed she was being exploited, as in harmed, nor that she resisted her role. In a question that further muddies the waters, Homans asks whether "resistance to poethood originates in sexual difference" (42). This gender-specific version of resistance to the dominant model of Romantic aesthetics obscures the ethical stakes of the poetry and unnecessarily limits the field of inquiry. Surely Blake's contrariety is a viable "resistance to poethood," as defined in Wordsworthian poetics, that does not "originate in sexual difference." Blake critiques the violent dynamics of "difference," but does so by challenging the limits of sexual differentiation as a means of judging human value. Homans's question can only lead to a negation and the repetition of the violence she decries. If Wordsworthian and Coleridgean aesthetics are to be resisted so we can begin reassessing other aesthetic modes of the period in relation to their influence (in part the *raison d'être* of the present work), then Dorothy's acquiescence in accepting her role in the production of "abundant recompense" (the family business), no matter how conflicted and unhappy, seems a poor choice for developing a counter-poetics as it leaves its presumed target intact. In other words, how can a covert critique be useful *as* a critique? The essentialist aspect of the argument is even more troubling because it

excludes by gender a writer like John Clare who resisted the intellectual conversion of his natural observations into “abundant recompense,” yet produced this resistance while altering rather than rejecting “poethood.” It is Wordsworthian “poethood” specifically that exploits Dorothy, and I find the search for resistance in the structure of that exploitation ironic to say the least. Wolfson’s essay elides the basic generic differences between Dorothy’s Journals and William’s poems. So while she re-constructs Dorothy’s emphasis on community as a positive aesthetic value, she does not challenge William’s idealist aesthetics. This leads to generic confusion when she moves to elevate Dorothy’s work as of equal aesthetic value even though it is clear (in Homans’s reading as well) that Dorothy would have strongly disagreed with this assessment. Wolfson’s generic confusion and Homans’s essentialism disable their potential critiques of Wordsworthian aesthetics by creating a phantom Dorothy self-consciously critiquing William’s work while, in fact, she actively and enthusiastically pursued his poetic goals while maintaining a clear understanding of her role. In the reading I am suggesting here, exploitation is part of an aesthetic technique, substitution, that finds its ultimate meaning in its centrality to Wordsworth’s poetic method, in its role in producing the sublime effect. Access to Dorothy’s childhood expands his fund of recollected moments which the recuperative structure of his poetics can convert into capital and then spend to alleviate depression, construct his “moral being,” or connect him with the religious totality that “rolls through all things.”

The poem ends with Wordsworth imagining Dorothy’s mind as “a mansion for all lovely forms” (211). By constructing her “memory” as a passive storehouse of images, he gains access to uncapitalized apprehensions of the landscape. Dorothy does not appear to receive “abundant recompense” in the same way he does, and, in her function as a source,⁴² she remains aligned with the natural self that he attempts to overcome in the poem. Her future “sober pleasure” will consist of the recollection of the particularity of natural

⁴²Nicolas Roe’s suggestion in his chapter, “The Politics of the Wye Valley,” (120) that the landscape described in the poem’s first verse paragraph is taken from Dorothy’s “Alfoxden Journal” and not from actual observation of the scene makes it clear that one of the purposes of the “mansion for all lovely forms” is to provide future materials to be converted into poems.

forms, but the “mansion” is an ambiguous image. It is possible to read it as a metaphor for the site of the construction of “abundant recompense,” in which case William is predicting an analogous moment to the poem’s moment for his sister. This matter is ambiguous, and its ambiguity signals the failure of “abundant recompense,” the aesthetic argument of the poem, to displace the natural ecstasy of the childhood “all in all.” Wordsworth fears the collapse of the sublime moments he has so carefully constructed. If he is plunged back into the condition of loss, then his supersession of that negative stage will be exposed as a temporary moment of enlightenment made possible by aesthetic means. This is the only kind of enlightenment possible in Blake’s analysis and the very reason why he resists the selfhood. It is in the context of Wordsworth’s anxiety that the poem achieves its greatness. He chooses not to end the poem with the creation of “abundant recompense,” but instead risks its very existence in the destabilizing recollection of what he has lost that occurs through the reflecting medium of Dorothy’s eyes. The postulate of a “far deeper zeal / Of holier love” (211, 154-155) falters in the performative longing that sounds in the line, “Oh! yet a little while,” spoken as he temporarily assumes Dorothy’s gaze. The power of the pathos generated in that half line is intensified by the bounds of the recuperative rhetorical structure which surround it. This creates the most intense moment of sublimity in the poem in the articulation of the magnitude of what is lost. This negative stage is not recuperated in the service of self-expansion, and thereby retains its awe. The poem’s selfhood is “opened” (in Blakean terms), and the poet risks the uncertainty of an “expenditure without return” (in Bataille’s terms). The emotional power of the experience of the rupture of Wordsworth’s closed economy brings the reader to the brink of the terror implicit in the sublime of crisis, and that the poet attempts in vain to supersede. Despite his care in constructing a self-enclosed, self-generated system, he ends in creating an unassimilated moment. This negative power is available for future sublime moments, but the poem ends with that power unsecured. “Tintern Abbey,” then, must be admired both for its status as an aesthetic tour de force, and for the strength of candor it displays in risking the destruction of the means to that aesthetic production. Wordsworth is driven to create a system that secures everything: his moral sense, his psychological stability, his religious

beliefs, yet he has the courage to recognize the illusory nature of the totalizing aesthetic structure of the poem's argument. A few years hence, when he is able to put these doubts aside, he becomes lost in the inability to recognize the rhetorical circularity of his poetic arguments; he fails to recognize that he is within the selfhood. This phenomenon is traceable throughout his career, for example in the proprietary claims on nature that begin "Home at Grasmere," but that analysis requires a more comprehensive study than I can offer here.

Chapter Four

The Object of Art

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, like Wordsworth, faced a personal and political crisis in the aftermath of his radical participation in public debate during the 1790's. He also attempted to overcome an impasse in his political thinking by turning to poetry and the aesthetic production of social meaning. The problem he risked in this project was the same one that trapped Wordsworth: how can one internalize political questions into aesthetic strategies without becoming isolated and confined in the self? Put another way, can such a project avoid the solipsism of the Blakean selfhood? From the outset of this inward turn, he conflated political and aesthetic questions and made use of his understanding of German aesthetics to create a powerful, and intensely personal, political critique. In particular, he employed the conventions of the idealist sublime to create a vision of political liberty as a quasi-religious awakening replete with apocalyptic overtones.

This apocalyptic rhetoric is perhaps most clearly visible in "France: An Ode" where he begins the poem with a compendium of sublime moments and their effects:

Ye Clouds! that far above me float and pause,
Whose pathless march no mortal can control!
Ye Ocean-Waves! that wheresoe'er ye roll,
Yield homage only to eternal laws!
Ye Woods! that listen to the night-birds singing,
Midway the smooth and perilous slope reclined,
Save when your own imperious branches swinging,
Have made a solemn music of the wind!
Where like a man beloved of God,
Through glooms, which never woodman trod,
How oft, pursuing fancies holy,
My moonlight way o'er flowering weeds I wound,
Inspired, beyond the guess of folly,
By each rude shape and wild unconquerable sound!
O ye loud Waves! and O ye Forests high!
And O ye Clouds that far above me soared!

Thou rising Sun! thou blue rejoicing Sky!
 Yea, every thing that is and will be free!
 Bear witness for me, wheresoe'er ye be,
 With that deep worship I have still adored
 The spirit of divinest Liberty.

(1-21)⁴³

The passage revels in its sublime vocabulary. The natural scene is defined by its power beyond “mortal” “control” which, thus, both overwhelms the poet/speaker and serves as the source of his visionary expansion. In other words it lists the sublime effects available to the poet in such a landscape, but what is surprising is that at the end of the passage, where the poet names the power that so moves him, he does not call it the spirit of sublimity (which it doubtless is), but rather “the spirit of divinest Liberty.” In order to understand this conclusion, the first strategy is to read it as a metaphor. The effect of the sublime landscape on the poet is analogous to the feeling of human expansion he experiences in meditating on human freedom. In this, the poem uses a familiar trope in which revolutionary awakening is equated with both religious apocalypse and individual human revelation. This metaphoric tradition is ubiquitous in the period. Blake’s participation in the radical traditions of religious enthusiasm provided him with a source of this imagery, but even presumably rationalist texts, such as Paine’s *Rights of Man*, employed the metaphor of revolution as apocalypse. The crucial difference here is that Coleridge is not employing a metaphor. He believes that the experience of the sublime effect *is* the experience of “Liberty.” The feelings he has of awe, grandeur and self-expansion are the only experience of “Liberty” he can achieve in the particular historical moment in which he writes. As the rest of the poem makes clear, he is experiencing a political crisis following what he perceives as the betrayal of the revolution in France. In order to manage this crisis, he internalizes its terms and makes his own isolated mind the site of revelation/revolution. He commands the sublime landscape with his invocations of its renovating power, and in so doing renovates himself. He harnesses the formal power of the sublime and attempts to re-deploy it as his

⁴³ All references to “France: An Ode” will be cited in the text by line number.

new means of addressing moral, ethical and political questions. He can use the sublime to transform his isolation into a negative stage, and, thus, as a way of confronting the many crises he faces. Rather than working as a metaphor for the struggle for “Liberty” in the political realm, the self becomes the site of all meaningful political activity. This is reminiscent of Wordsworth’s withdrawal in “The Old Cumberland Beggar,” and his shift to searching for ethical meaning in the innate capacities of human beings as he observes them in nature, but, for Coleridge, his move towards internalizing these problems and questions begins with a self-conscious shift into the formal grandeur of the aesthetics of the sublime. He is saying that the feeling of sublime self-expansion is identical with the feeling of “Liberty,” and therefore his poetic production of the sublime is a political act in that it re-creates the experience of “Liberty” in the reader and in so doing expresses a model of revolutionary consciousness, revelation. The remainder of the poem makes this abundantly clear as it recalls the history of his involvement in revolutionary politics and the process by which he has reached his present conclusions. Coleridge recounts his steadfast support of the revolution despite the “patriot emotion” (34) that surrounded him once England and France were at war:

For ne’er, O Liberty! With partial aim
I dimmed thy light or damped thy holy flame;
 But blessed the paeans of delivered France,
And hung my head and wept at Britain’s name.

(39-42)

He recognized the cause of the conflict in England’s attempts at interference in France’s affairs, and is saddened but does not lose faith. He continued to hope that France could serve as an exemplar for a general revolution in social justice and, thus, represent “Liberty:”

“And soon,” said I, “shall Wisdom teach her lore
In the low huts of them that toil and groan!
And, conquering by her happiness alone,
 Shall France compel the nations to be free,
Till Love and Joy look round, and call the Earth their own.”

(59-63)

Coleridge's dream for a bloodless revolution in all of Europe based on the recognition of France's "happiness" is dealt a severe blow with the French invasion of Switzerland. He feels implicated in this literal and symbolic betrayal of the principles of "Liberty" (symbolic in the connection between Rousseau, citizen of Geneva, and the intellectual underpinnings of the revolution). He asks forgiveness for ever having "cherished [even] one thought" (70-71) for the nation that could have inflicted such "bleeding wounds" (70). The violence of his description emphasizes the strength of the blow to his confidence, and the sudden collapse of his dreams. In this state of crisis, he attempts to find reasons for France's betrayal, and it is crucial to note that Coleridge is not turning away from the principles of "Liberty," rather, France is. To characterize this poem as a statement of political apostasy is to miss its largest point: the principles of "Liberty" persist in the world even in the aftermath of the French invasion, and increase in importance as the poet struggles with his feelings of implication in the intellectual climate that appears to have spawned this betrayal. Coleridge becomes suspicious of the intellectual, rationalist, pretensions that have shown themselves to be, at best, superficial, at worst, hypocritical. The proffered solution to the crisis, analogous to Wordsworth's in "Tintern Abbey," is to re-locate "Liberty" in the poet's recognition of it as a power in nature. He admits his failure:

O Liberty! with profitless endeavor
 Have I pursued thee, many a weary hour;
 But thou nor swell'st the victor's strain, nor ever
 Didst breathe thy soul in forms of human power.

(89-92)

The problem is how to retain access to any sense of "Liberty's" power once you conclude that it is beyond human power. This problem describes exactly the terrain, both literal and intellectual, of the sublime. In the very failure of human cognition comes the recognition of "Liberty's" true scope and power. Coleridge gains access to that power through his experience of the sublime effect, self-expansion in the face of the grandeur that dwarfs him. Despite his doubts and misgivings, he can be certain that "on that sea-cliff's verge," the liminal site of the sublime landscape, he can experience the powerful and

integrating force of “Liberty,” now another name for the sublime, on an intensely personal level. He re-deploys the aesthetics of sublimity and produces the feeling of being integrated into the elemental totality of “earth, sea and air” (103). By analogy this is made equivalent to the intellectual participation that he felt in the revolutionary project, and now the site of self-recrimination and regret, but Coleridge conceals the analogy by asserting that this is the same power in each instance and that he now has access to the elemental and true source of human “Liberty” in the feeling of grandeur of the sublime effect. His faith is expressed as a penetration to his deepest “spirit” (105) of the feeling of awe, and is made possible by the intensity of the sublime effect. In internalizing the capacity for recognizing “Liberty” in this way, Coleridge sets in place the ground for increasingly severe crises of another sort: his new moral, ethical and religious ground is dependent on the intensity of feeling, but he perceives his capacity for feeling to be inadequate. His incapacity in achieving his own criteria for hope becomes the great subject of his poems, and the major determining factor, along with his religious beliefs, in developing the details of his aesthetic systems.

In October 1797, Coleridge had confessed his incapacity of feeling in a letter to his friend, and fellow radical, John Thelwall:

—I can *at times* feel strongly the beauties, you describe, in themselves, & for themselves—but more frequently *all things* appear little—all the knowledge that can be acquired, child’s play—the universe itself—what but an immense heap of *little* things?—I can contemplate nothing but parts, & parts are all *little*—!—My mind feels as if it ached to behold & know something *great*—something *one & indivisible*—and it is only in the faith of this that rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caverns give me the sense of sublimity or majesty!—But in this faith *all things* counterfeit eternity!—

(Perkins, 523, Coleridge’s emphasis)

Disintegration is the main symptom of his failure of feeling. He cannot perceive the “one & indivisible” nature of the the objects of the natural world nor his inclusion in that unity. The emphasis on seeing only parts, however, is reminiscent of Kant’s free play of the imagination as it fails in its attempt to cognize the overwhelming mass of elements that constitutes the

mathematical sublime. Like Kant, Coleridge experiences the inability to “know” and attempts to convert that failure into an aesthetic mode of self-expansion beyond cognition and the understanding (in Kant’s terms). The very desire that propels him to failure is, for Coleridge, the “faith” necessary to maintain a connection to that overwhelming sense of unity that comes, not through feeling but, through his ability to convert the scene into the aesthetic production of beauty (the harmony Thelwall values so highly) and sublimity. His incapacity becomes the aesthetic source of his “faith,” the moral and religious ground he seeks. Thus the failure of his feeling becomes a key element in the poetic rhetoric of his early poems, for example, in the insistence on his blighted childhood and his lack of the innate Wordsworthian sensibility so necessary in the production of “abundant recompense.” Over time this strategy becomes self-defeating, as the lack of emotional depth becomes an agony that somehow lacks effect, a simultaneous dullness and pain. This culminates in the bitter distinction between “seeing” and “feeling” in “Dejection: An Ode.” In addition, it becomes a growing source of antipathy towards Wordsworth as that poet naïvely, in Coleridge’s view, sets out to secure a stable source of spiritual capital in the natural world.

