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Feeling Forgotten: The Survival of Romantic Memory in Charlotte Smith, William Godwin, and Walter Scott, 1784-1815

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Feeling Forgotten: The Survival of Romantic Memory in Charlotte Smith, William Godwin, and Walter Scott, 1784-1815

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2009

Acknowledgements

This dissertation has its origin in discussions that I had with Sam Baker while taking a course on Romantic poetry several years ago. Steering away from canonical Romantic authors, I ran across the poetry of Charlotte Smith. Smith piqued my curiosity and gave birth to a desire to read through a body of remarkable texts from the Romantic period that I was encountering for the first time. While the studies in *Feeling Forgotten* represent a point of culmination of many years of intellectual labor, I believe that they also give me a strong basis for future work.

Needless to say, I am deeply indebted to the members of my committee, mentors past and present, and many colleagues. At UT-Austin, Sam Baker has been a constant source of inspiration and advice; a great deal of this dissertation simply would not have been written without his timely suggestions and contributions. Without the support, lucid advice, and seemingly endless supply of patience invested in me by my committee co-chairs, Alexandra Wettlaufer and Lisa Moore, over the course of many, many years, I don't know how I would have found the stamina to complete this dissertation. Working for the American Comparative Literature Association under the supervision of Elizabeth Richmond-Garza has also taught me to see our field from new perspectives. The many

lively discussions that I have had over the years with my colleagues Olin Bjork and John Pedro Schwartz have been a constant source of intellectual inspiration.

At UW-Milwaukee, I first discovered that I actually had something called "intellectual curiosity" while taking courses with Roy Arthur Swanson and Marcus Bullock in the Program in Comparative Literature. Without their graceful willingness to respond to my ideas, I would never have thought of pursuing graduate work in literature. At UW-Madison, I discovered a love of classic literature while reading Dante and Petrarch with Christopher Kleinhenz. My later understanding of what it means to be a committed literary critic was deeply informed by working with Mary Layoun, Prospéro Saíz, Jane Tylus and my graduate student colleagues in the Department of Comparative Literature at UW-Madison.

Finally, I happily acknowledge the deep well of support offered time and again by my family, by Andrea, my love, and by Harley, a proverbial "cat of feeling" and constant companion through countless hours of reading and writing.

Feeling Forgotten: The Survival of Romantic Memory in Charlotte Smith, William Godwin, and Walter Scott, 1784-1815

Publication No.____________

Matthew Robert Russell, Ph.D.
The University of Texas at Austin, 2009

Supervisors: Alexandra Wettlaufer, Lisa Moore

Feeling Forgotten charts a shift in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English literature that is structured on a crisis of memory. This shift consists in a movement towards a literary construction of aesthetic and moral self-forgetfulness that draws its intense power from an anxiety about human mortality and historical forgetting. Through analyses of texts that depict the need to overcome individual and cultural loss through a desire for oblivion, *Feeling Forgotten* contends that the Romantic period gave birth to anti-mnemonic aesthetic in which the displacement of a perceived loss of the feeling of lived memories into various literary fictions preserves the past in such a way as to answer an unavoidable loss of feeling by asserting that the past, one's own and others, can be felt (again) in the complex affective experience found in reading about the past.

In a more ambitious sense, *Feeling Forgotten* attempts to point the way towards an understanding of Romantic and post-Romantic nostalgia as a strong rejection of its melancholic forbearers and as a response to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century

self-forgetting. Indeed, the rejection of this more complex Romantic form of nostalgia, one in which the always frustrated attempt to inscribe forgetfulness itself into the text of memory is productive of the ongoing act of writing, would become the founding principle for later forms of nostalgia that seek to render forgetting as an act that resides *outside* the written text. Based on a reorientation of Charlotte Smith's poetic archive of feelings, which defines feeling as the failure of poetry to contain and defuse feelings themselves, and the passionate rationalism of William Godwin's early nineteenth century texts, in which self-analysis serves as both the generator and corruptor of the sympathetic feelings found in sentimental literature, Walter Scott's passive, amnesiac romances stage the fantasy of an evasion from the political and material significance of history.

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Chapter One: The Life of Forgetting, Forgetting (as) Life: Feeling Romantic Memory in Theory and Practice 11

Chapter Two: Charlotte Smith and the Poetics of Oblivion 52

Chapter Three: The Fate of Feeling: William Godwin and Post-revolutionary Sentiment 97

Chapter Four: "I say the tale as 'twas told to me:" Walter Scott's Forgetful Memories 166

Conclusion 208

Bibliography 212

Vita 236

Introduction

I feel and I forget. A nostalgia – the same one that everyone feels for everything – invades me as if it were an opium in the cold air. … So many times, so many, like now, it has oppressed me to feel myself feel – to feel anguish just because it's a feeling, restlessness because I'm here, nostalgia for something I've never known, the sunset of all emotions.
-Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquietude*

In beginning this project, it would seem appropriate to address the embedded references included within its title. *Feeling forgotten*: what is significance of this phrase? As I hope will become clear, I wish to go down the two different routes that can be taken here: on the one hand, forgotten feelings and, on the other, feeling forgotten. Embedded within the single phrase, and in the broadest possible terms, I hope to explore the ways in which forgotten feelings, an inspiration for and consequence of re-examining past experiences, are tied tightly to the feeling of being forgotten, or, to experiences that alienate or isolate individuals from their present moment or social milieu. Indeed, the intimacy of the self's evaluative and critical relation to itself based on feeling is seen to threaten the way in which the individual thinks of or even recognizes itself in a variety of historical and political circumstances.

In the first chapter, I use a poem by John Keats to begin to consider the contorted, temporal complexity of this notion. Keats's poem is meant to act as a tuning fork for many of the readings throughout this project, one which sounds with a concern over forgotten feelings which can never be re-experienced in their imagined totality. This anxiety over the past comes to haunt the present to the degree that feelings are no longer tied directly to self-forgetful, unconscious immediate experience, but become dissociated from the subject who feels them. When I (wish to) remember the experiences of the past,

what and who is it that I am encountering? From this perspective, is it not also equally important to recognize that I am *forgetting* the past in the very moment that I remember it, that forgetting is not simply an unavoidable and natural blanking or erasing of the screen of memory, but a *process* or *discourse* that has its own history and feelings associated with it? As Harald Weinrich intimates in his book, *Lethe: The Art and Critique of Forgetting*, we are quite used to thinking of memory and history as almost interchangeable terms, and of forgetting as an activity which we do not control and that threatens both memory and history.[1] In spite of these ingrained habits, Weinrich states that we must recognize that forgetting is another mode of interacting with the world and ourselves, and that its processes exert a tremendous power. Indeed, in highlighting the interplay, processes and discourses of forgetting and feeling, I feel that this project offers an alternate lens for viewing many of the authors and their texts in the period.

One of the decisions that I made in this project needs to be explained further, and it involves the choice of texts and the resonance that these texts have regarding any subterranean argument about gender. From a certain perspective, it would be understandable to assume that this project situates Charlotte Smith as a poet who explores the limits of the lyric through an investigation into private feelings that are forgotten, whereas Godwin and Scott explore how the forgotten ought or ought not to be feelingly written into the public register of history. In the beginning of my chapter on Smith, I employ the apparently modest image of sea-shells to orient a reading of her poems as based on a rejection or critique of the Wordsworthian natural sublime; in this sense,

[1] Harald Weinrich, *Lethe: The Art and Critique of Forgetting*, translated by Steven Rendell (Cornell:

Smith sees herself and her poetry as located within the temporal, natural world rather than attempting to stand powerfully outside of it. Indeed, if Smith can be seen as positing a space outside of this world, it is not one that assumes the privileged role of human agency or its works in establishing a frame or form of control over the natural. Rather, it is one that sees natural time from two conflicting perspectives, and then speaks feelingly about this conflict that poses threats *to* individual human identity; in other words, Smith's poetry places the recognizable form of a cyclical natural world, understood through the seasons and their return, against a more progressive or apocalyptic view of history that has a single beginning and ending. Rather than finding comfort in either view of history, Smith chooses to amplify the loss of the material, individual memories in both and uses this amplification to chart out a different way of considering the transmission of memories from one individual or period of history to another.

To this degree, my argument is explicitly invested in very close readings of Smith's complex poetry in an attempt to argue for her importance as a poet invested in an uncompromising exploration of the variations of a Romantic *strain* of forgetting that runs against the critical evaluations of the period.[2] However, I would like to acknowledge

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Cornell University Press, 2004).

[2] In one sense, thinking of the rhetoric of health that subtends the discussions of memory in traditional reading of the Romantic period, forgetting may have been forgotten, displaced or quarantined as a virulent strain within that field. By *strain*, I would also wish to highlight for Smith the musical definition of the term as a refrain or recognizable section of melody. In her sonnet "On the Sonnets of Mrs. Charlotte Smith" (1791), Jane West points towards this reading of Smith as one including the recognition of a musical strain as a private performance that must remain unbroken: "Thy strains soul-harrowing melting pity hears, / Yet fears to break thy privacy of pain, / She blots thy page with sympathetic tears, / And while she mourns thy wrongs enjoys thy strain." In contemporary critical evaluations of Smith, unlike West's evocative reply, this strain is quite evident in the way that Smith's melancholy is heard as monotonous. I would point beyond the confines of this project and suggest that Smith's attempts to consider a proper register for "responses" to her own lyric poetry (critical or poetic) could be explored more fully as a means for investigating how Smith envisions an alternate form of history based not on the ideal and inherently

here that Charlotte Smith was also very explicitly invested in the public, and in many respects she was viewed as a public figure not only by the French revolutionaries who lauded her, but also by her fellow British citizens. On the one hand, Smith's popular novels explore the resonances of public memory and forgetting quite often. For example, although Scott was thought to bring the term *oubliette* ("forgotten place") back into circulation in poems such as "Marmion" (1808), in which a woman is buried alive, or novels such as *Ivanhoe* (1819), in which Scott references the oubliette as a "cell of forgetfulness, in which those were imprisoned who were doomed never to revisit the light,"[3] or *Anne of Geierstein; or The Maiden of the Mist* (1825), Smith discusses in quite painful terms the *oubliette* in her novel *The Banished Man* (1794) as a forgotten place or black site for the torture and execution of revolutionary sympathizers. Whereas Smith locates this Gothic device within the contemporary present, Scott safely positions it back within the Gothic past, putting it within the hands of villainous nuns in a convent in the twelfth century. Considered in relation to Smith's poetry and its resonances with Mary Wollstonecraft, the *oubliette* may be considered a symbol that gives voice to the private experience of suffering against the attempts by those who write histories which legitimate the suffering that is inflicted in their names. In ways that are familiar to readers of female novelists of the period, it also makes explicit comparisons between the experience of those put directly within "forgotten places," such as slaves or political and national enemies, to those who experience this kind of suffering as "legitimate" citizens within the

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evaluative form of Hegelian history (based on objective categories that stand the test of time) but upon the strange materiality of memories passed and refigured from one voice to another as variations on an elusive theme.

borders of the nation and within their own minds. Smith, like Wollstonecraft and Godwin, takes numerous Gothic conventions like the *oubliette* and literalizes them within a familiar world (British women and children, for example, are like slaves, captives or enemies) in order to critique the impersonal infliction of suffering that Godwin will also explore in *Fleetwood*.

In addition, one of the more forgotten texts by Smith, and one which I would have liked to explore in more detail, is a *public* elegy. Writing for the financial benefit of the survivors of a shipwreck near Weymouth, Smith penned the narrative of "The Wrecking of the *Catharine*, *Venus*, *Piedmont*, *Thomas*, *Golden Grove* and *Aelous*" in 1795.[4] Beyond the novelistic explorations in which the private and the public are seen as occupying different spaces and times (a difference that the forces of public history violently police), this piece demonstrates the extent to which Smith considered private sorrow *as* public sorrow; similar to the way in which Smith literalized Gothic conventions within a familiar world, so too does she see herself as literalizing public sorrow through private suffering. In reading Smith's poetry, we must always remember that public sorrow is not excluded or forgotten, but that which Smith gives form through the example of her individual voice.

Smith begins the piece on the shipwreck in the following way, and I excerpt at length both to demonstrate the way in which the private and public are wedded together

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[3] Found in Ian Duncan's note to Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe: A Romance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 579.

[4] Charlotte Smith, "The Wrecking of the *Catharine*, *Venus*, *Piedmont*, *Thomas*, *Golden Grove* and *Aelous*" (London: Sampson Low; and C. Law, 1795). Below the title, the description of this piece would be apt as title for a sonnet, given its description of the place-name: "Narrative of the Loss of the *Catharine*, *Venus*,

for Smith and to invoke it as a kind of ghostly presence when I turn to explicit analyses of Smith's poetry:

> Under the depression of sorrow that can end only with my life, and vainly contending against the weight of oppression, heavy is prolonged, I should not have entered upon so mournful a talk as this, had not some of the gentlemen, who have already so benevolently exerted themselves on behalf of the unfortunate person who escaped (with her life only) from the scene of destruction, believed, that a name, *to which the public has showed some partiality*,' might be useful in promoting farther their humane intention and, that being accustomed to fictitious narrative, I might be enabled to arrange, for publication, the information with which they have for that purpose furnished me; and to connect, in one detail, several detached anecdotes of calamity, alas ! but too real! Some also, among the respectable friends of those who perished 'on the fatal Eighteenth of November, have expressed their wishes that such an account of this catastrophe might be made public. Affection for the memory of those they deplore naturally induces them to desire, that their country, to the service of which the days of these brave men were dedicated, should join in the tribute of just regret; and *that to their private sorrows should be added, those of a Nation* on so sad a conclusion to useful and honorable lives. These motives, added to my wish to contribute all I have to give, *my time*, to assist the unfortunate person in question, have together induced me to suspend, for a few days, the labour. I am condemned to for the

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Piedmont, *Thomas*, *Golden Grove* and *Aelous* Merchant Ships, near Weymouth, on Wednesday the 18th of November Last, Drawn up from Information taken on the Spot.",

support of my own plundered family; and I shall receive great satisfaction, if the *Public accepts my attempt with so much favour as to make it answer the purpose for which it is intended*. (3, my emphases)

Without going into too much well-deserved detail on this remarkable passage, in which we can hear quite distinctly the effort and hedging by Smith to position herself as a public female elegist, we can see here that Smith considers her role as a writer as one in which the private is "added" or included within those of a "Nation," as the "public has showed some partiality," and which therefore gives to the private suffering chronicled in the *Elegiac Sonnets* a demonstrable purpose. For the *Sonnets*, a desire to forget suffering is given a form of memory that *preserves* or perhaps respects and taken seriously that very desire. For Smith, the purpose of lyric poetry, as found in her *Sonnets*, is not to console suffering but to give it a voice, even if the very desire of that voice (to be forgotten) strains against the form in which it is sounded. In detailed explorations of a grotesque Gothic torture device, such as the *oubliette*, depictions of real private sorrow in the public elegy, or sonnets that provide a melancholy archive for very private, personal suffering, Smith is always working to create in a public sphere that is not based on the wreckage of the private, one might say, but on a sympathetic or "partial" attunement to the soundings and voices of those which are forgotten.

As found explicitly in Smith's public elegy, forgetting maintains a metaphorical refuge in the act of *survival* or living on. Indeed, Smith was commissioned to write the elegy by the survivors of the dead, and as we shall see, Godwin's own formulation of survival addresses the role of forgetting *in* survival. In considering the sensation of

experience of surviving, then, the feeling of forgetting that I chart in this project may in some respects resemble the experience of the sublime, which focuses on the survival of consciousness in its encounter with forces that threaten it with extinction. For the purposes of this project, sublime disinterestedness, purposelessness, or the category of the poetic-philosophical impersonal, whether derived from Kant and other German idealist or transcendental philosophers, Wordsworth or his Victorian apologists, such as Arnold and others, are not derived from but are substitutions or re-inscriptions for what I am highlighting as forgotten feeling.[5] Although they have distinctly different ends, Smith, Godwin and Scott resist the category of the sublime in order to make their own criticisms against the powerful return of consciousness that has survived its encounter with finitude or death by focusing on the role of the imagination in anticipating survival. What does this entail in this project? The imagination plays a strong role in memory and forgetting here because it appears as the only category capable of giving shape to a future in which the present survives in some form or a past from which the present has survived.

Quite clearly, it is in this respect that the events of the French Revolution (1789) and the Reign of Terror (1793-4) that followed are key touchstones for the concerns that

[5] In *The Politics of Aesthetics: Nationalism, Gender, Romanticism*, a book that has inspired many of the directions taken in this project, Marc Redfield provides a trenchant critique of Arnoldian disinterestedness, for example, and its relation to aesthetics as a hidden political agenda: "to be sure, the priests of high culture and the postmodern cultural critics differ in their attitude toward the possibility of 'disinterested' aesthetic judgments. But under inspection, this difference turns into a knot of interfiliations and ambiguities. Disinterestedness can never be absolute or pure in traditional aesthetic discourse. One must always be able to return – invigorated, educated – to the workaday world of intentions, meaning, and action. Translated into the language of politics: disinterested criticism, according to Matthew Arnold, keeps its distance from 'the political, social, humanitarian sphere' in the hope that it may 'perhaps one day make its benefit felt even in this sphere, but in a natural and thence irresistible manner'" (2). In making these claims, Redfield seeks to complicate the notion of the aesthetic and makes the claims of the political upon aesthetic representations or experience less immediate and more complex. In my own modest way in this project, I also seek to trouble the investment that political, philosophical or national discourses have in

Smith or Godwin, and Scott have with memory and forgetting as related to private and personal histories and their imaginative representations in works of art. Or ought we to say, *a* key touchstone? Are the Revolution and the Terror the same historical event, or is one a direct refutation of the principles of the other? In the great majority of Romantic studies, the answer to this question determines how the period and the intentions of its authors are read. For the purposes of this project, it may do well to refer to the revolutionary, military leader and key architect of what would later be actually referenced as the Reign of Terror, Louis Antoine Léon de Saint-Just. One of Saint-Just's maxims narrates the relation of the 'citizen' to the nation: "The citizen first has relations only with his conscience and morality; *should he forget them*, he has a relation with the law; should he scorn the law, he is no longer a citizen: here begins his relation with power."[6] Another maxim by Saint-Just states, "A republican government has as its principle *virtue*, if not *terror*" (227, my emphasis). The form of memory advocated by Saint-Just is, in most respects, a form of legal, virtuous terror that exists within the "conscience" and "morality" of the citizen. At the same time, the 'citizen' that Saint-Just describes cannot possibly have a real existence, as it is meant to be a figure that the people of France were meant to keep constantly in mind *as* a form of terror, as well as a figure through which Saint-Just was able to exert brutal, impersonal power. To forget that one is subject to this kind of "law" is not a private act, as if one were harmlessly forgetting a fact or an event; rather, it is the condition for the exertion of material power masquerading as the law.

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aesthetic representations. Truth be told, I feel that the authors studied in this project make claims for the difficult divestment of the political, philosophical, and national from the aesthetic.

[6] Quoted from Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, translated by Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 226.

The imagination is no longer operating within the individual, but is given shape and force: whereas Frederic Jameson famously pronounced, "history is what hurts," we might consider Smith, Godwin, and even Scott, as adding *imagination* to that formula. Contextualizing the formal close readings that I give in the chapter on Godwin is his explicit critique and rejection of the tyranny of imagined forgetting that lies at the heart of memory as a deeply-felt terror, or, a sublime self-forgetting that never allows for the return of private, individual consciousness. While several of the texts studied in this project acts as a warning in this regard, they also highlight the divergent ways in which their authors attempt to keep alive an ideal hope for the future during a period in which it was increasingly threatened.

Chapter One

The Life of Forgetting, Forgetting (as) Life:

Feeling Romantic Memory in Theory and Practice

The power of life, as a power of continued life, is equated with forgetting. It is only in being forgotten and thereby transformed that anything survives at all. … Hope is not memory held fast but the return of what has been forgotten.
- Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

In 1988, Umberto Eco published an article in the *PMLA* entitled, "An *Ars Oblivionaris*? Forget it," in which he attempted to explain why an art or science of forgetting would not be possible. One day, Eco recounts, he found himself speaking with a group of academic colleagues. On a lark, they decide to invent "advertisements for university positions in nonexistent disciplines."[1] One of the more interesting calls for positions is in "the *ars oblivionalis*, as opposed to the mnemonic arts. We had to decide whether this art should be classified in the Department of Adynata or in the Department of Oxymoronica. The uncertainty, as we shall see, is of no little import." (254). Indeed, the difference between *adynata*, a rhetorical figure for the impossible or, more cryptically, the expression of the impossibility of expression, and *oxymoron*, the rhetorical figure for the combination of opposites, will be important for Eco's classification of this imaginary science that investigates "the techniques of forgetting" (254).

[1] Umberto Eco, "An *Ars Oblivionaris*? Forget it," *PMLA* 103 (1988), 254.