“This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison,” written at the same time as “Tintern Abbey,” shares a belief in the restorative powers of nature, and both poems meditate on the potential sources of such powers with an eye towards securing their transformative agency. While Wordsworth constructs a detailed pattern of substitution between himself and an external source in the natural world (“matured” into a “sober pleasure” (138-139)), Coleridge’s poem discovers a sufficient, if unstable, source in the individual’s imagination. Furthermore, Coleridge’s discovery occurs in the context of his professed incapacity (he is denied the pleasures of the walk). His gesture away from the self in his concern for Lamb creates the appearance of Bataille’s “expenditure without return,” a gesture that voluntarily ruptures the potential “closed economy” created from the feeling of being at one with the surrounding landscape. His own loss is deflected by his desire that Lamb capitalize on his experience of the landscape. The poet’s gestural sympathy becomes its own recuperative strategy as he achieves a sublime moment (of mediated divinity) and a means

of poetic/spiritual self-sufficiency in the face of his professed incapacity.

As the poem begins, Coleridge deeply feels a lost opportunity to accumulate the kind of emotional/psychological/spiritual capital Wordsworth described in "Tintern Abbey":

. . . I have lost
 Beauties and feelings, such as would have been
 Most sweet to my remembrance even when age
 Had dimm'd my eyes to blindness!

(2-5)⁴⁴

Coleridge's faith in the power of nature appears as an absolute that not even "blindness," the loss of his ability to renew his connection to it, can diminish. "Remembrance" alone can provide the poet with what he needs. Like Wordsworth, Coleridge creates a system in which the poet stores up experiences of nature to be spent at a later date, but he simply takes this system as an article of faith while Wordsworth creates a complex method of mediation and substitution to guarantee its continuation. Furthermore, while Coleridge begins the poem by creating a distinction between the actual experience of nature and its future use as spiritual capital (the structure of Wordsworthian poetics), the poem proceeds to unravel and ultimately collapse that distinction. As the poet imagines the landscape through which his friends pass, the very specificity of the imagined scene:

The roaring dell, o'erwooded, narrow, deep,
 And only speckled by the mid-day sun.
 Where its slim trunk the ash from rock to rock
 Flings arching like a bridge . . .

(10-13)

moves the poet into an experience of a scene to which he assumed he would not have access. He soon "wander(s) in gladness" (8) with his friends as he associatively moves deeper into the landscape. He creates the excitement of the walk through his use of his memory and his extension of sympathy to his

⁴⁴All references to "This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison" will be cited in the text by line number.

friends. This drift towards the original ecstatic experience of the dell differs sharply from Wordsworth's careful urban expenditure of natural moments and his intellectualized "abundant recompense." In imagining his friend's pleasure in the landscape Coleridge creates his own pleasure and landscape free of anxiety about its authenticity or sufficiency. He continues to *follow* his friends out into the broad expanse of the view opening seaward. The landscape signals his own sympathetic gesture as he wishes for Lamb's release from being "in the great City" (30), a repetition of Wordsworth's urban/rural dichotomy. An identity forms out of the physical expanse, Coleridge's imagining of it, Lamb's imagined release into it, and the poet's expansive gesture towards another. This identity combines elements that Wordsworth's poetics deem incompatible in "Tintern Abbey." There are no distinctions between actual experience, recollection, and therapeutic value (which instead are presented as simultaneous), and no supersession of immediacy is needed to secure the ultimate value of the scene. The gesture towards Lamb functions in part as a sincere wish for his friend's relief, whereas Wordsworth's gesture towards Dorothy also contains a re-inscription of the self ("remember me as"). While both poets experience the landscape vicariously through another, Coleridge's experience is a by-product of his attachment to his friend, as is Wordsworth's, but the latter is also a subtle exploitation of the other driven by the condition of loss the poet struggles to evade, the negative stage in his aesthetic system. However, this is not to say that Coleridge's poetic method is free of a similar drive towards recuperation. His recuperative strategy is different, more complex and conflicted, but nonetheless fundamental to his aesthetic production.

In the increasingly sublime imagined landscape of the poem, Coleridge describes a sublime religious moment in his apprehension of the sunset:

. . . Ah! slowly sink
 Behind the western ridge, thou glorious Sun!
 Shine in the slant beams of the sinking orb,
 Ye purple heath-flowers! richlier burn, ye clouds!
 Live in yellow light, ye distant groves!
 And kindle thou blue Ocean!

(32-37)⁴⁵

His desire for the sublime influence allows him to command the landscape as he imagines the lifting of Lamb's psychological burden: "So my friend / Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood, / Silent with swimming sense" (37-39). This profound moment does not require the substitution pattern of Wordsworth's "abundant recompense," and in fact attempts to imagine the actual and recollected versions of the scene as identical. In constructing that imaginative identity, Coleridge creates his own recuperative moment by achieving a mediated experience of divine presence (through the imagining of Lamb's perception of it and its effect) in the face of his physical absence. As "sense" fails, the sublime turn creates a moment of religious comfort and certainty that he wishes for Lamb, but achieves for himself. Things (including the self) grow "less gross than bodily" (40), and the individual's "spirit," lost in his "swimming" "gaze," becomes a part of the "Almighty Spirit" (42) veiled in the hues of sunset. The "veil" (42) provides a necessary mediation between the individual "spirit" and its "Almighty" counterpart. Coleridge's religious sensitivity necessitates this mediation as a means of evading the blasphemy of a direct apprehension of the divine (unmediated presence). The "veil" allows Coleridge to employ the power of apostrophe in the passage in order to express his desire for divine revelation. The gesture towards the divine simultaneously grows in power as the inclusive list of addressed elements grows, yet the final form of the vision is naturalized (and thus made safe) as the sunset. In this

⁴⁵ At the 1994 Coleridge Conference Anthony Harding suggested that the figure of the sunset may also include a dark vision of revolutionary violence within its more overt religious sublimity. This suggestion creates interesting textures and tensions in the poem. It supports and develops my line of argument re: that revolutionary violence constitutes a political sublime. See, for example, W.J.T. Mitchell's analysis of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in his *Iconology*, the discussion of "France: An Ode" above, and the discussion of the representation of the death of Robespierre in "The Prelude" in the previous chapter. This reading significantly ups the stakes in Coleridge's efforts to construct a mediated relation to such potentially destructive and potentially redemptive forces.

light, Lamb works as another mediating device further protecting the poet by providing a second mediated move away from the actual sublime source. The rupture which begins the poem (the crisis of not being able to participate) is capitalized, through the fiction of Lamb's perception of the sunset and the figure of the "veil," into a moment of sublimity. The mediation of presence evades the possibility of the greater rupture of a full-blown Kantian negative stage, and thus evades the religious crisis implicit in the self-sufficiency of the Kantian sublime (the supersession of the necessity of a religious source).

In the final verse paragraph, Coleridge makes explicit an identity between his imagined experience of the sublime moment, his imagination of his friend's *actual* experience of it, and his past experience of it:

. . . A delight
Comes sudden on my heart, and I am glad
As I myself were there!

(43-45)

He describes himself "struck with deep joy" (38), the sublime influence he had wished for Lamb. His desire for his friend's ease through the healing power of the landscape, thus leads the poet to an analogous experience of that power. Again, this is completely unlike Wordsworth's poem, in which any expenditure of the stored landscape must be different in kind, and any imagined version must be earned and constructed out of the loss of immediacy suffered over time. Coleridge rejects the inevitability of such loss, and its implicit status as a Kantian negative stage, and, through his sympathy and powers of association, recuperates the primary effect of the sublime through a mediated poetic engagement with it and simultaneous imaginative making of it.

Coleridge's outward gesture towards Lamb creates another form of recuperation as well. Through his charity shown to his friend, the poet creates the primary conditions for the construction of the Christian self. This is treacherous terrain in that the feeling and expression of Christian love must come from a completely self-disinterested place within the self. Yet that gesture simultaneously constructs the greatest possible self in Christian terms. The risk then is a collapse into an exploitive relation to otherness, as a

means of Christian self-aggrandizement (religious recuperation), through the gesture of self-sacrifice. The needs of the physical self are sacrificed in the creation of the spiritual self. In such a system, Coleridge risks descending into the realm of religious hypocrisy and becoming the equivalent of the church-goer who puts money in the poor box on Sundays and absolves himself from guilt or from acting to change the social conditions that create poverty—the psycho/social recuperation of the hypocrite. This is the same danger faced by Blake’s Milton in the “annihilation of the selfhood,” but in that case the nature of Blake’s poetics ensures that vision is a “moment” created out of a radically unstable immanent relation to the divine, and therefore, simultaneously, produces a critique of transcendence, and thus of the appetite for supersession and transcendence that haunts Coleridge’s work.

In his chapter on the conversation poems and “Tintern Abbey” in *Coleridge and Wordsworth: A Lyrical Dialogue*, Paul Magnuson focuses on the crisis created by Coleridge’s inability to join in the walk and his supersession of that crisis (as have I to this point), but he overlooks the penultimate section of the poem in which the poet discovers a kind of self-sufficiency in the “humble” landscape of the bower. The natural sublimity of the roaring dell, the broad expanse, and the sunset are found to be ultimately unnecessary in the creation of the sublime effect. Coleridge, following his powerful imaginative engagement in the landscape outside the confines of his cottage grounds, turns his mediated gaze to a direct apprehension of his seemingly humble surroundings and draws joy from the beauty of their details:

. . . I watch'd
 Some broad and sunny leaf, and lov'd to see
 The shadow of the leaf and stem above
 Dappling in sunshine! And that walnut-tree
 Was richly ting'd, and a deep radiance lay
 Full on the ancient ivy, which usurps
 Those fronting elms, and now, with blackest mass
 Makes their dark branches gleam a lighter hue
 Through the late twilight: and though now the bat
 Wheels silent by, and not a swallow twitters,
 Yet still the solitary humble-bee
 Sings in the bean-flower!

(48-59)

In the specificity of his contemplation, he becomes like the “humble-bee,” able to extract joy from the hush at the closing moments of the day through his concentration of purpose, through his faith (which is equivalent to his aesthetic system as the letter to Thelwall makes clear). In the humbleness of his relation he maintains and protects his devout concerns, yet simultaneously insists that this humble relation achieves the same “richly ting’d” hues as the sublime sunset. In this particular beauty is the promise of the glory and presence of the religious sublime. His gaze connects him directly into this process, and by couching his perception in the aesthetics of beauty (perceived harmony) he again evades a dangerous attachment to the uncognizable grandeur of the sublime which necessitated his earlier mediation. Coleridge thus collapses the Burkean distinction between the beautiful and the sublime and discovers the primary recuperative power of “joy” in both formerly distinct realms. In this discovery (the sufficiency of the bower as a natural source), Coleridge realizes that the quality of the poet’s contemplation creates the quality of the moment:

. . . Nature ne’er deserts the wise and pure;
 No plot so narrow, be but Nature there,
 No waste so vacant, but may well employ
 Each faculty and sense, and keep the heart
 Awake to Love and Beauty!

(60-64)

Wordsworth’s city/nature dichotomy is erased, and with it any anxiety about

creating an aesthetic system in which nature can be recovered, stored and spent to ward off melancholy. In the famous shared lines of the poems it is striking to realize that Wordsworth's emphasis on "Nature" as the ultimate source guiding "the heart that loved her" (line 123) is reversed by Coleridge's emphasis on "the wise and pure" condition of that heart. By shifting the ultimate source of the sublime experience inside the poet's imagination (the quality of the landscape is no longer an issue), Coleridge creates a poetry of self-sufficiency which is also unstable in its reliance on the transitoriness of human feeling. Wordsworth would find this radical instability intolerable. He would be unable to manage the anxiety created by the possible loss of his poetic powers if he failed to secure them through the means of sacrificial substitution. Coleridge's largely benign use of Lamb as a mediating other is unstable, as it depends on the quality of the poetic imagination to affect its power (the very realm Wordsworth desperately seeks to protect). The direct use of Dorothy relieves that anxiety by superseding his own experience of loss through the effort to stabilize his source of spiritual capital (in that instance her). Equally, the similarity, in kind, between Coleridge's imagining the power of the landscape and directly perceiving the power of the humble bower, threatens Wordsworth by suggesting that the conversion of his own lost immediacy with the landscape is nothing more than a rhetorical subterfuge vainly attempting to elide that loss by internalizing all the unstable variables into the "closed economy" of "abundant recompense" (the egotistical sublime). Indeed, that is the very recognition that ruptures the air of rhetorical certainty in the poem's final section. Wordsworth's struggle over whether to admit the limits of his proffered solution, or to re-experience, through Dorothy, the former intensity of feeling, the importance of which he now disclaims, creates the powerful tension and pathos that marks the poem's greatness as a record of the complexity of the human condition. On the other hand, in the difficult crisis Coleridge's poem describes, he discovers the ability to create a mediated negative method that does not depend on supersession in order to achieve its recuperative strength, and also discovers the sublime potential of everyday perception in the absence of an overtly sublime source. In this condition of absence he finds the means safely (in religious terms) to produce exquisite and subtle aesthetic moments:

'Tis well to be bereft of promis'd good,
 That we may lift the soul, and contemplate
 With lively joys the joys we cannot share.

(65-67)

Loss does not necessitate the immediate construction of a closed economy, but rather becomes an occasion for further aesthetic experiences in the details, first, of the lost realm, and then of the specific glories of whatever natural world he presently inhabits. The relationship of these two realms prefigures the distinction in "degree," not "kind," of the primary and secondary imaginations of Chapter 13 of *Biographia Literaria*, and follows from the same religious concern to evade a blasphemous relation to the primary imagination that we have seen in his double mediation (the "veil" and Lamb). The strategic deflation at the end of "The Eolian Harp" is another version of this religious evasion. Wordsworth's system is designed to make it impossible for him to be "bereft of promis'd good," and therefore, ironically, he also loses the ability to participate in the distinctively Coleridgean sublime of the humble bower. He presumes to supersede this kind of intense meditation on specific objects of nature as a mere "coarser pleasure," and, yet, he cannot finally bring himself to forget their past intensity.