Approaching forgetting as a science, Eco explores a number of different strategies that could produce an anti-mnemonic technique. All of the approaches that he considers fail to pass the test. According to Eco, "if an art of memory is a semiotics, then we can understand why it is not possible to construct an *ars oblivionalis* on the model of an art of memory. If one did, the *ars oblivionalis* would also be a semiotics, and it is proper to a semiotics to make present something absent" (258). Eco determines that it is impossible to forget through rational inquiry because every time that one would try to forget deliberately, one would need to call something to mind in order to forget it. More importantly, Eco directs the reader's attention to the possibility that calling something to mind is not an extra-linguistic activity, but the very reason for the existence of language as such: indeed, for the purposes of Eco's article, without language as a means of representation, nothing can be recollected. Based upon an attempt to get outside of language through language itself, all that an *ars* or *semiotica oblivionalis* can do is to confound rational processes rather than make absent something present. In the end, Eco soberly concludes that this science, considered as a technique (*ars*) or semiotics (*semiotica*), would fit beneath the departmental headings of both *adynata* and *oxymoron*: "So it has been established why an *ars oblivionalis* is not possible. It belongs to the Department of Adynata because it cannot be realized. But if we understand it to be a *semiotica oblivionalis*, it belongs to the Department of Oxymoronica, because a semiotics is by definition a device that stalls natural processes of oblivion" (261).

To read Eco's text as an *article*, however, and as representative of a serious mode of inquiry, is to miss a crucial point. It is important to recognize that this so-called article

begins with the words, "once, *as a joke*." The irony of the article is to be found in taking seriously that which the sobriety of analysis seems to discard; to take Eco's findings at face value and conclude that all this talk of an *ars oblivionalis* is simply impossible, then, is to get the joke. To this end, the techniques for an *ars oblivionalis* are discovered in the failure to discover any suitable technique, and so a *semiotica oblivionalis* fails to make absent that which is present. As a sly dig at academia and its pretensions of comprehensiveness in increasingly specialized departments, such as the "history of the wheel in the pre-Columbian empires, history of painting on Easter Island, Aztec horse racing" (254), all of which one could imagine as existing in a university somewhere (within a metaphysical "Department of Adynata") and as contradictory to each other (the university as an ever-expanding "Department of Oxymoronica"), Eco's "article" simply "proves" that the limit to this kind of epistemological construction of the world through a rigorous logic is discovered in fanciful, imaginary departments that have no techniques to teach, no histories to construct and no proper object of study.

At the same time, Eco's text seems to pose a yet more troubling question: what is it that keeps the alleged absurdity of the "history of painting on Easter Island" as a field of study from resembling semiotics or even history itself? In a more trenchant critique of the techniques or cultural semiotics dispensed through existing university departments, Eco seems to posit that the study of the world based on an attempt to reign in its vast and at times contradictory diversity avoids thinking about the possible impossibility, obsolescence or even fictiveness of that which is already known. In spite of the safety and satisfaction expressed through the narrator's objectivity, Eco intimates that these

bodies of knowledge can be forgotten, discarded and replaced as easily as the imaginary sciences or fields of study that are dismissed by the pseudo-logic of the article's inquiry. Some day, *semiotics* may be classified and filed away as a curious specimen: *semiotica oblivionalis*.

Whether it is a serious article in a well-respected academic journal, a short story, a joke, or all three at once, Eco draws attention to something that is relevant to my own argument. For Eco, while the passage of time is presented as a transformational forgetting that threatens the viability of academic fields of study, it nevertheless provides each one of them with glimpses of a categorically unknowable future for which alternate means of comprehension are required. Beneath the veil of a joke, Eco argues that the rigorous pursuit of comprehensiveness as a way of knowing the world is no longer supported by a faith in a divine or transcendent teleology that determines what ought to be remembered, but, rather, by the fiction of what may be forgotten within memory itself. And so, if the belief that strategies of memory and recollection, on a personal, societal and institutional level will lead to comprehensiveness or the completion of history is comedic from the position of Eco's ironic authorial distance, then the uses and abuses of memory to forestall an inevitable forgetting signal something more tragic and, in the logic of Eco's text, something decidedly human. Within Eco's text it is clear that neither the disinterest of comedic objectivity and resolution nor the tragedy of a frustrated, more limited, awareness can resist referencing each other. To this degree, to submit an *ars oblivionalis* to an *ars oblivionalis* of its own results in a purely formal repetition that is both maddening and outrageous, one that transforms progressive understanding into

asymptotic analysis: a functional comprehension of comprehending incomprehensiveness, or, a purely formal memory of how one misremembers rather than any information about the people, places, and events that appears to be available to memory via the written text.

While Eco seems to embrace a postmodern, semiotic playfulness in addressing an obstinate forgetting that calls forth both the need and impossibility of memory, I would like to call attention to the ways in which forgetting takes an important role in the construction and representation of affect and feeling in literature from the Romantic period. For Eco, the operation of memory in referencing itself, or, in coming up with various ways to unveil the processes of remembrance as that which must be remembered, cannot subsist without reflecting on how it *feels* to remember or forget. I wish to closely analyze representations and connections of feeling and forgetting, as well as their roles as the engines of the development of a consolatory or commiserating subjectivity in British Romanticism. *Feeling Forgotten: The Survival of Romantic Memory in Charlotte Smith, William Godwin, and Walter Scott, 1784-1815* examines three cases from the Romantic period in which the relationships between memory and forgetting were given shape not through an ironic rational inquiry, as in Eco, but through elegiac, affective reactions to representations of epistemological and cultural limits in works of art, all of which invoke the desire for and fear of a forgetting or self-forgetfulness of a more permanent nature. In its most tragic and sharply critical sense, there exists in the work of these authors a growing awareness that their own historical period, seen in various guises and compared against different epochs, has been plagued by an absence of sympathetic feeling.

The feeling of a catastrophic *loss* of feeling, associated with personal or public histories and generated by the sudden disappearance of emotion and the perceived feeling of *not* feeling, engenders in its turn yet more powerful, emotional responses. As we shall see, it is the act of giving an aesthetic, representational form or figure to this turn that generates feeling in the first place. What is the status of an emotion that is employed in mourning the loss of emotion itself? Can anything permanent, final, or irrecoverable happen to the notion of "feeling" in an encounter with its own limitations? How does this strange alienation of emotion from itself impact an awareness of history or community (that is presented) *after* affect? Feelings about feelings that have been, that will or will not have been, or are posited as forgotten, give shape to a number of profound, fundamental concerns for these authors, all of which have to do with the very possibility or impossibility of change and difference, from individual self-development to historical progress and national identity, as well as and at times especially in the relation of these terms to each other.

In addressing the possibility of change from the position of *feeling* change, ending or history take place, these authors seem to discover or point towards a representation of feeling that resonates beyond the limits of a communicable idea with which it may be associated, postulating within feeling a space for something incommunicable and interruptive of memory. For these authors, to conceive of this radical mode of difference, of feeling after forgotten feelings, required using the imagination in a *negative* sense, and to consider a sensation that second-generation Romantic poet John Keats would later

designate “the feel of *not* to feel it” in his poem from 1816, “In drear-Nighted December:”

> In a drear-nighted December,
>   Too happy, happy tree,
> Thy branches ne'er remember
>   Their green felicity:
> The north cannot undo them,
> With a sleety whistle through them;
> Nor frozen thawings glue them
>   From budding at the prime.
>
> In a drear-nighted December,
>   Too happy, happy brook,
> Thy bubblings ne'er remember
>   Apollo's summer look;
> But with a sweet forgetting,
> They stay their crystal fretting,
> Never, never petting
>   About the frozen time.
>
> Ah! would 'twere so with many
>   A gentle girl and boy!
> But were there ever any
>   Writh’d not of passed joy?
> The feel of not to feel it,
>   When there is none to heal it,
> Nor numbed sense to steel it,
>   Was never said in rhyme. [2]

In this poem, Keats provides a glimpse into the contorting temporal structure of feeling that is more convoluted than Raymond Williams’ formulation, yet that is nevertheless tied to the kinds of emotional residues that Williams finds at work in larger social units.[3]

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[2] John Keats, *Selected Poems*, ed. Susan Wolfson (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), 79-80.

[3] In *The Long Revolution*, Williams defines the “structure of feeling” as the concentrated remainder of the lived experience of a group outside of their institutional organization yet nevertheless tied to the representation of that group as a whole in a highly complex way. What I find fascinating about Williams’ discussion of structures of feeling is that, while always gesturing towards a fully comprehensible whole

Indeed, feeling becomes associated precisely with that which remains as a trace of what cannot be recollected. Keats suggests that a "passed" joy, a feeling no longer present but recollected, is an occasion for emotion, or, "the feel of not to feel" a "passed" joy. Once, Keats seems to say, I was happy, but now, as I am no longer happy, I feel that lost emotion more keenly; for Keats, it is perhaps the vocation of the poet to represent feelings only in their irretrievable absence.

At the same time, however, is it more appropriate to say *we* rather than Keats or the poet? After opening with a reference to the "sweet forgetting" of the natural world, the poem pivots on a rhetorical question in the final stanza with two possible responses. It is directed to an audience who assuredly *must* know what it is like to have "writh'd … of passed joy," is bound together by this absence of emotion, and hardly needs to respond. The inhuman alternative, as seen in nature, is to *not* to have "writh'd of passed joy," an insinuation which seems to haunts the negations which echo throughout the rest of the passage. The buried resonance that passes unseen here is given voice in this apocalyptic insight, the possibility that we cannot recall the point at which feeling *was* forgotten, and the continuation or extension of this state of being is the only form of memory possible, a stuttering recollection of forgetting unable to overcome or name itself. The line, "when there is none to heal it," conflates time ("when") with a changeless eternity ("there is") with nobody present ("none") and no consolation ("to heal it'), an emptiness made the more palpable, paradoxically, in the consequent desire for the absence of empirical feelings ("numbed sense") and language ("never said") to

picture of a society, they make room for expected social relationships and patterns as well as "discontinuities of an unexpected kind" (63).

give this non-time a representational expressiveness that has any aesthetic value at all ("in rhyme"). Indeed, it may not be an exaggeration to say that through this poem, for *us*, "joy" is the word that best describes unutterable inner experience because it is to be found in the social, shared feeling of "passed joy" that is at once a marker of the absolute *past*, of both the individual and its recollected experience, and that which is *passed* among nameless others as the source of a shared emotion that is different than that which is said to be experienced by the individual. Both passed and past in an interweaving of forgetting and recollecting, the structural integrity of this unutterable, impossible "joy" is to be found in its loss and in a world that is constructed amongst others upon a social feeling *beyond* language and feeling.[4] Keats' "joy (discovered in a kind of *affective capability*, one might say)[5] is to be found in inspiration as both a moment of divine, original creation without precedent and in the destruction of this moment's representational possibility in inexpressible suffering and loss that can only be shared among individuals.[6]

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[4] In "The Defense of Poetry," Shelley describes a version of Keats's "joy" as the essential, creative act of the poet: "creation, with genius, is an expansion, a flowing-forth, of the soul – when it takes heed of nothing but its own promptings, and bounds along without thinking how it goes … (The mind) is melting all her ideas into one golden stream, which she pours forth *with a joy that takes note of nothing but itself*" (651). In *The Mirror and the Lamp*, M.H. Abrams likens this sense of "joy" with Plotinus's emanation philosophy and Wordsworth's "naturalistic doctrine of the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling" (132).

[5] Keats famously notes the "negative capability" of the work of art, which dwells in its ability to cause the viewer to doubt his or her own existence. By "affective capability," I am extending Keats' formulation to suggest that the work of art also has the ability to appropriate not only the locus of timeless being, but also, the locus of authentic feeling.

[6] Byron alludes to a similar sense of the joy as a necessary forgetfulness of mortality:

> And if I laugh at any mortal thing,
>   'Tis that I may not weep; and if I weep,
> 'Tis that our nature cannot always bring
>   Itself to apathy, for we must steep

Absent feelings and self-forgetting function as markers for Keats in a strange kind of non-emotional, silent, and obviated communication, one that has meaning because it either survives or predates the demise of communicative language itself. We might find apt expression for the residual power of this strange definition of absent feeling as the creative and destructive Romantic "joy" or indeed sublime hope of lived experience for Keats that exists in communicating the desire to pass beyond language.[7] In Keats's poem, the natural world provides a model for an ahistorical or incommunicable experience of joy in "a sweet forgetting" of the past that will "ne'er remember" what has come before, even as and precisely because this process of never remembering is passive rather than active. The "feel of not to feel it" marks (the passage of) feeling itself as something that is remembered only when it is "ne'er remember(ed)," a phrase in which negation is marred and contracted ("ne'er").

Whereas Keats explores a communal relationship between feeling and forgetting that is felt or sensed in the demise of the language and natural imagery that conveys it,

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> Our hearts first in the depths of Lethe's spring,
> Ere what we least wish to behold will sleep:
> Thetis baptized her mortal son in Styx;
> A mortal mother would on Lethe fix. (*Don Juan*, 5:204; 4.4.24-32)

The first stanza of Keats' "Ode on Melancholy" (1819) states, "no, no, go not to Lethe … For shade to shade will come too drowsily, / And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul." Here, Keats appears to reject Lethean forgetfulness and benumbed consciousness in order to preserve lived experience ("the wakeful anguish of the soul"), but it should also be noted that Keats attempts to preserve a feeling of anguish that structurally mimics the "joy" to which I have been alluding, in that both are markers of an untranslatable inner experience that appears elusive to representation.

[7] In *The Story of Joy*, Adam Potkay describes Wordsworthian joy is driven by the confluence of individual and communal experience: "the lyric 'I' in Wordsworth is often and unexpectedly interchangeable with a communal we, and this is particularly true when Wordsworth addresses the power of joy. This resonates, in a general way, with what I have been calling the paradox of joy, an affect poised always between the not-I and the expanding I" (123). He continues to explain the "recompense" of *feelings* lost (lost joy, for example) with philosophical or ethical insights into the significance of that loss, or *thought*.

Friederich Nietzsche, in the second of his untimely meditations, "On the Uses and Abuses of History," posits a relationship between feeling and forgetting that can be discovered through a comparison with nature and history. In the meditation, Nietzsche employs the following example: a cow, in this instance, exists without *ennui* or suffering because it does not remember. Because it has no past upon which to ruminate, the cow appears content. At the same time, the contentedness of the animal is not exactly happy or joyous because it has nothing with which to compare its present state. It simply exists, and is unconcerned with the past as either the source or negation of happiness. Nietzsche uses this example to point to the power of what he calls "active forgetting," a sheer abandonment of the past that is beyond the capacities of the cow but nevertheless similar to it:

> In the case of the smallest or of the greatest happiness ... it is always the same thing that makes happiness happiness: the ability to forget or, expressed in more scholarly fashion, the capacity *to feel unhistorically* during its duration.[8]

Nietzsche calls for a rejection of the past as a determining factor for the present because, as he says, it "returns as a ghost and disturbs the peace of a later moment" (61). As an antidote to the "sickness" (100) of its historical predicament, he suggests a critical discourse on the past that would be attentive to the needs of the present and able to distinguish between what in the past is useful and what is harmful for life. Thus "active" forgetting is a kind of selective remembering, one in which not all past forms of knowledge and not all experiences are understood as beneficial for present and future life.

Active forgetting, then, is part of a broader attempt by Nietzsche to bring to consciousness haunting feelings from the past in order to engage them with another kind of feeling, an unhistorical feeling that neither escapes from nor overwhelms these moments from the past. Indeed, for Nietzsche, forgetting is important because it has the potential to save people from the history to which they appear destined and with which they are always burdened, a history that is considered disastrous and repetitious. Near the beginning of the meditation, however, Nietzsche advises caution with respect to both the degree of forgetting and the imperative to know or remember the past:

> Imagine the extremest possible example of a man who did not possess the power of forgetting at all and who was thus condemned to see everywhere a state of becoming: such a man would no longer believe in his own being, would no longer believe in himself, would see everything flowing asunder in moving points and would lose himself in this stream of becoming: like a true pupil of Heraclitus, he would in the end hardly dare to raise a finger. Forgetting is essential to action of any kind, just as not only light but darkness too is essential for the life of everything organic. A man who wanted to feel historically through and through would be like one forcibly deprived of sleep, or an animal that had to live only by rumination and ever repeated rumination. Thus it is possible to live almost without memory, and to live happily moreover, as the animal demonstrates; but it is altogether impossible to live at all without forgetting. Or, to express my theme even more simply: There is a degree of sleeplessness, of rumination, of the

[8] Friederich Nietzsche,"On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," in *Untimely Meditations*.

> historical sense, which is harmful and ultimately fatal to the living thing, whether this living thing be a man or a people or a culture. … The unhistorical and the historical are necessary in equal measure for the health of an individual, of a people and of a culture. (63)

An individual or a people, when actively forgetting, seeks to strike a balance between knowing and not knowing, between remembering and forgetting the past, for life demands not simply an oblivion of the past, but a balance between the historical and the active, between reflection and experience.[9]

Time for Nietzsche has a similar twofold role: it is a figure *for* the specifically human situation as well as a dimension of existence outside of human control. The man wondering at the cow begins next to wonder at himself and realizes "that he cannot learn to forget but clings relentlessly to the past: however far and fast he may run, this chain runs with him;" Nietzsche describes time as "a moment, now here and then gone, nothing before it came, again nothing after it has gone" (61). The moment "nonetheless returns as a ghost and disturbs the peace of a later moment. A leaf flutters from the scroll of time, floats away--and suddenly floats back again and falls into the man's lap" (61). Where the

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trans. R.J. Hollingdale, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983), 56.

[9] In "Wordsworthian Wakefulness," Sara Guyer explores the status of insomnia in several of Wordsworth's sonnets to sleep. For Guyer, employing the notion of insomnia as developed by both Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas, insomnia represents the eternal wakefulness of being to its own inability to step outside of itself. "For Wordsworth apostrophe (in the sonnets *to* sleep) fails to overcome wakefulness, but rather repeats and reproduces the state it aims to suspend. In this respect, Wordsworth's sonnets "To Sleep" suggest that wakefulness is suffering, and show that the response to wakefulness only ever reintroduces wakefulness. The response—as in Wordsworth's apostrophe—cannot prevent or rescue one from wakefulness. To the contrary, it leaves one submerged" (103). Guyer annotates this section of her essay with a remark that "in post-Holocaust works, apostrophe—if it too renders wakefulness—becomes a mode of bearing witness to the endless night of destruction. Wakefulness takes on the additional significance of interminable vigilance and uninterruptable existence. It names ethics and ontology" (110). In my chapter on Godwin, in a discussion of his "Essay Upon Sepulchres," I will attempt to address this consideration of

nation--another concept fundamental to our understanding of the call for active forgetting--is concerned, Nietzsche favors "assimilation" and a transformative "incorporation" of foreign elements into German culture, as he says when he addresses the possibility of Germans as an authentic people (123).

Nietzsche invokes the ruminating cow not simply to point to the need for selective memory but, more importantly, in order to assert that active forgetting counters history because forgetting, as in Keats, submits this discourse to the bare, affective experience of the living moment that has value precisely because it will not last. Moreover, with active forgetting, Nietzsche is not attempting to avoid the past but to open up a possibility for the future together with a different understanding of what history may be. As with Keats, Nietzsche is oriented towards a future that stands in direct, positive refutation of his own present moment (and hence, “untimely”). For Nietzsche, the possibility that the future holds something new is not driven by whether or not remembering can recreate the forgotten or whether forgetting can fully erase the possibility of recollection. The question is rather of the possibility of some form of balance between remembering and forgetting, between the historical and archival, on the one hand, and the active or interruptive as Nietzsche envisions them. For Nietzsche every historical moment ought to be always and categorically *new*, always open to both recording and reexamination, and to feelings that passed unnoticed.

The direct implications of this newness is not that history as an object of study is no longer possible or desirable, but that it should be replaced by a stance towards the past

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witnessing as a confluence of Romantic and post-Holocaust writing via Godwin’s discussion of survival and friendship.

that is not bound by establishing the timeless significance of recollected events. For Nietzsche, to think time otherwise than the historical requires an interruption of thinking that takes on the characteristics of an affective positioning outside of history, such that the experience of history, in this sense, becomes even richer than actual living experience. To feel "ahistorically," then, is not to think in a passive, reflective sense on events in the world or to record them; rather, it is to approach them with a critical perspective that is driven by affect.

What do both Keats and Nietzsche have in common? For both writers, the alignment of feeling or affective experience with forgetfulness is productive of a meaningful *resistance* to static forms of aesthetic, historical, and philosophical understanding. The conditions of this resistance can be traumatic or overwhelming, yet they nevertheless prove conducive to developing the possible autonomy of aesthetic or creative experience. While Keats considers the "feel of not to feel it" as a creative maxim that is always enabled by loss and inspired by the "sweet forgetfulness" of nature, Nietzsche thinks that active forgetting, an activity through which one will live and "feel unhistorically," must stand against a relentless drive to historical knowledge.[10] As in Keats, this feeling must be preserved in such a way as to elude, survive or forget the

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[10] In "On Nietzsche's Side," Maurice Blanchot considers the difficulty that critics face in attempting to tease out the relationship between thought and feeling in Nietzsche, and this difficulty is evocative of both the possibility and demand of thinking ahistorically as feeling: "Nietzsche's case … demands … the seriousness and patience of an infinite reflection, one that never stops working while it recognizes the movement that escapes it. … Such is the problem: it calls into question not the individual merits of the commentator but the possibility of any commentary on a *passionate thinker*, written from the outside" (289. my emphasis). Throughout Blanchot's collection, *The Work of Fire*, of which this essay is a part, the apparent lucidity and dispassionate movement of thought after meaning is examined as a displaced passion or feeling for something unrealizable, as a *desire*.

experience in which it has been conveyed in order to escape the historical register into which it would be drawn.