Rhetorically, the desire driving Coleridge's contemplation is belatedly for the poet's own ease (he discovers its value after the fact). An outward-directed concern for the other thus enables the poet's aesthetic and spiritual achievements. In his reading of "Frost at Midnight," Magnuson locates the source of this dependence on others in the terrible causality of Coleridge's disabling childhood experiences in "the great City pent." The poet's innate sensibility is unequal to his task, and thus he requires another person in order to vicariously experience sensations of the quality necessary to his poetic goals. Magnuson sees this as the nexus of the debate between "Tintern Abbey" and the conversation poems. Wordsworth argues that childhood sensibility must be superseded in order to become a poet, and attempts to have it both ways by securing a childhood source in Dorothy. In "Frost at Midnight," Coleridge's incapacity causes him to use the infant Hartley as a potential vicarious source by guaranteeing him a childhood of natural

sensibility (Wordsworth's childhood). The frost's "secret ministry," it is wished, will not be unknowable for the son. Yet, despite this rhetoric of incapacity, Coleridge uses Hartley as a mediating device, similar to his use of Lamb in the "Lime-Tree Bower" poem, and in the end overcomes the unknowable in his perception of the formal stability and perfection of the icicles "hung up" out of the flux of time. This moment, following on his explicit wish for an overtly religious sublime for Hartley, repeats the fundamental relation of degrees of sublimity found in the other poem. The humble moments of seeing into "the life of things" (in Wordsworth's phrase) constitute a Coleridgean recuperation made possible through first engaging in a negative (mediated) method of meditating on the nature and meaning of the absence of religious presence he suffers, only to discover that presence in the process. "This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison" ends with the achievement of such a humble sublime moment. The flight of the "last rook" imaginatively connects him to Lamb whom he imagines watching (receiving) the same flight, and which thus further connects them both in the sublime power of the "dilated glory" of the sun into which they devoutly squint. This flight thus inscribes a recuperative "closed economy" of sublime effectivity that Wordsworth can only envy. His, Wordsworth's, own substitution pattern is ultimately ruptured by the pathos generated by the very recollection of immediacy he attempts to exploit. His loss shatters the selfhood of his poetic rhetoric.

The argument about the ultimate source of poetic art that percolates in the exchange between "Tintern Abbey" and "This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison," becomes an increasingly important aesthetic divide between the two poets. With his self-confessed poverty of natural sensibility (the result of his blighted "urban" childhood), Coleridge must internalize his poetic source in the mind's ability to intellectually transform itself, rather than rely on an aesthetic transformation of a particular sublime landscape. The idea of an empirical source in nature must be discounted in order to overcome his natural infirmity, and that infirmity, in turn, becomes the negative foundation of his "faith" and aesthetic program. On the other hand, Wordsworth's poetic self-creation depends entirely on the interval between his perception of nature and his systematic supersession of that perception in the production of "abundant

recompense.” While the aesthetic goal of self-creation (in philosophical, psychological and religious terms) remains constant in both poets, the fundamental split in the means to that end continues to destabilize their relationship.⁴⁶ The most succinct expression of their aesthetic incompatibility comes in Coleridge’s response to the first four stanzas of what was to become the Immortality Ode: “. . . we receive but what we give, / And in our life alone does Nature live” (47-48). These lines, from “Dejection: An Ode,” discount Wordsworth’s central anxiety—his loss of a productive relation to the natural world. His poetic faith is predicated on the restorative powers of nature; “The Prelude” and “Tintern Abbey” depend entirely on the story of the recovery of this gift through Dorothy’s mediation, and without it the egotistical sublime has no basis—no material to transform into the “poet.” Coleridge’s couplet proclaims that that system is a fiction, and insists on the agony of recognizing the failure the fiction attempts to evade. Wordsworth’s external source is exposed as a necessary construct of his poetic imagination—a part of his aesthetic superstructure. At best, nature is a victim of exploitation in the Wordsworthian economy. The final seven stanzas of Wordsworth’s Immortality Ode reflect the aesthetic confusion created by this poetic exchange. He desperately attempts to stabilize an external source for his poetry by trying on different models, none of which ultimately sustain him.⁴⁷

Exposing the central subterfuge nature plays in Wordsworthian poetics becomes an explicit concern for Coleridge when he sets about establishing aesthetic criteria in *Biographia Literaria*. His critiques of Wordsworth’s poetry and theorizing (in Wordsworth’s various Prefaces) all participate in demystifying the use of nature in the service of purely intellectual ends. I might critique Wordsworth for his exploitation of otherness in his aesthetic fictions on ethical grounds, but Coleridge would dismiss otherness itself as a

⁴⁶This argument follows the lead of Paul Magnuson in his watershed study of the agonistic nature of their poetic dialogue, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: A Lyrical Dialogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

⁴⁷The creation of the myth of our prior existence, for example, attempts to create a potential source beyond the scope of Coleridge’s critique by locating it in a forgotten portion of the self. This characteristic self-division makes another self as a source of inspiration. The celebrated myth of childhood follows from this, not logically, but, as a kind of necessary improvisation. Not surprisingly Coleridge saved some of his most withering sarcasm in *Biographia Literaria* for this desperate invention of the ideal poet/child.

fiction of the self, an interior fiction of the mind. I will discuss this point, and its potential pitfalls for Coleridge, more fully when I discuss Chapter 12 of *Biographia Literaria*. Any trace of the actual external world in Wordsworth's poems thus becomes a fault or a naïve folly. Coleridge considers Wordsworth's true poetic art to lie in the intellectual purification of these rough moments. However, he suggests not supersession as the means to this end (Wordsworth's clear aesthetic structure), but editorial exclusion. When, in Chapter 22, Coleridge argues against the use of common speech and common events, he is being disingenuous about Wordsworth's poetry. The interval between the common and the sublime is necessary to the production of Wordsworth's poetic art, and indeed to his mental well-being given his habit of total investment in his current system. The first "defect" of Wordsworth's poetry that Coleridge names is "Inconstancy" (22, 97)⁴⁸ by which he means any shift from a *high* style to a *low* style. Coleridge complains that this was the result of an "experiment we will suppose to have failed" (22, 96). This experiment is, of course, Wordsworth's poetic role in *The Lyrical Ballads* and more specifically the insistence in the "Preface" to the second edition on the centrality of the "language really used by men"⁴⁹ (321) in creating a new poetry free from the artifice of neoclassicism. Coleridge ignored Wordsworth's explicit intention of using common material from rustic life as the *basis* of poetic art. An example he presents to demonstrate the "inconstancy" of Wordsworth's style is telling in this regard:

"Yes, proof was plain that since the day
On which the traveller thus had died,
The dog had watched about the spot,
Or by his master's side
How nourish'd there through such long time
He knows, who gave that love sublime,
And gave that strength of feeling, great
Above all human estimate!"

(22, 96, Coleridge's emphasis)

⁴⁸References to *Biographia Literaria* are from the standard two volume edition by J. Shawcross (London: Oxford University Press, 1907) and are cited by chapter and page number.

⁴⁹References to the Preface are from the final published version of 1850, reprinted in Perkins, and will be cited by page number.

By taking the last four lines as evidence that “he could not so entirely suppress the force and grandeur of his mind” (22, 96), Coleridge willfully obscures the very process of Wordsworthian aesthetics. The transformation of that common scene of the dog’s devotion into evidence of God’s love obviously cannot occur without the humble source which is ultimately superseded by divine vision. As I have argued above, this is the basic structure of Wordsworthian poetics and the very form of “The Prelude.” When Coleridge complains that readers experience this “defect” when their “feelings are alternately startled by anticlimax and hyperclimax” (22, 98), he aptly describes the basic pattern of “The Prelude,” the feeling of deflation and crisis superseded by the feelings of expansion, self-aggrandizement and finally vision. In brief then, it is difficult to see how Coleridge expects Wordsworth to experience the grandeur and judgement of the ominous looming mountain, (in the famous childhood “spot of time”) if he does not first steal the boat.

The second “defect,” “matter-of-factness,” like the first strikes at the very heart of Wordsworth’s two-part method. Supersession of “matter-of-factness,” or the discovery of the sublime in the common, characterizes Wordsworth’s poetry more than any other single feature. Coleridge centers his discussion on the use of common human subjects to communicate moral truth and to construct aesthetic grandeur. While he repeats here, in different terms, his attack on Wordsworth’s use of “rustic life” (17, 30) that he mounted in Chapter 17, he goes much further than an effort to “purify” the poetry from the taint of “real rustics.” There he had attempted to show how the grandeur of a figure like Michael was achieved because he was *not* described as a real rustic. He was an “imitation” not a “copy”⁵⁰ (17, 30). In Chapter 22 he goes beyond this distinction (that succinctly clarifies Wordsworth’s exploitation of rural peasants in producing poetic art), by now claiming that concern for such rustics crosses formal bounds between philosophy and art:

It seems indeed, to destroy the main fundamental distinction, not only between a poem and prose, but even between philosophy and art,

⁵⁰The “imitation” / “copy” distinction has religious implications that I will discuss in the context of Chapters 12 and 13 of the *Biographia*. The most succinct expression of the distinction is in *On Poesy or Art* (Perkins, 608-609).

inasmuch as it proposes *truth* for its immediate object, instead of *pleasure*.⁵¹

(22, 104, Coleridge's emphasis)

This marks Coleridge's ultimate idealist turn. Not only must he "purify" Wordsworth's poetry of the mistaken use of low diction and subjects (c.f. his attack on "The Idiot Boy" in Chapter 17), he must also "purify" it from a potential fall into moral philosophy and perhaps even worse—politics. "Michael" can be shown to be a poem of grandeur produced by "imitation" but this distinction goes beyond that to completely elide its mistaken attempts at political engagement. Wordsworth's explicit efforts to represent the problems of landlessness, absentee landlords, etc. and his subsequent letter to Fox in support of these causes can only be understood as "defects" in the rarified atmosphere of Coleridge's aesthetic extremism.⁵²

Given that Coleridge's efforts to "purify" Wordsworth's poetry largely collapse many of that poet's deepest concerns, and more importantly collapse the very means by which the poems come into being, the discussions in *Biographia Literaria* must be seen, in part, as instances of intellectual and psychological violence. Coleridge's almost complete dismissal of the central Wordsworthian fiction, a poetic source in nature, and his perverse demand for the sublime parts purged of the common parts that enabled their creation, sets up a series of psychological and aesthetic risks for him as well. This disagreement had existed at least since "This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison," and the discovery of a sufficient source for the sublime in the mind's contemplation of even the most humble scene. But, by codifying this side of the argument as part of the basis for determining the aesthetic categories of verbal art, Coleridge establishes the highest possible stakes for this ongoing poetic dialogue. The pitfalls in this for Coleridge exist in the risky terrain

⁵¹It is difficult to imagine a distinction (he would call it a negation) more likely to enrage William Blake.

⁵²It is difficult to argue with Coleridge's broadest point that Wordsworth is not describing "rustics," but rather idealized versions of these figures. Jerome McGann points out, however, that the level of exploitation involved in such portraits changes over the course of the career. He traces a pattern of increasing abstractness in the figures from the naturalism of "Michael" to the anonymity of the vagrants in "Tintern Abbey" to the clichéd pastoral figures in the Immortality Ode.

between his idealist project of aesthetic self-creation (the codification of his methods and beliefs, and the subjugation and appropriation of Wordsworth) and his religious beliefs and sensitivities. He set out to systematize the internal source of poetic creation in his expropriation of Schelling⁵³ in Chapter 12. As Coleridge works through the ten theses of the chapter, he systematically makes the world of objects and objective reasoning functions of the subject. Being supersedes knowing as the first principle of human understanding:

It is asserted only, that the act of self-consciousness is for *us* the source and principle of all *our* possible knowledge.

(12, 186, Thesis X)

Once this move to internalize all knowing (the philosophical equivalent of his attack on Wordsworth's natural source) is complete, Coleridge reverses the terms of his philosophical discussion:

For to us, self-consciousness is not a kind of *being*, but a kind of *knowing*, and that too the highest and farthest that exists for *us* .

(12, 187, X)

This reversal of terms is not a contradiction, but rather a final collapse of the very categories of the being/knowing distinction. Once knowing and being become modes of consciousness Coleridge can construct his final unity (patiently derived from the multitude of philosophical categories):

Thus the true system of natural philosophy places the sole reality of things in an ABSOLUTE, which is at once *causa sui et effectus*, . . . —in the absolute identity of subject and object, which it calls nature, and which in its highest power is nothing else than self-conscious will or intelligence.

(12, 187, X)

⁵³The important question is not whether he is guilty of plagiarism, but rather what pressures drove the composition of the work that made such an unattributed borrowing necessary. The question of attribution is complicated by Coleridge's earlier inclusion of a brief passage on his "Obligations to Schelling," Chapter 9, 161. Raimonda Modiano has suggested that Coleridge felt pressure to secure his reputation as a critic in the wake of Wordsworth's somewhat garbled and unauthorized version of Coleridge's poetic ideas in the 1815 Preface to Wordsworth's poems.

By granting the “self-conscious will or intelligence” the “highest power” in the creation of such absolute unities, Coleridge places himself on treacherous theological ground. If objective knowledge, self-creation, and (most important in this context) aesthetic creation are ultimately functions of “self-consciousness,” then the necessity of a god-term has been rendered superfluous by the radical autonomy of the mind as the very site of absolute unity. It is from this “fullness of the *human* intelligence” (12, 188) that Coleridge proposes to “deduce . . . a faculty, the generation, agency, and application of which form the contents of the ensuing chapter” (12, 188)—the Imagination. However, this deduction never occurs. Instead he turns his theorizing to identifying a confusion in Wordsworth’s aesthetic theory based on the Imagination/Fancy distinction he is about to make in Chapter 13. In showing that Wordsworth confuses the essentially secondary function of the Fancy to assemble and form associations between objects in the perceptual world (a potential recognition of an external source for poetic inspiration), and the constitutive shaping function of the Imagination, Coleridge further marginalizes Wordsworth’s poetics in comparison to any *proper* understanding of poetic creation.

In place of the promised deduction, which he commences by continuing to paraphrase Schelling (who in turn is working from Kant), Chapter 13 abruptly discontinues its idealist project and presents a self-penned *letter from a friend*.⁵⁴ The letter brings to an end a line of reasoning that would deduce a theory of the Imagination radically independent of any reliance on objects and utterly autonomous. The interjection of God into Schelling’s formulation would be an unnecessary addendum bordering on absurdity. This self-created (through the pressure to create an aesthetic system) religious cul-de-sac forms the immediate context for the famous definitions of the Coleridgean Imagination, and, as such, partly determines the structure of his formulations. The division into the Primary and Secondary Imaginations differing only in “degree” not “kind” (13, 202), allows Coleridge another “veil” analogous to his

⁵⁴I am indebted to David Baulch for drawing my attention to the various dynamics of the interposed letter. His discussion of these matters appears in an as yet unpublished essay.

use of Lamb as a mediating step away from the sublime source, or of his use of the image of the sunset as a *naturally* mediated vision of the sublime. The Secondary Imagination employs all the “esemplastic power” (13, 195) he sets out to secure for the poet while evading any blasphemous overreaching or attachment to a quasi-Kantian sublime of crisis.