Seen through the prism of these two figures, we might say here that feeling and forgetting work via the same structures of resistance: the feeling of *lost* feeling gives to the "original," phantom lost feeling its primacy by both being inspired by it and exceeding it (by giving it a form that it did not possess), in much the same way as the recollection of that which has been forgotten gives shape to memory as an active force in the first place: one cannot begin to feel unless one has already *lost* the capability for feeling, or, unless one has a feeling to later feel. Accordingly, feeling *must* be lost or forgotten in order to be recollected as a feeling always already about itself. For Keats, it is the feeling *of* (not) feeling, and for Nietzsche, it is the eternally interruptive or irruptive feeling of forgetting that allows a passage outside of the tautological repetition of purely historical recollection: to feel ahistorically is to think without seeking out an already established or possible truth. For Nietzsche, it is the attempt to (re)capture a form of *thinking* as a powerful force that is woven together with, rather than acting as a rejection of, feeling. As we see reflected in Eco's later text, the power of creating feelings through forgetting is drawn into the human sphere via acts of poetic or ahistorical creation that both resist and recast human community.

As found in the sense of being passed from the past to the present, passed from writers to communities of readers, a question that is to be found in the texts that I analyze may be formulated in the following way: what happens in the belatedly recognized interim of "the feel" and "not to feel it" if not *feeling* itself as the interim, one in which an

attempt to make sense literally of one's own past or the past of others is a gesture fraught with a productive, affective uncertainty? Can feeling be employed in a consideration of history that breaks free from a determinative historical sense without being radically skeptical and negative in essence? In addressing desires for and fears of forgetting through self-reflecting analyses of feeling, these authors seem to struggle to move beyond Lockean theories of individual subjectivity based in associative patterns of recollection and forgetting (where the present is confirmed in affirmative analyses of the past for the individual, as well as the social operation of discourses of sympathy) while at the same time resisting to embrace proto-psychological definitions of the self that seem already and necessarily to augur the unanswerable guilt, repression, melancholy, loss, and trauma that would accompany such an abandonment of sympathetic feeling and consequent interpretive certainty, even as these newer psychological structures of experience already seem to have surfaced in their texts.[11] In attempting to place these texts within a specific historical context, I wish to position them within a history of forgetting that passes through the Romantic period and that has its own unique and at time strange valences.

In the work of Charlotte Smith, William Godwin, and, to some extent, Walter Scott, the relationship between pasts that cannot but must be forgotten and presents that

[11] Indeed, it has proven irresistible for many critics to discuss Godwin without gesturing towards Freud, Lacan, or, in a slightly different context, Foucault in order to explain the strange inner workings of Godwin's narrators. That Godwin, influenced by Rousseau, was clearly interested in discussing the damaging effects of society upon the formation and repression of individual subjectivity is undeniable. In a similar vein, what is equally fascinating about Godwin is the effect of time and language upon repressed memories. Rather than employ Freud in any great detail, we might tentatively suggest that both Godwin and Freud are a part of a very long history of feeling or sentiment. I also resist incorporating Freud in these discussions because I feel that the very closeness of Freud and Godwin would in fact limit the kinds of insights that we might be able to generate from a reading of Godwin that is generated, as much as possible, from his own strange insights into the formation of human identity.

seek to initiate a discourse of forgetting in order to inscribe this past *as* past in a proper, healthful sense, is never fully established from a safe distance. For these authors, the difficulties with forgetting are representative of their difficulties in engaging with their own contemporary worlds and the value of recollection within them. Of course, not every author from this period has invoked forgetting or oblivion as a questioning of memory or history as an inability to (truly) feel. Keats, Nietzsche, and Eco occupy later moments in this history of forgetting and offer responses in their own way to the deep skepticism directed towards forms of Romantic memory through forgetting as found in Smith, Godwin, and Scott, even as forgetting is seen by these earlier writers as a necessary gesture fraught with its own uncertainties and untimeliness.

In proposing a reading of this kind, I am not attempting to dislodge one of the dominant ideas regarding the fundamentally rehabilitative use of memory in British Romanticism, but mark evocations of it as exceptional to the period. In the memory-fragment of 1799, William Wordsworth acknowledges his desire to create poetry that seeks to regain pasts that have been lost: "feeling, as I fear, / The weakness of a human love for days / Disowned by memory." In this fragment, Wordsworth aligns feeling with "weakness" and forgetting with the act of being "*disowned* by memory;" it is crucial to recognize here that "disowned" amounts to a refusal by memory to acknowledge forgotten pasts.[12]

[12] In *Disowned by Memory: Wordsworth's Poetry of the 1790s*, David Bromwich has explored Wordsworth's early poetry as exploring memory and the fleetingness of originary feeling: "Wordsworth believed we are humanized by a process in which thoughts become habitual. But a feeling or sympathy itself makes itself memorable in its first moment—always a moment of shock when it comes from an unexpected source" (5-6).

Famously, in the "Preface" to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), Wordsworth appears to acknowledge the negative power or "weakness" of feeling, and consequently attempts to restore a past that has been "disowned" with something *other* than feeling. Initially, Wordsworth notes with aversion that, in his contemporary social world, the literature of English culture has been "driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse," much in the same way (although for completely different purposes) that Nietzsche dismissed the "sickness" of history. For Wordsworth, the "frantic" and "sickly" works of literature that have flooded the world produce an infernal, Tantalus-like and impossible to quench "degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation" such that he is "almost ashamed to have spoken of the feeble endeavor made in these volumes (of the *Lyrical Ballads*) to counteract it." The passage in which Wordsworth works out his own rehabilitation, a remarkable mnemonic engine for the production of "pure" feeling, is justly noted as a hallmark of Romantic sensibility, and I quote it below at length:

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

> connected with important subjects, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced, that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature, and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified.[13]

In this passage, Wordsworth considers the development of a habitual relationship of feeling to thought as the basis for the foundation of a community based in reading. While the famous phrase that begins this passage, that poetry is the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," seems to assert a purely affective register for poetry, Wordsworth quickly turns and attempts to achieve balance: "spontaneous" becomes fodder for "long" rumination, while "overflow" recedes and settles into the solidity of depth ("deeply"). Poetry may be "good," but it has no "value" without a corresponding "thought." How is this value of good poetry discovered? Wordsworth pivots from poetry as something produced by "a man of *more than usual* organic sensibility" (a veritable "man of feeling") in an "overflow," to the "influx" of feeling that may come from thoughts shared amongst others ("*our* continued influx," "all *our* past feeling") in thinking about the feelings transmitted via poetry itself. By repeating and continuing this "act" of "contemplation," of thinking long and deeply about the feelings contained within good poetry, the social value of poetry as a dialogic foundation for community will be established.

[13] William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, eds. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones,

A poetic evocation that corresponds to this engine of the transmission of shared feelings through a kind of forgetting can be found in the later *Prelude* and Wordsworth's "spots of time": "there are in our existence spots of time, / That with distinct pre-eminence retain / A renovating virtue."[14] The passage refers to a memory that Wordsworth recollects from childhood in which he strains with expectation as he waited to be taken home for the Christmas holidays, scrambling up a "crag overlooking two highways to see whether he can spot the horses that should be coming" (168). As he recollects this event from his past, he begins to expand imaginatively the scope of his memory. Wordsworth shifts suddenly to the fact that his father died within ten days of his return from school. In concluding this sequence of recollections, he states, "the event / With all the sorrow that is brought, appeared / A chastisement" (309-11); as a "chastisement," Wordsworth considers that he was to blame, in some sense, for his father's death simply by desiring to return home. Geoffrey Hartman has commented on these lines by suggesting that "spots of time" provide a feeling of consolation for Wordsworth as he considers a traumatic event from the past. Hartman's reading of this passage in *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* suggests further that this passage poses a problem of time in which an absence of causality between one event and another generates a powerful feeling in the act of recollection: "there is no hint of anything that would compel the mind to link the two terms, hope against time and its peculiar fulfillment."[15] At the same time, if this absence also proposes a "sin against time" in the

(New York, Barnes & Noble), 15.

[14] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: A Parallel Text*, ed. J.C. Maxwell (London: Penguin, 1979), 479.

[15] Geoffrey Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1987), 170.

way that it anticipates recollection in the future, the recollected events recorded in *The Prelude* also allows Wordsworth to promote two different modes of understanding temporality. On the one hand, Hartman suggests that Wordsworth employs "an anticipatory, proleptic relation to time, intensified to the point where there is at once desire for and dread of the end being hastened," such that "there is a potential inner turning against time, and against nature insofar as it participates in the temporal order" (167). In this sense, Wordsworth employs a revolutionary stance against time that both looks forward to and fears the ending of time. On the other hand, according to Hartman, there is a sense of time in the passage that evokes "a perfectly ordinary mood (which) is seen to involve a sin against time" (170).

In other words, there is no ahistorical register of experience, and failing to understand that every event and experience is connected to a larger web of individual, temporal, and moral significance results in future damnation. The "value" of "good" poetry, we see here, is discovered in the way that feelings (symbolically represented, I would argue, as *categorically* traumatic to both thought and time) are positioned within a temporal, causal chain that is designed to neutralize their interruptive, ahistorical "overflow." In thinking "long" and "deeply" about his past as a child anticipating returning home, then, there exists the possibilities of his complex complicity in his father's death, discovered in an unknowable, unconscious wish for the death of his father that can be later recollected and seen as a form of prophetic punishment.

At the same time, in the *Scars of the Spirit*, Hartman argues that “spots of time” also provide moments of consolation from the unpredictable sense of causality that informs conscious recollection:

> A “spot of time” is “an unforgettable marker in consciousness that incites troubling yet vitalizing flashbacks. Place (“spot”) and that moment in time fuse as an indelible memory. The forward looking, natural intensity of a childish hope turns into a moment of terror. … The assumption of a causal link between his impatient hope and the father’s death has induced an illogical guilt in the boy. Seen through Freudian eyes, strength of imagination in this premature mode is an instance of the omnipotence of thoughts. Yet the event’s traumatic effect, as it reaches through time, consoles the poet because it evokes a power he once experienced more purely. … The scene, as Wordsworth says in the episode’s continuation, becomes a fountain with a refreshing, reparative effect on his relation to rural nature.[16]

For Hartman, drawing on the “strengthened” and “purified” nature of feeling as it passes through memory, the act of recollection is able to draw connections between experiences from the past that were not apparent or non-existent during the time in which they occurred; it is only in retrospect that causality can and must be established. Indeed, causality *must* be established for Hartman, as the comfort or consolation provided for the guilt that accompanies the past is established through predestination: “Such incidents of loneliness and feelings of terror akin to the sublime render Wordsworth’s nature poetry

quite different from verses in the georgic tradition … The episode opens onto an *eschatological* backdrop in which the boy's innocent and impatient longing for home anticipates a not-so-innocent burden: the poet's orphic mission" (184-5, my emphasis). As such, a religious language or sentiment accompanies Wordsworth's invocation of the powers of recollection.

In much the same manner as Eco's ironic *ars oblivionalis* or even Nietzsche's balance of remembering and forgetting in the drive to "feel ahistorically," Wordsworth's *ars poetica* transfers the powerful sense of an absent or inexplicable causality between his actions and his father's death, registered as the impossibility of knowing what he was doing or of what he was culpable, into a glance backwards that makes sense or explains this absence of causality as unconscious desire. Tragedy, found in the haunting, unacknowledged absence of a connection between two moments in time, is turned into transcendent comedy, a happy marriage of past and future, such that Wordsworth's act of recollection gives to the past a direction and sense of purpose that did not exist before. In this sense, Wordsworth does not merely re-present scenes from the past from the perspective of the present; he also invests them with a moral and personal significance that legitimates the exigency of his own poetic activity.[17] For Hartman, the necessity of forgetting to the activity of Wordsworthian recollection is found in the erasure and consequent re-inscription of a past event suffused with moral feeling that both generates

[16] Geoffrey Hartman, *Scars of the Spirit: The Struggle Against Authenticity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 184.
[17] See also Abrams' classic distinction between mimic representation and the creative imagination in *The Mirror and The Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

and is produced by the activity of memory.[18] Considered in this light, another famous phrase from the 1800 "Preface," "poetry is emotion recollected in tranquility," is not merely (and perhaps not at all) a definition but a narrative illustration of the tension that poetry both recollects and renounces, to some degree, from a position of necessary disinterest or disinvestment.

While Wordsworth seems to suggest that the poetic employment of recollection is meant to both arouse and defuse particular emotions that arise in a "spontaneous overflow," he also ties very tightly together emotion and memory in a way that encourages us to consider a dynamic configuration of these two concepts in which both depend upon the other for their significance. In beginning to consider what we might call an intertwining of forgetting and feeling, Frances Ferguson, in "Romantic Memory," has questioned Hartman's construction of Wordsworth's transformative poetic recollection by examining the way that guilt plays a central role in producing poetic power.[19] In Ferguson's estimation, Hartman's reading of Wordsworth's "spots of time" seems to argue *too* passionately for the overcoming of guilt: "neither the purest of motives nor the greatest of attention to things apparently indifferent would protect one from the experience of illimitable guilt in the face of any negative outcome or undesirable event" (527). For Ferguson, Hartman misrecognizes the apparatus of memory in Wordsworth as a process of reaffirmation in the present that links together disparate events without

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[18] In some ways, the deeply ambiguous phrase from the "Preface" regarding the status of moral feeling in the reader ("if we be *originally* possessed of much sensibility") is exploited and amplified by Keats's temporal contortions in the "feel of not to feel it." In other words, in Wordsworth's case, how can one be possessed with sensibility "originally" unless this original sensibility is discovered most powerfully in a retrospective glance that affirms the present absence of that originary feeling?

[19] Frances Ferguson, "Romantic Memory," *Studies in Romanticism* 35.4 (1996),

breaking free of them. Feeling, in this sense, cannot be therapeutically forgotten. Rather than discovering a source of power in poetic consciousness that transcends the mechanical passage of time by insisting on a linear chronology, "Romantic" memory for Ferguson heightens a continuing sense of moral obligation that one must bear for the past as a repository of feeling: "like … techniques of spiritual and material development, (Romantic memory) involves subjecting one's own experience to a standard more demanding than that of truthfulness or even accuracy, because it makes every individual memory stand in the same relation to experience as Rousseau's general will does to the individual. It requires a continual review of actions through the lenses of a variety of different sets of consequences" (527). Ferguson argues that there can be nothing pleasurable about Wordsworth's recollection of the past because it intimates his culpability in his father's death. Rather, "what Wordsworth's 'spot of time' enables us to track is not just Romanticism's stress on memory as memory solicits a consciousness of what one has done – in so far as one judges oneself by the actions that one has performed. It also registers the increasing pressure that Romanticism will come to put on the memory that can provide convincing evidence that one hasn't *acted*" (528, my emphasis). Ferguson offers a new name for this operation of "Romantic memory" as *circumstantial memory*: "circumstantial memory provides a kind of balm to the potentially corrosive memory that might seem to make an individual responsible for all the events that he was capable of knowing about from experience or report. … The good news of the memory of these clustered elements is that *there is no news,* that nothing has happened" (529). The power of childhood recollection as found in the *Prelude* can be perceived in the way that

Wordsworth's acts of recollection in the present produces "a transcript of images that never cohere into a causal pattern" (529). Rather than basing the power of Romantic memory in a repressed sense of possible guilt, Ferguson finds it in a sense of relief that there is nothing to find in the past to link it to the present. The past reaffirms the present because the present, in this sense, is the direct consequence of both a path avoided in the past and its morally justifiable denunciation of the road not taken in the present.

For Hartman and Ferguson, Romantic memory as defined through Wordsworth produces a feeling of "consolation" or "balm" for very different reasons. Hartman finds Wordsworth deriving consolation in remembering "troubling yet vitalizing flashbacks" that legitimates the present as connected to the past. Ferguson feels that the guilt of these "troubling" flashbacks could never be contained by poetic recollection because it would overwhelm the desire to remember; rather, "Romantic memory" confirms the process of time by establishing a *lack* of a connection between events in the past (childish desire to return home and the death of Wordsworth's father) that is appropriately felt as a kind of haunting; like a ghost, it is a feeling both of something and nothing. To this degree, Wordsworth's "spots of time" designate loci of moral obligation that the poet constructs with his own past; for Ferguson, the exigency of the act of recollection denotes a sense of propriety with the past that opens it up for inspection yet without impinging on the present.

At play in the analyses of both Hartman and Ferguson is a sense of possible guilt concerning traumatic experiences in the past that Wordsworth must both recognize and dismiss. For Hartman, the gap between two moments of time that is overcome in the acts

of a transcendent memory is diagnosed as a rupture that has been repressed through feelings of guilt. The episode from the *Prelude* both creates and salves a traumatic event and, in a more general sense, assuages the guilt that consciousness feels innately in an attempt to make sense of time outside of the passage of natural time. In other words, for Hartman's Wordsworth, one must not forget, even if nothing can be represented as having taken place.[20]

As many critics have noted, the sense of guilt that suffuses Wordsworth's recollections appears traumatic, and any study of the feelings of forgetting or forgetfulness in the Romantic era must pay heed to recent work in trauma studies. The word "trauma" is from the Greek word for "wound," and refers to an injury that has been inflicted on the body. In later medical, psychological and psychoanalytical usage, however, the term is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind.[21] More recently, trauma studies have become concerned with the historical construction of trauma from one generation to the next.[22] Cathy Caruth has argued that the signs of trauma can be discovered in the delayed, belated or repetitive appearance of hallucinations or other kinds of strange phenomena, indicating the inability to process or

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[20] My earlier reference to the article by Sara Guyer on Wordsworthian insomnia and the relationship of Romantic to post-Holocaust writing comes into play here. For Hartman's Wordsworth, the past as feeling must not be forgotten, even and especially if the past (as in many theoretical evaluations of possible impossibility of representing the Holocaust as 'event') is somehow beyond representation, as if it never "happened" in a verifiable sense. Read through this lens, Ferguson's version of Wordsworthian and Romantic memory as circumstantial memory seems less generous to Wordsworth, as if traumatic guilt must leave behind traces in the historical record that can be verified by oneself and others or it is not guilt at all.

[21] Freud's exploration of trauma is usefully explored in Figley's *Trauma and its Wake* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1985). For Hartman, unlike Ferguson, perhaps, the "scars of the spirit" are by nature invisible.

[22] See Marianne Hirsch, "Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning, and Post-Memory," *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* (15:2), 3-29. Hirsch discusses the ways in which second-generation or children of those who perished in the Holocaust attempted to reconstruct the experiences of

represent an experience that eludes representation.[23] Caruth argues that not only is this inability to represent or give a figure to a particular experience a sign of a damaged psyche, it is also representative of history itself: "The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all. For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or, to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence" (17-8). For Caruth, the belated representational structure of trauma is a symptom of a psychological disorder due to extreme suffering, yet it also informs the most basic and fundamental characteristics of human experience as mediated by language. Aligning the experience of trauma with the Jewish experience of the Holocaust, Caruth suggests that history itself is made up of historical crises that demand "the passing on of a *survival* that can only be possessed within a history larger than any single individual" (71, my emphasis). As Hartman himself will admit, in discussing the Holocaust testimony project in *Scars of the Spirit*, "an active if belated response, relays terrible stories, yet in a bearable way, most of the time. … In the hearing of it the listener, who as interviewer enables the telling, is a partner an act of *remembering forward* that obliges us to receive rather than repress inhuman events" (79).

One of the historical anxieties that Smith, Godwin and Scott all seem to share is that acts of dialogic communication must be constituted as a shared witnessing of the

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those who did not survive it.

present; furthermore, that these acts are fundamental to the generation of a community whose sole function is to attempt to give shape to events from the past that have or threaten to disfigure those who are or have been the witnesses of these events. The way in which these communities are formed is through a "remembering forward," an anxious and skeptical passage to a future that retains the minimal form of the present to which they owe their possible existence beyond the bounds of individual memory or experience.

In one sense, these communities operate according to an *ars oblivionalis*: identity through self-forgetfulness and mediated acts of passive self-sacrifice to a future that is uncertain and fundamentally, formally contingent. Caruth's definition of trauma, indicated through the sharing or passing on of unrepresentable events by those who have "survived" particular experiences, even (and especially) if it is the experience of *others*, provides a clue into the ways in which the texts with which I am concerned transmit through feelings and the epistemology of sympathy rather than thoughts defined as the "general representatives" (Wordsworth) of feelings. Considered through the philosophical paradigms of eighteenth-century Enlightenment empiricism, feelings are made to be cognitively forgotten as they are inscribed into the bodies that experience them.[24] Yet Smith, Godwin and Scott attempt to articulate a belief in the ability of feelings to transcend lived experience and find a form of existence in the texts that both contain and threaten them.