While evading a full-blown Kantian negative stage, and avoiding a similar crisis by breaking off his use of Schelling, Coleridge still creates an idealist version of the sublime. The aesthetic mode of production is completely internalized through the use of Schelling’s construction of the primacy of Subjective knowledge, the insistence that the Secondary Imagination need not differ in “kind” from the Primary, and in the further distinction between an “imitation” and a “copy.” The “imitation” begins with a part, or fragment, of the originary source in the Primary, but does not attempt a dangerous mimetic relation to that source. The “copy” must bear a blasphemous relation to the divine, and furthermore, in the case of the sublime, would create a situation akin to the exhaustion of the Kantian free-play of the imagination—the negative stage of the sublime of crisis. Raimonda Modiano succinctly notes Coleridge’s reserve in borrowing from such idealist theories:

Coleridge’s unwillingness to go the way of so many eighteenth-century theorists and characterize the culminating intensity of sublime self-consciousness as a kind of apotheosis, an exhilarating sense of the mind’s quasi-divine power and capacity, is related to his religious sensitivity and his religious shading he gives the sublime.⁵⁵

His religious refinement of idealist aesthetics is clearly seen in an example Modiano presents from an unpublished fragment on the subject.⁵⁶ In this work Coleridge makes a distinction between the beautiful and the sublime based on “finding” or “attributing.” This follows the Kantian model in characterizing the beautiful as the harmony *found* through the free-play of the understanding operating under the auspices of the imagination, and reserving the active “attributing” mind, the mind moved in the Kantian sublime turn, for an

⁵⁵Coleridge *and the Concept of Nature*, (London: Macmillan, 1985), 135.

⁵⁶“Unpublished Fragments on Aesthetics,” ed. T.M. Raysor in *Studies in Philology*, 22 (1925), 532.

aesthetic of the sublime. This recalls the further distinction between Imagination and Fancy that concludes Chapter 13, and suggests Coleridgean Imagination is a mode suitable for the apprehension and production of the sublime, while Fancy is a lower aesthetic mode that must be satisfied with the apprehension and production of beauty. Seen in this light, Coleridge's attack on Wordsworth's "confusion" of these two modes at the outset of Chapter 13 asserts that the very poetic capacity for sublimity is eroded and compromised by his colleague's aesthetic naïveté. The example presented in the unpublished fragment further clarifies these aesthetic refinements. Coleridge gives the single example of the "circle" to illustrate both aesthetic modes. This appears to violate Kantian method by mixing the two aesthetics. The beautiful should derive from the harmony of the imagination with the concepts of the understanding in the subjective purposiveness of the beautiful (to use Kantian terms). How can the same object, "the circle," also excite the sublime? Coleridge observes the object anew and instead of "finding" beauty, he "attributes" the idea "eternity" to it and thus effects a move to the sublime. This move away from the sensual object and into the mind, and away from mental satisfaction in/with the object's form, demonstrates Coleridge's move in aesthetic modes from Fancy to Imagination even as it demonstrates the Kantian move from the cognitive processes of the understanding to the uncognizable realm of the a priori ideas of the reason. This re-emphasis on an aesthetic mode and away from the specific object (the Kantian understanding is both satisfied and exhausted by "the circle") creates for Coleridge a version of the poetic symbol based on sublime transport (the production of "eternity" in this case), yet insulated from the religious dangers implicit in the Kantian formulation. By looking back to "This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison" and the withdrawal from the necessity of an overtly sublime field of objects into the sufficiency of the bower, we can see that this refinement of idealist aesthetics is part of an evolution in Coleridge's poetic art. Furthermore, the purpose of making aesthetic attachments to objects shifts away from discovering the structure of those objects, and even away from the mind's operations in achieving those attachments, to the experience of the sublime effect itself. He began his poetic career by attempting to secure that effect (in aesthetic, personal and political terms), and his complex analysis of the relations of

subject to objects is a testament to his continuing faith in the significance of that experience. Despite Coleridge's religious sensitivities, self-aggrandizement through aesthetic means increasingly appears to be the *raison d'être* of his poetic theorizing. But this is deceiving. Self-aggrandizement pales in significance in relation to the complex constitution of a negative stage that both allows sublime transport, and prevents blasphemous attachments to sublime objects. That Coleridge succeeds in this apparently impossible task (in logical terms), is a monument to his improvisational genius. By systematically eliding Kantian crises he can philosophically and theologically protect himself from blasphemy (the danger of aesthetic crises becoming crises of faith), and at the same time preserve access to a radical power of self-creation in the very metaphoricity of language.

Tim Fulford pushes this argument further in arguing that Coleridge's development of figurative language constitutes a critique of Kantian philosophy.⁵⁷ His argument centers on Coleridge's need to refute the Kantian inaccessibility of the ultimate object of reason, and break down the allegedly unbridgeable gulf between the reason and the understanding. In my discussion to this point, this desire is most clearly seen in Coleridge's insistence that the Primary and Secondary Imaginations differ in "degree" not "kind," and in his theory of the symbol. This provides access to the Primary (analogous to Kant's reason) through the use of "imitation" while avoiding the blasphemy or crisis implicit in the "copy" (a successful "copy" is blasphemous, a failed "copy" is a Kantian crisis). However, despite his suspicion of the problematic structures of knowledge developed in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Coleridge ultimately shared common aesthetic goals with Kant in the theorizing of the sublime. It is difficult to see him as anti-Kantian in the context of *The Critique of Judgement*. In the third critique Kant explored the same limit of the understanding that concerned Coleridge. In "The Analytic of the Sublime" the moment of the failure of the imagination that occurs with the exhaustion of the concepts of the understanding paradoxically discovers a supersensible destination in the very ability to conceive of that failure. The magnitude of the crisis turns and

⁵⁷Coleridge's *Figurative Language* (London: Macmillan, 1991). Future references to this work will be cited in the text by page number.

becomes the exact magnitude of self-expansion. What Coleridge evades in the relation between the Primary and Secondary Imaginations is not the self-expansion of access to the Primary and its ultimately divine origin, but the use of a potentially dangerous crisis to bring such access into being. Fulford's argument is addressed specifically to the first critique and its conclusions about the uncognizability of God. He brilliantly recovers Coleridge's use of etymology to carry on his arguments with Kant's conclusions at the level of language itself:

Kant's conceptual arguments might show that attempts to know non-sensible objects, such as God, being and good, were mutually contradictory, but the words in which these arguments were put reconciled those contradictions in their derivation and structure. The Greek word for 'make love' would disprove Kant's emphasis on the performance of duty as the only intimation of God, since its derivation showed the mental necessity to see love as an *a priori* unity of self and other.

(Fulford, 107)

While this line of speculation is a brilliantly creative response to the conceptual gulf of the first critique, in the context of "The Analytic of the Sublime" it cannot be called anti-Kantian. Rather it provides an example of a kind of verbal free-play that cannot find satisfaction in an empiricist theory of etymology,⁵⁸ and thus points to a supersensible origin it terms God. The abandonment of empiricist notions of language is an affirmation not a crisis, but as in Kant's carefully staged crisis the result is evidence of a supersensible destination (whether it is employed as evidence of God or a transcendent humanism is up to the aesthetician), and the effect on the individual is identical—self-aggrandizement.

Coleridge began his retreat into the self (and his philosophical formulations represent the most complex version of a Blakean selfhood I have ever encountered) with the sincere wish and provisional belief that he could recognize, in his response to the grandeur of the natural world, not only the

⁵⁸Fulford suggests that this process was, in part, a response to Coleridge's earlier call to Godwin to "philosophize Horne Tooke," (20-21 and 141)—an aesthetic appropriation of empiricist etymology.

presence of the divine (his religious sublime), but also the human capacity for intellectual and spiritual growth that had been the foundation of his radical political beliefs. "France: An Ode" makes it clear that this strategy was not intended as a repudiation of his earlier views, but, rather as a new means of discovering proofs of their existence in the very fabric of human consciousness, in our ability to feel the renovating power of the sublime scene. This strategy became a retreat through the successive crises of his belief in the inadequacy of his emotional responses, his need to protect himself from blasphemy by distancing himself from the rhetorical achievements of his poems (isolation through mediation), and through subsequent political and personal events. The political and the personal become difficult to distinguish in the early years of the nineteenth century as he attempts to get ahead in life. Coleridge actively re-contextualized his earlier work, usually with an eye towards denying his radical past. For example, he reprinted his Bristol lectures of 1795 in *The Friend* in 1812 with the intention of proving he had never been a Jacobin. His revolutionary beliefs had been eccentric, derived as they were from his radical Unitarian background at Cambridge, but his reprinting of non-Jacobin views was disingenuous as a repudiation of political radicalism seeing, for example, he had been easily convinced by arguments for the necessity of regicide in France. His political apostasy was a program of personal rehabilitation, and it is difficult to know whether it was a symptom of his increasing emotional and spiritual isolation or vice versa. He began by denying the distinction between ethical and aesthetic questions, and ended in vast philosophical formulations dividing the two realms by their separate objects: art and beauty, philosophy and truth. This is the Romantic ideology that it has become fashionable to decry as reactionary, elitist, etc. I have tried to demonstrate that the current conclusion, in some critical circles, that all aesthetic criteria for art are tarred with this brush is a spectacular example of partial knowledge. Not only are Coleridge's conservative formulations only one of a large range of what we can call Romantic aesthetics, but even his formulations began in a desire to address the difficult political questions confronting him. Furthermore, taken as a various whole, Romantic aesthetics contain the desire towards engaging, and in the case of Blake the means to directly engage in, ethical and political problems.

Chapter Five

Shelley and the Tropological Sublime

The poet that best represents the powerful influence of Coleridgean aesthetics, and the drive to resist them, is Percy Shelley. Shelley deliberately sets out to interrogate the structure of the Coleridgean sublime; he is simultaneously drawn to its power and suspicious of its self-aggrandizement. In the letter to Thelwall (discussed above), Coleridge detailed a crisis where he was unable to respond to “things.” His lack of innate, Wordsworthian, sensibility made it impossible to experience the sublime in the “things” of the external world. In place of the ability to feel such experiences, he created an aesthetic mode of superseding his failure and converting it into an instance of intellectual will. He attacked the *littleness* of things, and *thingness* itself, and made this perceived lack of feeling foundational in his poetics as the negative stage in personal sublime transport. That he began by integrating the perception of political justice in this revelatory mode was eventually lost, but the structure itself, in either positive or negative manifestations persisted throughout his poetic career. The tension between feeling and thinking was structured as a sublime drama, and his religious faith (the desire for “something *one & indivisible*”) self-consciously replaced “things” (“in themselves & for themselves”). He was left with an intellectual model of religious transport--God as a function of the mind. His intellectual pantheism, as suggested by the letter, was, from the beginning, a default position necessitated by a lack and transformed into an intellectual apotheosis--transcendence as consolation. In this context, Coleridge’s spirited attack in the *Biographia Literaria* on the *thingness* of nature in Wordsworth’s poems (as self-deluded subterfuge) makes perfect psychological sense. It is both intellectual isolation and self-aggrandizement as a mark of faith that I want to take up in relation to Shelley’s “Mont Blanc.” Shelley recognizes the power in the sublime landscape, and is tempted to recuperate that power, as Coleridge would in the period of “France: An Ode,” into faith in the possibility of human freedom in light of the profound smallness of human products in relation to the

grandeur of the mountain. For Shelley, this illuminated the inadequacy of human institutions and presented a potential source of revolutionary power. In the poem he struggled with the temptation to exploit this power, to make a Shelleyan political sublime, and the ethical unease he felt in such exploitations. In order to resist recuperation in the poem, he, essentially, must resist Coleridge. Shelley's struggle, as we will see, is self-conscious and has Coleridge's "Hymn Before Sun-Rise in the Vale of Chamouni" in mind.

Coleridge's "Hymn" is a conventional representation of the religious sublime, a poetic commonplace of the English grand tour. It has been controversial ever since De Quincy exposed it as a partial plagiarism of a poem by Frederike Brun. Norman Fruman made much of this in his (celebrated or notorious, depending on your point of view) attack on Coleridge's character.⁵⁹ While Fruman uncovers interesting psychological insights in Coleridge's evasiveness about the poem's sources and original conception, he does little to illuminate the investment in the aesthetics of the poem that so moves Coleridge that he takes this extreme and questionable step. The poem is not Brun's; his additions make it completely his own. So why not simply draw attention to the original in his introduction? The introduction, of course, is the clearer case of plagiarism, a virtual translation of Brun's introduction. Coleridge endorses her version of the religious significance of sublime landscape and takes it as his own. The more interesting possibility, for my purposes, is that Coleridge had no need for the actual landscape in his poetic method, from as early as "This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison," and therefore the "Hymn" points to the fact that Brun's verbal landscape was a perfectly sufficient source, especially given that he could not have meaningfully *felt* the experience of the Alps in any case. The supposed scandal of his having not visited the Vale of Chamouni, can be recast as a quintessential Coleridgean moment where the source and aesthetic production of art are neatly internalized as purely intellectual events, free of the disappointing confusion of natural objects. Working from a representation allows Coleridge to concentrate on the aesthetic effect of Brun's poem and not worry about his own lack of sensibility

⁵⁹ Norman Fruman, *Coleridge: The Damaged Archangel* (New York: George Braziller, 1971), 26-30.

in relation to the landscape. It is ironic then that in Coleridge/Brun's introduction to the poem, he declares:

Indeed, the whole vale, its every light, its every sound, must needs impress every mind not utterly callous with the thought--Who *would* be, who *could* be an Atheist in this valley of wonders!

(Perkins, 434)

His pious declaration further highlights the depth of his personal crisis, in that it is precisely his callousness towards the natural sublime that torments him. However, the irony of Coleridge having not been in the landscape that he praises is not my focus here. Percy Shelley's mind is indeed "not utterly callous with the thought" in the sublime landscape he also seeks, and, yet, he sets out with the expressed purpose of refuting Coleridge's assertion that it would be impossible to be an Atheist in that landscape. Shelley signs the registry at the hotel, "Percy Shelley, Atheist," and sets out for his confrontation with the power of the mountain.⁶⁰

Shelley's "Mont Blanc" describes the poet's relationship to the sublime landscape in terms that are easily recognizable in the context of Coleridgean or Kantian aesthetics:

Dizzy Ravine! And when I gaze on thee
I seem as in a trance sublime and strange
To muse on my own separate fantasy,
My own, my human mind, which passively
Now renders and receives fast influencings,
Holding an unremitting interchange
With the clear universe of things around.⁶¹

He describes the feeling of being overwhelmed by the sublime influence

⁶⁰ The fact that Shelley, despite his radicalism, is following the course of the typical English grand tour is interesting for two reasons. First, it confirms the status of Coleridge's "Hymn" as a poetic equivalent to a guidebook to the picturesque and sublime aspects to be consumed by the discerning tourist. Second, it demonstrates Shelley's recklessness in publically announcing his Atheism in a forum where the traffic of English gentry was high. Most English guests would read the register to see which of their countrymen had preceded them. Indeed, this declaration of his beliefs was an important instance of "scandalous" behaviour marshalled against him in his unsuccessful legal battle for custody of his children.

⁶¹All references to "Mont Blanc" will be cited in the text by line number.

as he “passively” allows his mind to be a site of the transformative power he perceives around him. The only hint that this is not intended as a straightforward re-expression of an idealist sublime occurs in the subtle use of simile to say that he is not “in a trance sublime,” but rather in something like it. This use of simile to mark the poet’s failed effort to use poetic language to express something that cannot be expressed in language is a crucial Shelleyan move, and I will discuss it further in the context of “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,” and Act 4 of “Prometheus Unbound.” The difference between Shelley’s state and a typical sublime state is his resistance to identifying it and thus recuperating its power. Instead, he sustains the crisis point, and preserves the possibilities of the power’s mystery. In the third verse paragraph, his revery on the possible meaning of his past perceptions of analogous instances of power do nothing to secure the experience and diminish its terror:

. . . For the very spirit fails,
Driven like a homeless cloud from steep to steep
That vanishes among the viewless gales!

(57-59)

The vocabulary of the Kantian mathematical sublime is clear as the mind races among the objects that it cannot finally assimilate into a whole, but instead of converting this failure of the free play of the imagination (in Kant’s formulation) into a sublime moment of self-expansion (Coleridge’s characterization of the experience as a religious proof, for example) Shelley re-emphasizes the magnitude of the terror by pointing to the essential inhumanity of the scene. The event of Mont Blanc “piercing the infinite sky” (60) does not relieve the poet’s anxiety, but rather further reminds him of the insignificance of the human in relation to such magnitude. The only possible human presence is incidental, “when the eagle brings some hunter’s bone” (68). The mountain does not deliver the religious expansion and calm Coleridge guaranteed, and instead re-inscribes sublime terror in the image of human insignificance and death. Shelley is unable, however, to completely resist the pull to recuperate the moment, but tries to re-direct the recuperation away from the personal and into the ethical domain of the political. He insists on the

ultimate unknowability of the mountain, but concedes that the experience does come to mean something to the individual perceiver. Unlike Coleridge's assurance that the scene can be translated into God, Shelley entertains this as a possible intellectual response among many:

The wilderness has a mysterious tongue
Which teaches awful doubt, or faith so mild,
So solemn, so serene, that man may be,
But for such faith, with nature reconciled;

(76-79)

This pantheistic "faith" is only a possible response, as is "awful doubt," and therefore he reiterates the point that such moments are best seen as finally ineffable, and any meaning a human invention brought to the scene for its own reasons. Shelley temporarily succumbs to this temptation to recuperate the moment, and converts his experience of the sublime crisis into a confirmation of his political ideals. The grandeur of the mountain is converted into the knowledge of the insignificance and superficial venality of the oppressive political institutions he opposes:

Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeal
Large codes of fraud and woe; not understood
By all, but which the wise, and great, and good
Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel.

(80-83)

The issue is interpretation, the conversion of feeling into confirmation of both his political faith and his poetic power. He is presumably among those who can "make felt" the sublime power the mountain generates. Shelley does not assert that this is the ultimate meaning of the natural sublime; rather, he says it is an example of the human drive to make meaning of it. His recuperation of his political faith from the moment of crisis is provisional, and a function of a specific moment. In concluding the poem, he calls into question any claims of inherent universal meaning for the moment, and goes further in speculating that perhaps even provisional meanings are illusory, and that the mountain means nothing at all. Shelley finally refuses to recuperate the crisis, even into his ethical drive for political justice, and leaves open the dark possibility of an

amoral force randomly buffeting a powerless, fearful, and superstitious humankind. This vast animating force that he wants to experience as a “secret Strength of things / Which governs all thought” (139-140) may in the end prove to be “vacancy” (144), a dark pun on Blanc.

Shelley’s masterpiece in attempting to struggle with the implications of this fierce insistence on his own limits is “Prometheus Unbound.” In the verse drama he explores the limits of human power in effecting political change. In other words, he takes up the crisis of recognizing the self-dramatization at the root of sublime aesthetics, and conceives of it, first, as an ethical and political problem (the violent dualism that binds Prometheus to Jupiter seen as conflicting attempts at self-aggrandizement), and, second, as a poetic problem (the limits of poetic language to signify, the inability to make sense in the face of sublime terror). He recasts these problems in an increasingly abstract retelling of the Prometheus story. But, the story itself soon wanes in importance as he explores the human and abstract relationships between self and other. I will summarize the problem as Shelley conceives it, show how traditional readings of the poem’s *action* leave many central questions unaddressed, and offer a re-interpretation of the action of Act II as a means of formulating an answer to the poem’s ethical and political questions. In conclusion, I will take on the more complex question of Shelley’s poetic solution as represented in his use of poetic tropes in Act IV, what I will call the tropological sublime.

In order to read Shelley’s “Prometheus Unbound” as a revolutionary poem dedicated to meaningful social change, several major questions must be addressed. How does the vision of a transformed society in Act III come about? What agency drives it, and how? The traditional critical solution to these questions has been to claim that Prometheus creates the action of Act III by “repent[ing]” his curse of Jupiter in Act I, thus putting love in the place of hate as the governing principle of the instantaneously changing world.⁶² The

⁶² The tradition of reading Prometheus as the heroic agent of the poem is succinctly stated by Carlos Baker: “Everything is made to hinge upon the readiness of Prometheus.” *Shelley’s Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), 96. The apparent problem of Prometheus’ lack of action has been overcome by seeing the poem as a psychodrama, most famously by M.H. Abrams: “Various clues in the text ... invite us to regard all the *dramatis personae*, except one, as externalized correlatives of the powers,

appeal of this reading centers around its recognition of the central problematic of the poem: the hate-generated opposition of Prometheus and Jupiter. As a binary pair they enact a crisis in dualistic reasoning wherein the distinction of self/other carries with it the potential violence of the identification and negation of the other as enemy. The poem opens with Prometheus unable to resist the pull of such violent identification in his desire for the "Hour" which:

Shall drag thee, cruel King, to kiss the blood
From these pale feet, which then might trample thee
If they disdained not such a prostrate slave.⁶³

His desire to reverse the tyrant/slave roles perpetuates the dualism which engendered them and implicates Prometheus in the cycles of tyranny that the poem attempts to disrupt. Shelley was all too familiar with this violent cycle through such events as the collapse of the French revolution, Napoleon's self-coronation, and the reactionary nightmare of the Congress of Vienna. The lines which immediately follow Prometheus' self-implicating cry for vengeance are taken as a major event in the traditional reading of the action of the poem:

Disdain? Ah no! I pity thee.—What Ruin
Will hunt thee undefended through wide Heaven!
How will thy soul, cloven to its depth with terror,
Gape like a Hell within! I speak in grief,
Not exultation, for I hate no more,
As then, ere misery made me wise . . .

(I, 53-58)

Prometheus replaces hate with pity and this presumably causes the

aspects and activities of Prometheus' own divided and conflicted self, and to regard even the altering natural setting as projections of Prometheus, mental states." *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), 301. The ultimate trajectory of such a reading strategy collapses the objective world into the internal processes of the self, a Blakean selfhood. This is made explicit by Earl Wasserman: "Since 'things' actually exist for man only as thoughts, the elements organized by the poet are thoughts recognized as wholly mental and not mistaken for any independent externality." *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1971), 270. The result of this reading strategy, then, is to collapse the ground of a possible Shelleyan ethics.

⁶³ Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Prometheus Unbound" in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, eds. Donald Reiman and Sharon Powers (New York: Norton, 1977), 137. All other references to the poem are from this edition and will be cited in the text by Act, where needed Scene, and line number. This reference would be (I, 50-52).

transformative action of the poem to commence. This reading does not account for the specific nature of pity as an emotion. Pity depends on the objectification of the other (the object of pity) as much as hate does. By conflating pity and love this reading blurs the crucial difference between them in relation to otherness. By making pity a subspecies of love, the selfless potential of love's recognition of the integrity of otherness and desire to draw the other in without negation becomes problematic and obscure. Prometheus appears to relish his description of Jupiter's fate under the name of pity. He claims otherwise by calling it "grief" not "exultation," but his tone undermines his assertion. Even taken at his word, Prometheus' possible motives color his pronouncement. His "grief" grows out of his momentary "exultation" over the tremendous suffering Jupiter will endure, and the grief can thus be read as the product of a projection of his own suffering which, once externalized, creates a self-pitying response. In other words, the grief need not be seen as created by concern for the other. He admits as much in the phrase, "ere misery made me wise," which makes the internal source of his grief/wisdom clear. This is not a small point when the rest of Prometheus' responses in Act I are considered. He gains knowledge of how he is implicated in this violent dualism through the intricate imagery of recalling the curse, of the tormented forcing a vision of the tormentor to pronounce the curse of the tormented on the tormentor back on the tormented. This tangle completely implicates Prometheus as co-equal in the creation of dualistic violence. His new knowledge of the nature and cause of his position leads him to declare:

It doth repent me: words are quick and vain;
Grief for awhile is blind, and so was mine.
I wish no living thing to suffer pain.

(I, 303-305)

In the traditional reading of the poem this is the greatest moment of Promethean agency in the entire work and the event which causes the revolutionary change imaged in Act III. To sustain this reading, the reader must suppress Prometheus' continued confusion of love with pity. By pitying the tormenting Furies later in Act I, Prometheus maintains the dualistic self/other relations which entangle him. The pitied becomes the name of the

enemy and his tone moves towards the exultation he earlier disclaimed:

Pity the self-despising slaves of Heaven,
 Not me, within whose mind sits peace serene
 As light in the sun, throned . . . How vain is talk!
 Call up the fiends!

(I, 429-432)

The outburst, “[h]ow vain is talk,” creates a powerful juxtaposition to the assertion that within his “mind sits peace serene,” and his challenge to inflict more torment has the violence of the old opposition to the enemy/other driving it.

So we return to the problem we began with. The modes of dualistic reasoning (violence) so pervade our thinking that they are nearly impossible for Prometheus, or Shelley, or ourselves (as the critical tradition indicates) to resist. It cannot suffice to replace the immoral wish to destroy the other with hate, with the masked immorality of destroying the other with love. Shelley struggles in the poem to create a revolutionary consciousness in which a *revolutionary* is not merely a rhetorical name for *us*. In Act I such rhetoric operates under the figure of pity and masks the status quo in a false promotion of a new Promethean power. The Promethean itself must be disengaged in order for the word revolutionary to gain meaning. The dependence of the critical tradition on Prometheus’ agency to change the world *for* them implicates them in Prometheus’ error.⁶⁴ The true force of agency (political and poetic) imaged in the poem acts through Asia and Panthea in Act II. Examining the questions of agency and otherness as imaged in Asia/Panthea reveals a process free of any dependence on a charismatic authority (of whatever conflicted motives), and which moves towards a non-violent, non-dualistic acceptance and accommodation of otherness. A working model of a non-rhetorical (non-ideological?) revolutionary consciousness based on a

⁶⁴ The imagery of Christ’s Passion and crucifixion which haunts Act I can be read as Shelley’s insistence that not only can we not rely on an authority to act for us, but neither can we allow another to be sacrificed for us. Such a sacrifice participates in Promethean error by replacing the individual’s ability to conceive of otherness with the politically sanctioned authority of religious dogma. Sacrifice works as a negative form of the mistaken wish for Promethean agency.

transformed relation to otherness emerges through the processes of Panthea's dreams, her and Asia's journey to Demogorgon's cave and Asia's transfiguration.

The action of "Prometheus Unbound" takes place largely in Act II and does not directly involve Prometheus. His absence in the Act and lack of involvement in the crucial scenes of agency in the poem have been explained by making the poem a psychomachia in which all the characters are elements of Prometheus' consciousness moving towards a final re-integration. Asia, in such a reading, becomes desire (an aspect of love) fragmented from the Promethean whole, and Act II describes the process towards their reunion in Act III. This solution appeals because it recognizes the distance between the lovers as a partial description of or metaphor for the problem of self and other which the poem meditates on. Difficulties arise when the causality implied between Prometheus' individuation and the revolutionary changes of Act III cannot be established. Asia's transfiguration does not directly cause the changes, or even cause her reunion with Prometheus. The poem goes to great length to obscure or even deny such causal claims (or perhaps even possibility). Furthermore, a psychological allegory idealizes the action of Act II and reduces the complexity of the agency imaged there to an inevitable recovery caused by Prometheus' turn to love. Such a reading is problematic (as I've argued) and obscures the specificity and power of the poem's language (Shelley's poetic agency). Such generalized solutions are too incomplete finally to be useful.

The agency which drives the action of Act II is Asia's desire. Her unspecified desire begins as a longing and as a response to the absent other figured as the "beatings [which] haunt the heart" (II, i, 4). In a characteristic Shelleyan image, she longs for the renewal (recovery) of Spring "as the memory of a dream / Which now is sad because it hath been sweet" (II, i, 9-10). She knows her desire in negative terms through memory, dream and the sadness engendered by the temporality of the "sweet." Her longing shifts into a more active mode through a premonition and a plea:

This is the season, this the day, the hour;

At sunrise thou shouldst come, sweet sister mine,
Too long desired, too long delaying, come!

(II, i, 13-15)

The now of the poem places her at the point of renewal, and perhaps at a new originary moment. Yet this moment cannot be a direct reunion with Prometheus, but must be mediated through the agency of her “sweet sister,” Panthea. As Asia responds to Panthea’s presence, she describes the power (heat) that her sister mediates:

I feel, I see
Those eyes which burn through smiles that fade in tears
Like stars half quenched in mists of silver dew.
Beloved and most beautiful, who wearest
The shadow of that soul by which I live . . .

(II, i, 27-31)

The imagery of the joyous (and simultaneously destructive) meeting of fire (“burn”) and water (“tears”) describes the problematic relationship of self and other. Here the energy of their potential union gets caught in the double knowledge of pleasure’s inevitable relationships to pain in the momentariness of the intimate exchange; the burning must consume the present and “fade in tears.” The simile which follows the image repeats its pattern, but holds out a tentative promise in that the “stars” are “half quenched” suggesting that self/other is possible without total negation. By shifting the problem of how dualism creates and conditions the other from the political/psychological problematic of Act I to the intimate problematic of love and sexual desire, Shelley provides an appropriate scope in which to work and think. The nature of the problematic has not been diminished and remains essentially the same, but the intimacy of the scene makes it more readily knowable. The obvious problem in enacting such intimacy becomes Prometheus’ lack of agency and absence from the scene. His participation can only occur through the complex mediation of Panthea.

Panthea functions as the “shadow” of both Prometheus and Asia and her mediation between them prevents their total objectification and loss of one

another. She names her agency at the close of Act I when she reminds Prometheus of Asia's existence "which would fade / If it were mingled not with thine" (I, 833). Panthea keeps open the possibility of the Chorus' prophecy at the end of Act I that the present condition in which "Ruin now Love's shadow be, / Following him destroyingly" (I, 780-781) need not be a final judgement on the human condition. She creates the possibility for a mutual exchange between the two lovers (self/other) by herself becoming pure receptivity and surrendering her autonomy. In her first speech in Act II she describes the experience of surrendering the self and becoming a kind of wholly receptive otherness:

. . . as now, since I am made the wind
Which fails beneath the music that I bear
Of thy most wordless converse; since dissolved
Into the sense with which love talks, my rest
Was troubled and yet sweet—my waking hours
Too full of care and pain.