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[23] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

[24] John Locke and David Hume, arguing against a Cartesian seventeenth-century rationalism, argue that empirical existence both defines and limits human experience. Hume tried to place this notion of empirical understanding to use in an "attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects," as the subtitle of his *Treatise of Human Nature* indicated.

For Smith and Godwin, sympathy is at odds with a rational, epistemological understanding of the past as a site of knowledge; rather, sympathy extends a shared sense of human feeling that must be imaginatively projected into both the past and the future in order to make it recognizable. Unlike Wordsworth, Smith bases her own poetic practice on the inability to use poetry for any kind of consolation except in the effacement of personal experience. Through Hartman and Ferguson, Wordsworth can be seen to anticipate a future state that has an element of moral or apocalyptic certainty to it; for Smith, a future based on shared feeling is *categorically* unknowable. As a poet, Smith imagines that she might be able to discover some sense of consolation in her future readers; on the other hand, the means through which this imaginary connection is established is always through the representation of her voice in *texts*. Indeed, Smith, Godwin and Scott all employ a paradoxically mediated immediacy that the discourse of sentiment offers to an analysis of the past through *textual* artifacts rather than remembered events. Modifying Caruth *via* Keats, we might say that it is only in and through the inherent forgetting of memories that they are *first* experienced at all; yet the first experience of these forgotten memories is always by *others*. In a roundabout way, the Lethean logic of this form of Romantic forgetting resembles Wordsworth's poetic recollection, yet it directly transfers the site of possible remembrance from the self to others.

The authors studied in *Feeling Forgotten* address anxieties about the ability of language to both represent and deform the past, to recollect and forget; at the same time, they refuse to fully submit these anxieties to an analysis that defuses or reduces them to

moments within an overarching historical pattern. In other words, the literature that they leave to history is not made up of simple moral or cultural statements; rather, they take the form of urgent questions posed to an uncertain future. In order to study these texts as questions, then, I argue that it is essential to leave certain questions unanswered in order to attempt to discover the *feelings* that seem to run up against the limits of knowledge as a form of individual or collective security. Many critics have found that Wordsworth, in railing against Godwin's belief in the power of reason, made a case for a form of thoughtful "general representation" of individual feeling in the *Lyrical Ballads* when he stated that "our meddling intellect / Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things: / we murder to dissect" ("The Tables Turned"). Rather than avoiding the problem of the "meddling intellect" which "murder(s) to dissect," the writers whom I consider in *Feeling Forgotten* seem to confront the murderous intellect head-on and still refuse to abandon its importance to an unknown future. Indeed, the relationship between reason and feeling in the texts studied in *Feeling Forgotten* is not based on a dialectical process of one overcoming or pre-dating the other; rather, these terms are deeply intertwined and reveal a struggle for primacy with each other.

This dissertation charts a Romantic literary and critical tradition in which the representation of self-forgetfulness in and through literature, defined as a consoling escape from or transcendence of present emotional turmoil, is displaced or lost. Traditional accounts of the role of feeling and memory argue that the writers of this period use literature to transform traumatic impressions of the past. As I have suggested, one of the essential elements of Romantic creativity was to be found in the reconciliation

between the experience of the natural and spiritual worlds. The device used in most cases, from poems such as Coleridge's "Aeolian Harp" to Wordsworth's monumental *Prelude*, was a recollection of a chain of images from the poet's memory that acted analogically to assist the reader to establish an emotional connection between natural and spiritual reality. In the Romantic tradition, the poetic employment of memory was the crucial link between disparate parts and the whole, between the poet and reader, and between the temporal, specific moment and the eternal, universal truth. The authors that I discuss acknowledge that sentimental literary reflections on a troubling or traumatic past are meant to provide a balm, whether for individuals or communities, for these experiences. Yet the subject of their works directly highlights the *failure* of literature to provide this form of consolation to either the author or reader. Using literature to demonstrate the inadequacy of literary experience as a form of consolation, these authors imagine a new role for feeling, which comes to be defined as a sense of alienation and isolation.

Admittedly, while I have chosen to discuss authors and texts that do not appear to fit together into readily available patterns of critical or cultural analyses, I find that an examination of their works from the perspective of feeling and forgetting reveals new possibilities for study in the period. While I suggest that there are connections to be found in comparing these authors, earlier studies would position these authors *against* each other. Charlotte Smith has been designated as a proto-Romantic or Romantic poet who is decidedly sympathetic to the proto-feminism of the period. It has been argued, for example, that Godwin's memoir of his wife, Mary Wollstonecraft, was incredibly

misogynistic and revealed his own disdain for women.[25] In addition, it could not be more obvious that Scott's beliefs in national cultural authority and Burkean conservatism against a radical, revolutionary politics are strongly and demonstrably antithetical to those held by Smith and Godwin. Given these oppositions, then, what would an analysis of Smith's poetry, Godwin's texts from the early nineteenth century, and Scott's poetry reveal? More so than a direct engagement with the various genres that these authors employ, I am concerned with the ideas that connect them and that are explored across a variety of aesthetic forms. Indeed, what I hope to reveal by my work here is that these authors are less concerned with remaining true to specific genres and more interested in testing their use of particular genres as fit vehicles for the representation of feelings that deeply question the value of the literary to act as an objective, historical repository of memories. For these authors, this form of questioning becomes the substance of the literary itself, one in which the literary becomes a mode of communicating anxieties and self-doubt that literature itself appears unable to address.

What must also be acknowledged is that these authors were very familiar with each other's work, and, at times, admiringly so. Based on her use of the Petrarchan sonnet and references to Goethe's *Sturm und Drang* novel, *Werther* (1774), Smith's poetry gives voice to a melancholy that directly questions gender boundaries and the relationship between writers and readers based on feelings of intense, self-forgetful melancholy. Godwin also employs Goethe in his own work, yet he repositions the 'man

[25] Joanne Shattock notes that Godwin's attempt to be brutally frank about Wollstonecraft's troubled life in the memoir defamed her reputation: "in their (historians of feminism) view Godwin committed a double murder of Wollstonecraft's reputation, firstly by his misguided candor and secondly by his unwitting undermining of her intellectual credentials" (14).

of feeling' into a political and cultural environment for the purposes of broad social critique, one that makes feeling itself both necessary and deeply suspect. In his work for the Edinburgh journal, *The Monthly Review*, Scott displays a great affinity for Smith's and Godwin's novels. Indeed, in his own literary productions, Scott borrows extensively from both. Pierre Bourdieu's analyses regarding the relationship between cultural practices and broader social processes, including the social position and role of the intellectual, provide an initial framework for examining the ideas that hold these writers together in a field that is at once open to mutual admiration and contention.[26] Bourdieu posits a "field of cultural production," a space that has its own laws and functions outside of the political and economic fields in which it appears to be enmeshed. Literature is clearly one such field, in which writers compete for position and prestige, and struggle to define the aesthetic value of the literary work. Bourdieu states that, "what is at stake (in the field) is the power to impose the dominant definition of the writer and therefore to delimit the population of those entitled to take part in the struggle to define the writer" (42). Their struggle to define the writer as a producer of personal and cultural memories that cannot or ought not to be represented also redefines the role of the literary in preserving a past as one that directly contradictions or comes into conflict with the beliefs of the present, and that historicizes events from the past that nevertheless must be remembered even if the present desire of the writer is to forget them.

For Smith, this struggle is resolved in a negation of self through poetry that projects traumatic feelings forward to future readers. Smith attempts to dislodge feelings

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[26] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia

that overwhelm individual thought from her own experience and transmit them to the bodies and consciousnesses of others who may act as witnesses to her suffering. In *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis*, Richard Terdiman argues that "memory and exchange have been 'facts' throughout history, but in the 'long nineteenth century' each underwent an epochal reconfiguration. … Goods move and are transformed in their circulation; memories are displaced and transformed with the passage of time or in the course of an increasingly dense and highly organized process of information exchange."[27] For Smith, when memories are atomized and cut loose from specific individual experience, or, in other words, when sonnets are acknowledged as units of economic exchange (as they very much were in journals that reprinted Smith's work without her permission), then the illusory act of intimate communication between poet and reader can be based upon the loss of this very intimacy.

In the second chapter of *Feeling Forgotten*, I argue that a close analysis of Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* reveals the degree to which her poetry anticipates a shift in nineteenth- and twentieth century modern poetry from a mournful compensation of loss to one of inconsolable melancholy. For Smith, the loss of feeling is explored from the perspective of an *aesthetic* forgetting, and so from the viewpoint of the individual poet and the effect of her poetry on her readers. Smith's poetry of forgetting, underwritten by an amplification of Petrarchan paradoxes that disrupt poetic subjectivity and memory, attempts to establish a future community of readers who sympathetically

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University Press, 1993).

feel the poet's suffering *for* her through her proto-Keatsian disappearance from her own verse. Unlike the memorial communities that Wordsworth or Coleridge will later attempt to construct through a return to Christian faith, the fundamental principle of Smith's poetically constructed community is based on accepting human mortality and finitude as an inextricable condition of the possibility of poetic representation. Analogically relating recollection and forgetting with the shifting positions of poetic subjectivity (as found in the poet's eye/I) and objectivity (the object of the poetic gaze), Smith invests the eighteenth-century aesthetic experience of self-forgetfulness and desire for oblivion with a radically destabilizing force.

As Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* give voice to a traumatic psyche that nineteenth-century writers struggle to contain and displace, so Godwin's mixture of rational, utopian skepticism and sentimental fiction provides a mixed literary heritage for his nineteenth-century followers to exploit. In my third chapter, I address what might be called the wages of *political* forgetting, and argue that Godwin's anti-sentimental sentimental novel, *Fleetwood, or, The New Man of Feeling* (1805) is a keystone to the edifice of nineteenth-century realist, anti-Romantic fiction. Casimir Fleetwood, the novel's first-person narrator, recounts episodes from his life and attempts to locate in his past the reasons for his misanthropic feelings. His relentless self-analysis appears to dismiss the possibility of retaining any sense of sublime Romantic feeling in a corrupted, fallen world.[28]

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[27] Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 1.