(II, i, 50-55)

The nature of the "wordless converse" and "the sense with which love talks" for which she willingly serves as the agent soon becomes known as erotic love. Panthea's mediation of the lovers' mutual sexual desire makes possible Prometheus' mediated presence in the scene. His erotic exchange with Asia serves as his first (only?) true agency towards meaningful change in human relations, but that agency can only work in its mediated condition. In order to get behind the problem of Promethean will (as an objectifying force), Shelley places Prometheus' agency in the unconscious as a dream which Panthea mediates/creates and surrenders to Asia who commands her: "Lift up thine eyes / And let me read thy dream" (II, i, 55-56). The process of reading through the transparency of Panthea's mediating otherness makes the presence of Prometheus possible. The image of Prometheus as Christ healed of his suffering as "his pale, wound-worn limbs / Fell from" him (II, i, 62-63), does not begin an ascent into an idealized heaven, but rather the recovery of his sexual body, reversing the sacrificial error. He is drawn by Asia's sexual desire. Panthea recounts the dream in which she becomes Asia through being penetrated by Prometheus' gaze and his repetition of Asia's command to "lift

thine eyes" (II, i, 70). The dream of overwhelming coital bliss repeats the earlier imagery of the possibilities of the meeting of fire (light) and water, but here the intensity of the moment cannot be allegorized away from its sexual concreteness because of the details and quality of the similes:

. . . —the overwhelming light
 Of that immortal shape was shadowed o'er
 By love; which from his soft and flowing limbs
 And passion-parted lips, and keen faint eyes
 Steam'd forth like vapourous fire; and atmosphere
 Which wrapt me in its all-dissolving power
 As the warm ether of the morning sun
 Wraps ere it drinks some cloud of wandering dew.
 I saw not—heard not—moved not—only felt
 His presence flow and mingle through my blood
 Till it became his life and his grew mine
 And I was thus absorbed—

(II, i, 71-82)

The most intimate of exchanges culminates in the moment of orgasm in which the categories of self and other reverse ("it became his life, his grew mine") and finally dissolve into the ecstasy of otherness (being *ex stasis*). The orgasmic moment provides intense joy and simultaneously faces the ultimate risk—annihilation. In that moment the fear which generates the objectified world (and the poem's problematic) is annihilated with the rest. The moment quickly collapses and Panthea comes back into herself through the imagery of condensation (the water returning to itself following the disappearance of the fire). She recovers the self when her "being was condensed" (II, i, 86), and a new longing encroaches on the post-coital scene:

. . . as the rays
 Of thought were slowly gathered, I could hear
 His voice, whose accents lingered ere they died
 Like footsteps of far melody. Thy name,
 Among the many sounds alone I heard
 Of what might be articulate; though still
 I listened through the night when sound was none.

(II, i, 86-92)

The overwhelming power of the other in the orgasmic moment recedes and

disappears leaving new longing, new desire. Despite the seeming inevitability of such fading, existence is still enriched by the risk/pleasure of the moment. It provides an intimate form for the necessary transformation of consciousness which can potentially heal the violent dualism which haunts the poem (and our culture). The body becomes the site of the possibility of secular redemption, and in the process Shelley redeems the body from the religious moralism which seeks to constrain its force (by naming it sin and performing a sacrifice in its name). The sexual longing which follows the orgasm functions as the physically felt version of the pull towards otherness (exteriority). Shelley elaborates this figure in the final lines of "Epipsychidion" where the possibility of sexual fulfillment is conflated with the possibility of transfiguration, and both are conditioned by the necessity of "annihilation" that the moment demands:

We shall become the same, we shall be one
 Spirit within two frames, oh! wherefore two?
 One passion in twin-hearts, which grows and grew,
 'Till like two meteors of expanding flame,
 Those spheres instinct with it become the same,
 Touch, mingle, are transfigured; ever still
 Burning, yet ever unconsumable:
 In one another's substance finding food,
 Like flames too pure and light unimbued
 To nourish their bright lives with baser prey,
 Which point to Heaven and cannot pass away:
 One hope within two wills, one will beneath
 Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,
 One Heaven, one Hell, one immortality,
 And one annihilation.

(573-587)⁶⁵

The conflicted nature of Shelley's struggle between self and other is evident everywhere in this passage. His physical desire is transfigured, through the simile of the meteors, into an idealization of itself, but the image of the meteors is elaborated not by abstract versions of the love relationship, but by images of the physical heat of the relationship and its "substance." The self/other tension vacillates between the ideal "one" and the undeniable "two," and figures both post-coital longing, and the intellectual desire for an end to dualism

⁶⁵References to "Epipsychidion" are cited in the text by line number.

through the willing annihilation of each self.

Panthea's role in mediating the transforming sexual moment overwhelms her both as transparent mediator and as sexual other. Despite her mediation through dream between the lovers' unconscious minds, she is the one in which the sexual act is consummated (she is consumed). This fact connects the otherness of mediation to the otherness of the orgasmic which becomes more complex when we consider her connection to her sisters Ione and especially Asia. Ione awakes having dreamt of some unspecified desire which must be "sweet since it is sweet / Even to desire" (II, i, 98-99), and recognizes that Panthea's mediation of sexual passion has touched her as well. Her response suggests the possibility of sexual jealousy over Panthea's role as the specific agent of the passion. Ione awakens to participate in the post-coital collapse:

. . . —for when just now
We kissed, I felt within thy parted lips
The sweet air that sustained me; and the warmth
Of the life-blood for loss of which I faint
Quivering between our intertwining arms.

(II, i, 102-106)

Ione knows only the trace of the moment and the renewal of longing for that which sustains her. This brief scene creates a glimpse of the danger of Shelley's metaphorical reliance on sexual otherness because, culturally, the desire for such otherness has been contaminated by sexual jealousy—the perverse form of sexual desire and an agency which participates in the dualistic creation of the rival/enemy.⁶⁶ The Promethean project becomes further implicated in such dualism when it projects a single elevated other, Prometheus as champion of humankind, towards whom all desire is directed. In such a system fixated desire cannot be disengaged from jealousy.

In the post-coital collapse, Panthea describes language as being

⁶⁶Steven Shaviro points out that Shelley attempts to work this problem out through the Percy, Mary, "Emilia" triangle in "Epipsychidion" (private correspondence).

inarticulate except for Asia's name, the lone articulate sound. This reminds the reader that Asia not Panthea served as the erotic other in Prometheus' dream and Prometheus served as the erotic other in Asia's dream. Despite the intensity of Panthea's description the lovers remain separated. The moment takes place in language and is not of the body. Panthea recognized this from the point of her arrival when she named the power of sexual agency "wordless converse." Asia responds to this failure of signification by re-emphasizing the crisis:

Thou speakest, but thy words
Are as the air. I feel them not. . . oh lift
Thine eyes that I may read his written soul!

(II, i, 108-110)

She cannot find a way out of her predicament and calls on a repetition of the reading process. His "written soul" is not his soul and cannot suffice. Shelley acknowledges the limits of his own poetic agency by emphasizing the failure of language, and begins an argument about signification which culminates in Demogorgon's cave. This problem/insight has a similar structure to Jacques Lacan's theorizing concerning the pleasure which eludes signification and remains in the body.⁶⁷ In Lacan's model such pleasure (*jouissance*) (Panthea's experience as the site of the exchange) becomes the *sinthome* which transports desire into the symbolic as pure drive. The purity of the drive connects it to the death drive—in Shelley's poem the annihilation of becoming pure otherness. This model allows us to better understand the condition of mediation,⁶⁸ and may help in making Asia's eventual transfiguration comprehensible.

This connection to Lacan's symbolic provides a vocabulary to discuss how Shelley's poetic description of the intimate relations to otherness can be generalized into the beginnings of a description of a new kind of revolutionary

⁶⁷ These generalizations are based on Žižek's political reading of Lacan's theory in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 122-124. He summarizes Lacan's *sinthome* in terms that suggest Panthea's function in the poem: "a particular signifying formation which is immediately permeated with enjoyment—that is, the impossible junction of enjoyment with the signifier."

⁶⁸ This might also serve as a partial key to reading Panthea's experience in Act IV as descriptive of the condition of otherness which her pure mediation allows her to experience.

consciousness. Libidinal drive unfettered from social/cultural constraints creates an overwhelming connection to otherness. Such a connection in the symbolic realm begins to suggest an ethics based on receptivity to the other. The ideal form would be complete openness and a willingness to become other. Short of such idealization, individuals recognize the integrity of the other and the potential pleasure/value of the receding self and the resulting interpenetration of two selves, two others. The dualistic categories of self/other destabilize and the violence of negation ceases to structure human relations. The relation self/other becomes a contrary and creates a field of Blakean energy in which change (exchange) becomes possible. For Shelley, this new model addresses the problem of presenting the will as the agent of revolutionary change. In that old system the will attempts to manipulate the field of objects (using ideology, violence, aesthetics), but replaces the displaced authority with its own. This constitutes the Promethean error which implicates us in our wish for a leader's active agency. Such a system destroys the possibility of individual agency and must end in totalitarian stasis (the problematic of Act I). Act II imagines a way out of the cycle of tyranny by denying the primacy of Promethean agency. In Act III, Prometheus' extreme passivity towards the revolutionary change around him images the necessary withdrawal of the will's desire to "quilt" (Zizek, 87-89) the social real in its own ideological image (Blake's selfhood). Prometheus becomes an individual among individuals and recedes into the conjugal bliss of otherness finally felt in the body.

The rest of Act II moves/evolves through the agency of Asia's desire. The longing in her plea, "Prometheus, it is thou—depart not yet" (II, i, 123), propels her, Panthea and the reader into the second dream. The dream represents another force acting through Panthea and compelling the sisters to "follow, follow." As a force it appears as exteriority drawing them on, yet its source appears to be the interior landscape of both Panthea and Asia. Panthea's telling of her dream re-calls the dream from Asia's consciousness. In her version of the dream the natural world animates around the agency of her desire for the other intensified "as they [the voice] vanish":

A wind arose among the pines—it shook

The clinging music from their boughs, and then
 Low, sweet, faint sounds, like the farewell of ghosts,
 Were heard—*Oh follow, follow, follow me!*

(II, i, 156-159)

She must pursue the “ghost” and a process begins in which she and Panthea follow the echo of the fleeting moment (the “memory of music fled”). They assume the voice has an interior source and “mocks” their voices, but this quickly reverses and the echoes become imaged as a condition of a purely exterior voice. They echo the condition the sisters pursue:

We cannot stay
 As dew-stars glisten
 Then fade away—
 Child of Ocean

(II, i, 167-170)

But this condition names their desire. The issue of interior/exterior, self/other, agent/agency becomes completely entangled. Asia asks the external “Spirits” to “speak,” yet when they do they point back at her as the source of their song:

While our music, wild and sweet
 Mocks thy gently-falling feet,
 Child of Ocean!

(II, i, 185-195)

These complex reversals of self and other show how their former status has been destabilized. They are in play as fluid relations. Whether Asia is drawn by an exterior force, or by an interior voice projected onto exteriority becomes irrelevant ultimately. The important image to follow shows her surrendering her will to the pursuit of otherness. The issue of the constitution of otherness would be of interest in a full Lacanian reading, but here must remain secondary to the gesture towards, and its relation to the possibility of a revolutionary ethics of otherness. The final semichorus of Scene ii describes the conflation of agent and agency from outside and shows the sisters drawn towards Demogorgon’s cave by their desire and simultaneously driven there:

. . . those who saw

Say from the breathing Earth behind
 There steams a plume-uplifting wind
 Which drives them on their path, while they
 Believe their own swift wings and feet
 The sweet desires within obey.

(II, ii, 51-56)

The “plume-uplifting wind” observed by the semichorus names the agency of Scene iii. Panthea describes her and Asia’s relation to that “wind”:

Hither the sound has borne us—to the realm
 Of Demogorgon, and the mighty portal,
 Like a volcano’s meteor-breathing chasm,
 Whence the oracular vapour is hurled up
 Which lonely men drink in their youth
 And call truth, virtue, love, genius or joy—.

(II, iii, 1-6)

The image of the “oracular vapour” emphasizes Asia’s surrender of her conscious willing self. She assumes the place of the Pythia through whom true knowledge of otherness can be spoken. The priestess at the oracle gives up her physical body so that the god can act through her (agency imaged as other). Here the poem re-connects Asia’s process towards otherness (mystery) to Shelley’s relation to his own poetic agency which writes the poem, yet remains dissatisfied with the gap between the force of inspiration and what language can “call” it: “truth, virtue, love, genius or joy.” Such inspiration leaves the agent in a state of longing when it passes, just as the orgasmic moment creates the subsequent longing which Asia has followed. The process of being taken up by otherness (inspiration, sexual desire, or some other agency) displaces the self with “deep intoxication.” The self becomes, like the Maenad, out of self (ex stasis) in ecstasy. This process, like the orgasm, creates overwhelming joy at the moment of annihilation, but inevitably creates anxiety in those who see it as negation, total destruction, “the voice which is contagion” (II, iii, 10) in its power to overwhelm. Asia welcomes the moment (her “Hour” which takes on an apocalyptic quality through the image of “the sun-awakened avalanche” (II, iii, 37) built out of revolutionary ideas:

As thought by thought is piled, till some great truth

Is loosened, and the nations echo round
Shaken to their roots.

(II, iii, 40-42)

We have been brought to this moment through Asia's selfless following, yet her vision's identification with the Promethean "Heaven-defying minds" (II, iii, 39) indicates that her transformation remains incomplete. She now becomes the priestess at the oracle:

The fragments of the cloud are scattered up—
The wind that lifts them disentwines my hair—
Its billows now sweep o'er mine eyes—my brain
Grows dizzy—I see thin shapes within the mist.

(II, iii, 46-49)

Again the imagery emphasizes that her physical body becomes the site of otherness (repeating the orgasm, re-figuring inspiration), and she and Panthea shift functions as she mediates the vision of the Spirits for her. The Spirits draw her "To the Deep, to the Deep / Down, down" into mystery and presumably into herself (remembering that her desire began the process). She eventually must recognize the conflicted emotions within herself, and her descent will make that possible as she yields her conscious mind, and the ideological constructs which define and impede it, to the otherness of Demogorgon's cave. Yet, she does not completely negate self in this process of becoming other; the self is externalized as the echo-chamber of Demogoron's cave, and the significance of her descent is thus in its gesture towards effacing self in the recognition of otherness. She goes through her own limits, "the veil and the bar" (II, iii, 59), and beyond the habit of reducing things "which seem and are" (II, iii, 60). She stops domesticating those things which "seem" into those things which "are." The second stanza of the Spirits' song shows Asia clear of the fear which engenders domestication. The parallel list of attracting pairs no longer creates the fear of annihilation as she rushes towards otherness. Even "Death, Despair; Love, Sorrow" (II, iii, 68), the pairs whose inevitability created her original desire, are subsumed in her process down. The descent reveals the potentiality within herself and the potentiality of revolutionary possibility, "Like veil'd Lightning asleep, / Like the spark nursed

in embers” (II, iii, 83-84), both made possible by the recognition and voluntary movement towards the other. This movement is finally named at the end of the scene:

Resist not the weakness—
Such strength is in meekness—
That the Eternal, the Immortal,
Must unloose through life’s portal
The snake-like Doom coiled underneath his throne
By that alone!

(II, iii, 93-98)

Only through the frailty of the body, cleansed of its self-imposed limits, can the apocalyptic (as revolutionary, or as psychological, or as spiritual) moment occur and become provisionally knowable.

When the prepared-for moment arrives as Asia announces that “The veil has fallen” (II, iv, 2), the anticipated flood of knowledge into her does not occur. Instead she and Demogorgon play out a negative exchange where he functions as the final limit of exteriority and she gains knowledge through her struggle against his ultimate impenetrability. In order to know she must address the conflicting emotions and ideas within herself. Positive knowledge must be gained through the struggle with its absence. Her necessary self-knowledge bears an immanent relation to her struggling consciousness. When she asks about the originator of “the living world” (II, iv, 7), she begins in the most general terms and through her repeated interrogation of Demogorgon’s (her own) responses: “God,” “God, Almighty God,” and “Merciful God” (II, iv, 8, 11, 18), she descends into the very particularity of her question:

Who made that sense which, when the winds of Spring
In rarest visitation, or the voice
Of one beloved heard in youth alone,
Fills the faint eyes with falling tears, which dim
The radiant looks of unbewailing flowers,
And leaves this peopled earth a solitude
When it returns no more?

(II, iv, 12-18)

The question must be addressed at this level of particularity. The knowledge which becomes possible in the exchange (a repetition of the self/other, agent/agency flux of the echoes) cannot be achieved as a fixed system of categories which totalizes all experience. Instead, Asia gains knowledge of the contrary interdependence of relations which can only be seen in the particularity of the value/pain of the specific human moment experienced in, and conditioned by, its temporality.

The second exchange between Asia and Demogorgon allows her to work through her conflicted emotions which still maintain an external other figured as the great enemy. Demogorgon reflects this projected figure back at her with his repetition of "He reigns" (II, iv, 28, 31, 33). Asia's first question in this sequence names specific effects on the human condition which are created through forced participation in a totalizing version of social order (or of knowledge). Individuals become barely significant in "the links of the great chain of things" (II, iv, 20) understood as both imposed social order and the rigidity of philosophical causality (dualism fuels the causal chain by making distinctions possible). This results in "terror, madness, crime, remorse" (II, iv, 19) which burden us and drag us "towards the pit of death" (II, iv, 23) and causes us to participate in the negations of "abandoned hope, and love that turns to hate" (II, iv, 24). Asia cannot yet recognize that her fixation on Prometheus implicates her in such a system and she speaks in the language of violent negation when she declares that "curses shall drag him [he who reigns] down." She begins to move towards recognition as she says: "I feel, I know it—who?" (II, iv, 32). Her long speech functions as the site of her working through the question by going through human history as she knows it and the role of Prometheus in that history. As she lists his attributes, she begins to see the conflicted structure created by his will. Even the gift of speech/thought becomes a conflicted double as it implicates individual humans in the hubris of the will. At the end of the speech she projects the source of suffering onto an external enemy, but that assertion collapses as she interrogates the cause of the human condition:

. . . but who rains down
Evil, the immedicable plague, which while

Man looks on his creation like a God
 And sees that it is glorious, drives him on,
 The wreck of his own will, the scorn of Earth,
 The outcast, the abandoned, the alone?

(II, iv, 100-105)

Our isolation is produced by the participation of the will in the production of totalizing categories. Asia finally can ask the necessary question: "Who is his master? Is he too a slave?" (II, iv, 109). In this utterance she recognizes the violent dualism which maintains the Prometheus/Jupiter relationship and can now undo the mutually negating structure which has bound her. She needed to get past the question of "Who reigns" to a critical consciousness of the results of perpetuating *reigning* as the governing principle of human relations. When she asks her final question, "Who is the master of the slave?" (II, iv, 113), the frame of reference of the question shifts to the ultimate source of agency itself. What force drives the human condition (now transfigured as the fluid interplay of self and other)? Demogorgon's response (anti-response) brings us to the true limit of human knowledge in which "a voice / Is wanting, the deep truth is imageless" (II, iv, 115, 116). We cannot know finally what drives the relations of self and other, and thus we come to the limit of human agency and simultaneously to the limit of Shelley's poetic agency. Asia's final statement on the paradox of internalized exteriority (which cannot be reduced) dramatizes the human challenge of the poem to re-form the consciousness through the acknowledgment of the other within:

... I dare not look on thee;
 I feel, but see thee not. I scarce endure
 The radiance of thy beauty. Some good change
 Is working in the elements which suffer
 Thy presence thus unveiled.

(II, v, 16-20)

The connection of "good change" and "suffering" describes the pull of presence as absolute otherness. The sublime effect, a "good change" through "suffering," is not recuperated into the self, but rather dispersed through "the elements." Shelley has re-routed the effect from aesthetic expansion into revolutionary

change. The mediating veil that protected Coleridge, and made his aesthetic expansion possible, is removed and the individual is overwhelmed. The effect is levelling instead of self-aggrandizing. The poet is caught up in the universal change, not personal change, that is created in relation to “presence thus unveiled.” There is no religious recuperation of “presence” possible in the general annihilation of the moment. In philosophical terms, this moment repeats the moment of the annihilation of the selfhood in Blake’s “Milton” in even more extreme terms. In Blake’s formulation, the self was renovated out of the willed gesture of self-annihilation. But here, Shelley dissolves self entirely into an undifferentiated “elemental” change. In relation to such overwhelming exteriority the individual discovers the limits of the self and experiences the value/necessity of otherness. The knowledge which if enacted in all individuals (figured here in Asia’s transfiguration into pure agency) creates the revolutionary possibility as the “whole world seeks [her] sympathy” (II, v, 34). Asia’s final speech in Act II describes the condition of otherness in which the “soul is an enchanted Boat” (II, v, 72), simultaneously driven and driving. She gives herself over to the “boat of [her] desire” (II, v, 94) and becomes the passive agent of its course, yet simultaneously the pure agency of Eros as her influence spreads outward:

Till like one in slumber bound
Borne to the Ocean [her original home], I float down, around,
Into a sea profound, of ever-spreading sound.

(II, v, 82-84)

The contrary exchange of agent/agency within the single figure of Asia brings us to mystery itself. There can be no known causality of her transfiguration and apotheosis into the transforming world where individuals fearlessly become the sites of otherness “too bright to see” (II, v, 108). We can only know the human scale of our own desires and drives and attempt to put off our own fear and embrace the transformative power of the pull towards otherness.

Shelley describes his revolutionary vision in Act III, not as a set of events, but as a change with no perceivable cause. It is as if the tyranny, that had presented itself as a part of nature, has simply vanished and been

forgotten. The social distortions that had, in turn, distorted human personality are gone, and individuals are revealed as naturally benevolent. This is an obvious attack on the conservative Burkean notion of the natural evolution of the English state that was pervasive at the time. As a political vision, it also employs both Godwin's theory of perfectibility (here presented in apocalyptic rather than evolutionary terms), and Wollstonecraft's theory of the superficiality of the social manners that constrain human development. Prometheus does not appear. No heroic action causes the change. His will has been removed from the revolutionary equation, and his sexual languor reveals revolutionary change as an annihilation, through the sexual energy Shelley attributes to the "death drive," into a selfless utopia. In order to complete this political vision, Shelley must demonstrate its effect on language in general, and poetic art in particular. Only then will the vision be truly "elemental." The experimental use of poetic figures in Act IV, however, are not isolated artistic events in Shelley's career. "Epipsychidion" shares the use of similes in demonstrating the effect of the annihilation of the poetic self into the sexual idealism (a uniquely Shelleyan oxymoron) of a cosmic coital moment. But, the use of similes to mark the limits of language in trying to represent experience, rather than to mark similarity, begins in "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty."

Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" struggles and fails to name the object of its veneration. "Intellectual Beauty" acts as the first insufficient name in a complex list of names and instances of naming which moves us through the poem. The first line of the poem attempts a more precise name: "The shadow of some unseen Power."⁶⁹ By making the power unseeable, the poet leaves us with an influencing "shadow" which moves us through a necessarily mysterious process. The struggle of language to name that overwhelming aesthetic force signals the presence of the sublime (which is itself another provisional name). And the failure of the names also defines the sublime as that which exceeds language—that which we cannot figure. Shelley briefly chronicles some of the failed human efforts at naming, "Demon, Ghost, and Heaven" (I, 26), and recalls his own efforts in his youth when he "called on

⁶⁹ All other references to "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" will be cited in the text by stanza and line number.

poisonous names" (I, 53) in an effort to conjure the power into presence through language. When simple naming fails, the poem attempts to make the power present through analogy by constructing similes which figure the human experience of such power. These similes image the very ineffability of the animating source:

As summer winds that creep from flower to flower,—
Like moonbeams that behind some piny mountain shower,

.....
Like hues and harmonies of evening,—
Like clouds in starlight widely spread,—
Like memory of music fled,—

(II, 4-10)

Each simile repeats the mystery and transitory nature of the one it follows, and the overall effect suggests a desperate struggle towards something that exceeds cognition. In this pursuit, Shelley's poem enacts the crisis of Kant's mathematical sublime in which the poet experiences "a feeling of the inadequacy of his imagination for presenting the ideas of a whole, wherein the imagination reaches its maximum and, in striving to suppress it, sinks back into itself."⁷⁰ Kant concludes this sentence by claiming that the crisis is overcome at the very point of intensity and replaced, through the intervention of Reason, by "a kind of emotional satisfaction" (91). Shelley's poem more clearly delineates the crisis than it does Kant's satisfaction in that the similes by their very nature remain grounded in the realm of the sensible by their dependence on "like"(ness). However, the series of similes which ends stanza III, while recapitulating the ineffable relation between human experience and aesthetic source (like "moonlight on a midnight stream," 35), moves to establish a stable value in that very instability. Shelley claims that the power's "light" provides "grace and truth to life's unquiet dream" (36). Each transitory experience of the ineffable, here figured through similes, becomes a moment of potential "grace." This movement does not go as far as Kant's carefully staged crisis and the resulting self-aggrandizement of the Reason, but

⁷⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J.H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Press, 1951), 91. All other references to Kant's third critique will be cited in the text by page number.

it does create a provisional victory for the poet in a poem which enacts the very failure of poetic language. The sublime (in Kantian terms) is defined by that failure; Shelley dramatizes his failure to create a trope which figures the sublime, yet triumphs in that failure. By choosing similes to mark his failure, he further dramatizes this effect, because a simile assumes a stable ground of comparison. Something is like something else. But, Shelley's similes mark the failure to achieve likeness, poetic language's failure to transparently signify.

The final stanza of "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" makes clear what the poet must recognize in the failure of his language. The power cannot be known through the direct pursuit of the human will acting through language. Rather, the poet must recover his "passive youth" (79) and allow the power to descend and act through him. In this he learns to "fear himself" (84) as a striving will which must be effaced in order to enable his apprehension of the sublime. Yet, this recognition itself works as a moment of "grace and truth" and thus moves towards the recuperation of self-respect created by Kant's Reason at the moment of crisis:

the inner perception of the inadequacy of all sensible standards for rational estimation of magnitude [Shelley's "power"] indicates a correspondence with rational laws; it involves a pain, which arouses in us the feeling of our supersensible destination, according to which it is purposive and therefore pleasurable to find every standard of sensibility inadequate to the ideas of understanding (97).

The intellectual self-aggrandizement of this Kantian formulation (feeling ourselves greater than the sensible realm at the moment it threatens to overwhelm us) becomes a new crisis in Shelley because it conflicts with the necessary self-effacement which enables his poetic acts. The extreme circularity of this paradox of the power of recognizing the necessity of powerlessness impinges on Shelley's ability to move from his aesthetic insight to its resulting ethical demand "to love all human kind" (84). As a revolutionary poet, Shelley feels he must move towards otherness in an economy of self/other, and the enhancement of the self implicit in his recognition of his relation to the sublime thus becomes a vexing problem in affecting that ethical move.

Shelley describes the influence of love as a transforming agency, the transfigured Asia, in Act III of "Prometheus Unbound," and in Act IV he attempts to take a step beyond pure description in an effort to actually imagine the condition of otherness through, or as, a kind of tropological excess. Panthea and Ione function as the sites of this otherness. Panthea's function throughout the entire poem involves serving as a point of mediation between Asia and Prometheus, and her sister Ione. For example, when she relays the erotic dream from Prometheus's unconscious to Asia, she herself is nearly obliterated in the process:

. . . since I am made the wind
Which fails beneath the music that I bear
Of thy most wordless converse; since dissolved
Into the sense with which love talks.

(II, i, 50-53)

Similarly, she appears to be connected to Ione's consciousness. Ione is also affected by the erotic dream, but awakens at its passing and in disappointment accuses Panthea of having:

. . . discovered some enchantment old
Whose spells have stolen my spirit as I slept
And mingled it with thine.

(II, i, 100-102)

Panthea then mediates between the three sisters and Prometheus, and does so through a necessary partial effacement of the self. In Act IV this mediating function, extended into Ione, becomes a near total effacement allowing the poetic language which fills them to enter the poem.

In "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" the similes remained rooted in the sensible in their failure to represent the ineffable "power." The poetic efforts to locate the "power" in the concrete through analogy defined the sublime in the recognition of their failure. Despite this, the referent for the similes in the first stanza, for example, remained clear, if ineffable: "The awful shadow of some unseen Power." In Act IV, Shelley destabilizes both of these relations in the poetic discourse which passes between and through Panthea and Ione. Their

exchange begins at a pivotal moment when impending change is the only known. Ione asks: "Even while we speak / New notes arise. What is that awful sound?" (IV, 185-186), and Panthea answers:

'Tis the deep music of the rolling world
Kindling within the strings of the waved air
Eolian modulations.

(IV, 187-189)

Some change in the very elemental music of the earth's course penetrates Panthea's passive Eolian consciousness. Ione names the particular quality of the new music and its influence on her:

Listen too,
How every pause is filled with under-notes,
Clear, silver, icy, keen, awakening tones,
Which pierce the sense, and live within the soul,
As the sharp stars pierce winter's crystal air
And gaze upon themselves within the sea.

(IV, 188-193)

In this music she can hear each discrete component, even the notes inside the melody. This becomes an overwhelming auditory experience which penetrates sense and strikes "the soul." She figures this experience in a complex simile in which "sense" becomes the cold atmosphere which gives way to transparency (source to soul). This auditory sublime pre-figures the overwhelming figuration which follows by representing the sisters as passive sites through which visions can pass. Ione's next speech begins with a simile which *can* be taken in:

I see a chariot like that thinnest boat,
In which the Mother of the Months is borne
By ebbing light into her western cave,
When she upsprings from interlunar dreams.

(IV, 206-209)

The image of the crescent moon piloted by Diana refers directly to the chariot as a description, although the weight of the simile nearly overwhelms the

original image. As the passage accelerates, the similes become much more difficult to process:

O'er which is curved an orblike canopy
 Of gentle darkness, and the hills and woods
 Distinctly seen through the dusk aery veil,
 Regard like shapes in an enchanter's glass;
 Its wheels are solid clouds, azure and gold,
 Such as the genii of the thunderstorm
 Pile on the floor of the illumined sea
 When the sun rushes under it;

(IV, 210-217)

The image of the chariot becomes increasingly difficult to form, and the similes which intervene barely slow the flow of the imagery and do not form an analogy which can be taken back to the unfolding image. "Like shapes in an enchanter's glass" does not help in figuring the chariot, although it may partially describe our (and Ione's) difficulty in attempting to do so. The simile describing the activity of "the genii of the thunderstorm" cannot be readily imaged let alone taken back to the description of the chariot. Figuration itself breaks down. The similes are desperate markers without clear referents. They fail to establish analogies to the world of sense which could slow down and domesticate the vision. Ione becomes overwhelmed by the images that move through her. Panthea's ensuing speech completes the movement away from sense, as her "opening in the wood" (IV, 236) yields an abstract vision of complex geometrical forms:

. . . with loud and whirlwind harmony
 A sphere, which is as many thousand spheres,
 Solid as crystal, yet through all its mass
 Flow, as through empty space, music and light:
 Ten thousand orbs involving and involved,
 Purple and azure, white, and green, and golden,
 Sphere within sphere; and every space between
 Peopled with unimaginable shapes.

(IV, 237-244)

The use of "as" in this passage has the opposite effect to grounding the description in the sensible realm. "As a thousand spheres," and "as crystal"

create rapid transformations of the image of the sphere which make cognition impossible. A condition is created where the excess of signifiers overwhelms the possibility of a signified. This produces the experience of the mathematical sublime in the reader through the tropological sublime of an overwhelming flow of transforming images of “unimaginable shapes.” This flow eventually overwhelms the world of sense in a condensing moment of synesthesia:

. . . the multitudinous orb
Grinds the bright brook into an azure mist
Of elemental subtlety, like light;
And the wild odour of the forest flowers
The music of the living grass and air,
The emerald light of leaf-entangled beams
Round its intense yet self-conflicting speed,
Seem kneaded into one aëreal mass
Which drowns the sense.

(IV, 253-261)

This is the sublime moment in which the realm of sense is atomized and we are overwhelmed. Panthea makes no effort to know her vision. She experiences it as an unmediated flow. Her consciousness has been effaced to the point where the vision assumes its place and structures all thought, and that thought images its liberation from the constraints of her confining will through its extreme tropological instability. Shelley produces a radically processive vision of the condition of otherness, and that vision can only occur if Panthea, and we, resist the move to Kantian recuperation. Such a move would attempt to stabilize the tropes (in the manner of the “Hymn”) in order to make the vision meaningful. The present effort to elucidate the structure of Shelley’s poetic moment implicates the reader in a vain attempt to contain its tropological force, to have Reason provide an abstraction which can characterize the experience, but even if the reader goes back through the tropes to the “opening in the wood” he or she cannot force the passage to signify. What in Kant would be the occasion of judgement remains in the realm of uncognizable mystery. But this mystery is not Burkean either because no recuperative cognition can ensue.

In Panthea’s speech which ends this sequence she completes her vision

with a similarly complex series of images in which time appears to stop (“ruins of cancelled cycles,” IV, 289) in the final transformation of the apocalypse. The apocalypse, by definition, has no stable referential basis, and Shelley’s version here appears to be social rather than religious in its transformations. The violent history which the moment arrests was one in which we were “mortal, but not human” (IV, 298). Shelley’s wish is that our apprehension of the sublime will create a new humanity based on an irresistible movement towards the otherness figured there. To be “human” we need to allow ourselves to be drawn to Asia, transfigured as Aphrodite, rather than arrest our own sublime moment through the recuperation of Kant’s Reason. Such recuperation necessarily leads to self-aggrandizement (and a fictionalized account of human power), and returns us to the crisis of the Promethean will which began the poem. Panthea ends her speech by bringing the apocalypse to language itself in a vision in which:

. . . some God
Whose throne was in a comet, passed, and cried
“Be not!” And like my words they were no more.

(IV, 316-318)

In the beginning the word was not—negative creation. She ends with a created space of otherness vacated by language, her words “were no more,” and thus made full of aesthetic and ethical potential. She refuses ownership of her words, and its accompanying recuperation, and this poetic gesture constitutes a Shelleyan ethics as the self’s relation to the radically transformative nature of its own language. Humility follows from recognition of the trope’s overwhelming power, and the re-direction of that power away from recuperation and towards the other (including the otherness of language itself).

The move to ethics completes Shelley’s vision of a revolutionary possibility structured around the apprehension of the sublime. When Panthea and Ione give themselves over to vision, the force that enters is the transforming power of Asia—the agency of love as the governing principle of existence. The Earth sounds the effects of love’s power over human consciousness:

Thought's stagnant chaos, unremoved for ever, fleeing,
 Till hate, and fear, and pain, light-vanquished shadows,
 Leave Man, who was a many-sided mirror
 Which could distort to many a shape of error
 This true fair world of things, a sea reflecting love.

(IV, 380-384)

Humankind moves past the self-conflicted creations of the anxious self (the condition which seeks solace in external power by joining in ideological formations) to a receptivity which allows love to transform experience. The former state, epitomized by the Prometheus/Jupiter dualism, functioned as a “stagnant chaos” where change was merely apparent as violence replicated itself in the status quo of power. In being drawn towards the effacement of the self (Panthea's and Ione's movement), human consciousness transforms in such a way that language itself becomes free of the ideological structures which confined it. The word “will,” the problem the poem begins with, is emptied of its accepted content (the Promethean/Kantian problematic) and is transformed into a word for the activity of the selfless self in the world:

His [humanity's] will, with all mean passions, bad delights,
 And selfish cares, its tumbling satellites,
 A spirit ill to guide, but mighty to obey,
 Is as a tempest-winged ship, whose helm
 Love rules, through waves which dare not overwhelm,
 Forcing life's wildest shores to its [love's] sovereign sway.

(IV, 406-411)

The transformation of “will” is fundamentally tropological in the displacement of the debased, accepted meaning of the word by the sublimity of otherness. The content of “rules” and “sovereign” undergo similar transformations into descriptions of love's agency in the world. The radical transformation of governance collapses the former distinction “of love and might” (IV, 394), and makes us the “satellites” of the sublime influence rather than the centers of neurotic universes (like the Satanic Abyss). The expression of the will works in a tension with the overwhelming force of otherness (the gravitational pull of desire towards Aphrodite) which can no longer be safely denied:

As the sun rules, even with a tyrant's gaze,

The unquiet republic of the maze
Of planets, struggling fierce towards heaven's free wilderness.

(IV, 397-399)

Each of our planet selves works inside the gravitational certainty of the sublime's power, yet our struggle (the retained portion of the self) moves us towards the freedom of our recognition of ourselves transformed by the other. Shelley's poem does not demand annihilation, but rather recognition of our common destination and the impulse towards otherness free of the substitutions of ideological institutions. Even the word "tyrant" undergoes a tropological transformation into that force which transforms the self into a new definition of the human. Language itself transforms into a medium free of the "fear" of "oneself" (the violent potential of representation), and becomes endless transformative possibility:

Language is a perpetual Orphic song,
Which rules with Daedal harmony a throng
Of thoughts and forms, which else senseless and shapeless were.

(IV, 415-417)

Ione and Panthea note the change in language wrought by the sublime influence (taken as an ethical demand). In their final exchange Ione says: "There is a sense of words upon mine ear" (IV, 517), and Panthea continues: "An universal sound like words: Oh, list!" (IV, 518). Language points past language towards the possibility of revolutionary change as we accept the limits of the self in relation to the sublime.

Conclusion

Admittedly, the critical line pursued in this discussion of Romantic poetics does not flatter Wordsworth. By constantly returning to the issues raised in the process of thinking about aesthetic choices and their ethical consequences, Wordsworth appears thoughtless in comparison to the other writers studied. However, in a more traditional standard of evaluation, the quality and variety of emotional experiences offered to the reader, he is unsurpassed. These are not unrelated phenomena. Wordsworth's depth of feeling is predicated on the depth of his personal crises, and, thus, the power of his poetry is often the direct result of his intellectual confusions. Coleridge's cross-purposes in his discussion of Wordsworth in *Biographia Literaria*, the simultaneous canonization of him as the greatest poet since Milton, and the savaging of him as an aesthetic lightweight, seem, in retrospect, inevitable.

The poet who comes off as the most aesthetically astute is Shelley. Because he positions his critique of recuperation directly against Coleridgean aesthetics, he emerges as the most conscious of the interlocking nature of aesthetics and ethics, the subject that I have chosen to pursue, and also the most aware of the complexity of the problem by explicitly extending his arguments to the very nature of poetic language. In the final analysis, however, Shelley's exploration becomes an impasse wherein the ethics of representation becomes a potential source of paralysis. In the end, I return to Blake. In beginning his poetic thinking with the idea of contrariety, he is able to formulate a method that sees any distinction between aesthetics and ethics as a violent absurdity. The Shelleyan anxiety concerning poetic representation and self-dramatization is faced from the outset as an inevitable contrary, a form of the devouring and the prolific, and Blake addresses the problem directly in "Milton." If the political and/or theoretical goal of this study is to find tools in developing a critique of ideological violence, then Blake is the exemplar, for he best meets the test of theoretical utility.

The preceding study might lead to a variety of research projects employing the same line of inquiry. The most obvious would entail a more comprehensive discussion of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's political apostasy in light of their later careers. This would be especially interesting as a vantage from which to observe Coleridge's philosophical development.

However, what interests me more is the development of a counter-sublime that attempts to repair the perceived division between aesthetics and ethics. Following from Shelley's critique of recuperation, a discussion of Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* might yield a new model for the figuration of the sublime that makes recuperation impossible: "in the horizon of the infinite."⁷¹ In addition, Nietzsche significantly modifies the concept of "play" in such a way as to resist its aesthetic conversion of objects, and instead shows how it can function to disperse meaning and, thus, undermine the construction of the selfhood.

On another tact, but equally relevant, is the poetry of Shelley's contemporary, John Clare. Clare's traditional designation as a minor writer is the direct result of the implicit critique of Coleridge and Wordsworth in his poetics. He strives to locate poetic value in the object being represented, and works to deflect value away from the self, an aesthetic pattern that is based on an ethics of representation and directly opposed to the dominant stream of Romantic aesthetics. For example, in Clare's poem, "The Vixen," the foxes represented do not find their value in their relationship to the human inhabitants of the poem who appear thoughtless and cruel: "The shepard sees them and the boy goes bye / And gets a stick and progs the hole to try" (Perkins, 1166-1167). This is not the Wordsworthian boy who would brood on his transgression until it yielded its moral expansion; this "boy" is of no concern to the poem or poet, who instead attempts to recover the ineffability of the animals' responses to danger. Clare's determination to resist self-dramatization is completely integrated into his everyday existence, and his attacks on agricultural "closure" are presented as continuous with his ethical

⁷¹Aphorism 124, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 180-181.

aesthetic. This constitutes a counter-Romanticism that has contrary goals to Wordsworth and Coleridge.

Finally, focusing on the ethics of aesthetic practice presents an entry into a political reading of Keats's "negative capability." The ethics so clearly implicit (and largely ignored) in that formulation become clear from the critical vantage I have developed above. Political readings of Keats have finally begun to appear, as evidenced by Nicholas Roe's paper at the 1995 MLA conference, "Keats's 'Green World:' Politics, Nature and the Poems." Roe's historical approach is persuasive in recovering the political context of Keats's compositions. My approach would make a start at recovering the intellectual history of Keats's method in relation to Wordsworth, Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt and others. Taken together, these projects would begin the task of developing a poetics of resistance.

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Teaching Experience

Sessional Instructor, Dept. of English, Simon Fraser University, 1995-96
ENGL 206: 19th Century English Literature
ENGL 324: Blake, Coleridge and Wordsworth

Teaching Assistant, Dept. of English, University of Washington, 1992-93
ENGL 131: Introduction to Composition

Sessional Instructor, Dept. of English, Simon Fraser University, 1990-91

ENGL 324: Blake, Coleridge and Wordsworth

ENGL 326: Shelley, Keats and Byron

ENGL 206: 19th Century Literature

ENGL 383: Varieties of Fantasy (Contemporary Science Fiction)

ENGL 374: Special Studies (Blake, Wollstonecraft and Godwin)

ENGL 199: Academic Writing

Teaching Assistant, Dept. of English, Simon Fraser University, 1984-90

ENGL 101: Introduction to Fiction (Fall 1984)

ENGL 102: Introduction to Poetry (Spring 1987, Fall 1987, Fall 1988)

ENGL 103: Introduction to Drama (Spring 1985, Fall 1989)

ENGL 104: Introduction to the Essay as Literature (Summer 1986)

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Awards and Honours

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**Winter and Spring, 1992, Non-resident tuition waiver
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Summer, 1987, British Columbia Post-Secondary Scholarship
Province of British Columbia

1985-1986, Open Graduate Scholarship
Simon Fraser University

Summer, 1985, President's Research Stipend
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Summer, 1985, Dean's Medal for Undergraduate Achievement
English Department nominee, Simon Fraser University

Autumn, 1982 - Spring, 1984, Open Undergraduate Scholarship
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Conference Papers Presented

Reading Contraries: Resisting Negation in Blake's "Visions of the Daughters of Albion," at the William Blake Conference, London, England, July 13-15, 1994

"Abundant Recompense:" Recuperative Strategies in Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" and Coleridge's "This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison," at the Coleridge 1994 Conference, Somerset, England, July 22-27, 1994

The Poet and Ideology: Blake's Contrary Critique, at the Recovery of the Public World Conference, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, June 1-4, 1995

The Aesthetic Construction of John Clare's *Minorness*, at the Modern Languages Association Convention, Chicago, December 27-30, 1995

The Trouble With Rustics: Coleridge and Clare, at the Coleridge 1996 Conference, Somerset, England, July 19-24, 1996

Papers Submitted and Published

Reading Contraries: Resisting Negation in Blake's "Visions of the Daughters of Albion," solicited and under consideration for **The Wordsworth Circle** and/or inclusion in a monograph drawn from the conference papers

The Poet and Ideology: Blake's Contrary Critique, forthcoming in a collection of essays entitled **The Recovery of the Public World**

The Aesthetic Construction of John Clare's *Minorness*, solicited and under consideration for the journal **Romanticism**