[28] Thomas Pfau, *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1790-1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005). Pfau discusses Godwin's understanding of feeling in similar terms. Godwin's works demonstrate "how early romantic history is experienced as an unrelenting condition of anxious hyperlucidity or paranoia. … Social and political

Godwin takes Smith's radical unhinging of the relationship between poetic subjectivity and objectivity and turns it into his life's work by producing texts that can be aligned one against the other. Whereas his political tract, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), calls for a revolutionary sense of rational utopianism to overturn the superstitions of existing cultural institutions and habits, his first novel, *The Adventures of Caleb Williams, or, Things as They Are* (1794), demonstrates that such a future state may only be possible at the expense of the very humanity that it seeks to preserve. In other words, a future that has been cleansed of the stagnating or discriminatory institutions that suppress the operation of reason will be unfamiliar and strange to the person who by necessity must be endowed with reason, who successfully enacts the revolution, and must exist in that new world. Indeed, while many of Godwin's writings demonstrate a vast historical knowledge and awareness of English culture, he often directed his writings towards the destruction of historical myths, such as the ideals of the Burkean feudal past or the enlightened, sympathetic codes of conduct of the eighteenth-century. I also cite Godwin's *Life of Geoffrey Chaucer* and his "Essay on Sepulchers" and suggest that they are harbingers of forms of historical fiction that promote an imaginary yet impersonal relationship with literary history, one that is based on the use of the imagination to connect sympathetically with the past in such a way as to confront, question, and disrupt the ideologies of the present.

Although Smith's ungrounded Petrarchan poems and Godwin's Gothic tales of instrumental reason seem to constantly reinscribe a loss of a sense of history that could

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knowledge proves inextricably entwined with its emotional phenomenology. … The experience of the real hinges on one's constant preparedness to distrust the reality of experience and to expose the latter as so

contain a hopeful or happy future, such that their "Romantic," proto-modern experience entails learning to live in a permanent condition of moral insecurity, there are also elements that seem to gesture beyond. In my fourth chapter, I contend that Walter Scott recognizes these radical elements as found in Smith and Godwin, and then transports them to the realm of fiction that is written and recorded *impersonally*. Unlike the aesthetic or political forgetting that Smith and Godwin explore, Scott crafts a sense of *national* or *cultural* forgetting that gives shape to what we might recognize as the effect of nostalgia. I begin the third chapter with a recapitulation of Scott criticism before moving to an analysis of Scott's first poetical romance, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. Published in 1805, the same year as Godwin's *Fleetwood*, Scott's poem emphasizes the degree to which historical amnesia *must* inform the recollection of the past: in the absence of physical presence or material knowledge of the past, the present, figured through the voice of a wandering bard, is reduced to evoking vague and nostalgic feelings for a past that is threatened with being forgotten. At the same time, Scott presents this form of forgetful memory as a cure to the immersive and labyrinthine models of reading that have, in his estimation, led authors such as Smith and Godwin astray: to become embroiled in sentimental or sympathetic communion with the past risks blurring the distinctions between past and present, as well as fiction and reality. For Scott, the past must resist being changed by the present; the bard, who "tells the tale as 'twas told," gives voice to history as based on repetition, such that it is everywhere and at every time the *same* tale. As such, the past must become a possession that is transmitted into the

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many ideological frames conspiring against our genuine access to the real" (20).

future rather than that which possesses and inhabits the reader as a dominant idea (as the mere *idea* of revolution had become that which drove the eponymous hero of his first novel, *Waverley* (1814), to participate in the Jacobite revolution). Shifting from the moral basis of Wordsworthian recollection, in which past is revisited in order to examine its unacknowledged ethical contributions to the present, to a nostalgic principle of iterability, in which the virtue of the past that is remembered is that it is always already what has been said, Scott relinquishes his claim to investigating the past as anything other than a transmission.

In the end, *Feeling Forgotten* attempts to chart a shift in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English literature that is noticeable as a crisis of memory, one in which the vestiges of eighteenth-century theories of sympathy are transformed into new, and not always successful, ways in which the self relates to its own past and to that of others, as well as to its historical and political milieu. Keats, Nietzsche, and Eco, among others, are the inheritors and transmitters of these reconfigurations. Through texts that depict the need to overcome individual and cultural loss, this shift is discernible through the displacement of the melancholic loss of the feeling of lived memories into the fiction of an impersonal historical plenitude that acts to preserve the past in such a way as to answer unavoidable loss of feeling by asserting that the past, one's own and others, can be felt (again) in the aesthetic or historical experience of reading about the past. While Smith and Godwin image the survival of their own identities in the own versions of Romantic memory in the figure of a future reader who will remember them in mourning their loss, Scott attempts to shut down the trauma of the recurring past by constructing a

more pleasant feeling of forgetfulness in nostalgia, or, in Scott's formulation, a form of melancholy that itself becomes subject to history.

Chapter Two

Charlotte Smith and the Poetics of Oblivion

One of the central concerns of feminist critics of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century women poets has been that of poetic lineage. Traditionally, the poetry of the Romantic period is considered to begin with the publication of the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, and its theoretical framework is given shape with the publication of the second edition and preface of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800. Yet, as current criticism has been at pains to demonstrate, women poets that seemed to have inspired the foundational aesthetic concerns attributed to Romanticism have traditionally been given relatively little attention or marginalized to the realm of the "pre-Romantic"[1] or "poetry of sensibility."[2] Critical gestures of dismissal are also present in the mythic, founding moments of Romanticism itself. In a pamphlet printed in 1796, Coleridge admits a preference for the sonnets of William Bowles, but he also pays tribute to his

[1] As early as 1928, James R. Foster recognizes critical amnesia with regard to Charlotte Smith, but in a way that seems to legitimate that very forgetfulness: "time and the critics have dealt but scurvily with Charlotte Smith, since she has been completely forgotten, being neither as bad as the Minerva Press nor as striking as Ann Radcliffe" (Foster 463). Marshall Brown, in *Preromanticism*, focuses primarily on male authors and provokes the question of lineage by employing a Hegelian view of history. He stresses that the period is preromantic "precisely because it was *not yet* romantic" (2). To the possible objection that this kind of thinking leads to a rigorous teleology, Browns states, "the term 'preromanticism' has always been attacked for its teleology, but that is the very reason I welcome it. The great authors were striving ahead for something new, and when they failed to identify a goal, they were left powerless. The real problem with earlier studies of preromanticism is that they are not teleological enough" (3). Overarching Brown's discussion is the belief that Romanticism perfected the aesthetic and philosophical developments of Preromanticism and the Enlightenment.

[2] Like Foster, Jerome McGann, following in the footsteps of Northrop Frye in attempting to reignite interest in the period preceding Romanticism in his seminal essay, "Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility," attempts to recover the revolutionary potential of the female "poetics of sensibility." At the same time, McGann seems to argue for the necessity of reading these female poets while to preserving the

early fascination with Charlotte Smith, stating, "Charlotte Smith and Bowles are they who first made the Sonnet popular among the present English: I am justified therefore by analogy in deducing its laws from their compositions."[3] In 1835, Wordsworth remarked that Smith was "a lady to whom English verse is under greater obligations than are likely to be either acknowledged or remembered."[4]

The issues facing women poets in their own time have been carried over into contemporary critical attempts at resuscitating their legacy. Kari Lokke summarizes the problems facing the critic who wishes to revive the female poets of the Romantic period by noting how there appears to be little room to create an alternate poetics of the period alongside the dominant, masculine aesthetics of sublimity.[5] Lokke suggests that a more complete picture of poetry emerges if we consider the ways in which women responded to their "uniquely vulnerable and troubled sociopolitical position as women writers in a revolutionary and post-revolutionary age" (86). If anything, both the older and more recent attempts to give shape to the period immediately preceding or impinging upon Romanticism are fraught with a kind of aesthetic and critical anxiety that was marked out from the very beginning.

In this chapter, I will explore how Smith's poetry gives voice to a traumatic loss of individual identity by disabling the traditional forms of poetic consolation they appear to reference. The paradox of this problem is that the representations of a desired self-

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aesthetics and seriousness of the masculine poetic projects of Romanticism.

[3] Quoted from Daniel Robinson, "Work Without Hope": Anxiety and Embarrassment in Coleridge's Sonnets," 81.

[4] William Wordsworth, *Wordsworth: Selected Prose* (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1988), 403.

[5] Kari Lokke, *Rebellious Heart: British Women Writers and the French Revolution* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

forgetfulness and oblivion that populate these poems can only happen when the poet is forgotten and left behind. For Smith, oblivion represents a strange kind of freedom from the necessity of communicating incommunicable suffering with an audience, even as the passionate need for sympathy from others for a tormented life lived outside of poetic communication, for the life that is both hidden by and motivates the formation of Smith's poetic persona, appears as the sole, motivating desire. The appeal of self-forgetfulness, an appeal rooted in the impossible, imaginary possession of death within life, promises a momentary respite from pain and suffering; for Smith, the proleptic *moment* of self-forgetfulness defines poetic duration as an impossible interruption into lived existence and an evasion of life's ills from within life itself.

At the same time, the melancholic awareness conveyed in Smith's poems that the moment of self-forgetfulness must be purely illusory and without real existence or duration is represented as a moment of *insight* from within the scope of a poetic utterance. The freedom of the lyric "I" from the illusory self-forgetfulness of poetic experience and duration leads to its desire to abstain from the insufficiency of poetry as a balm or consolation because suffering as a *real* feeling must be fleeting and not artificially perpetuated by the figures of poetry. As with Keats's evocation of the "feel of not to feel it" and its temporal contortions, feeling takes place both before and after the "lost" feeling that poetry seeks in vain to (re)capture in evoking a past that is inaccessible and impossible to retrieve. From ironic evocations of eighteenth-century poetic tropes of sentiment to parodies of the Romantic sublime, Smith seems to retreat into an

inconsolable silence that is heard only in the negating of poetic voice altogether.[6] To this degree, I will argue in this chapter that Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* stage poetic self-forgetfulness as an impossible way out of the self's pain of existence. Indeed, modern critics have found the benumbing repetition of melancholic sadness in Smith's poems to be a barrier to reading the majority of her poems, and this dispassionate inability to read her poetry is an ironic, yet fitting testament to poems that contain within them a silent suffering too great to be endured by the illusory consolations of a self-forgetfulness found within poetry.

My argument begins with the claim that the poetry of Charlotte Smith cannot be understood without an investigation into its aesthetic complexity and the critical, historical forgetting to which it has been subject. The questions that drive my analyses are the following: why are we always "recovering" Charlotte Smith? In what sense does this constant recovery displace or rewrite Smith's poetics? In what way is Smith's melancholy presupposed as the *basis* for a mournful recovery and re-inscription in

[6] In *The Romantic Poetess: European Culture, Politics, and Gender, 1820-1840*, Patrick Vincent provides powerful readings of women poets from a later period that nevertheless draws on themes and constructions of lyric subjectivity that I find prevalent in Smith. Referring to Smith as a forbearer to Felicia Hemans and Letitia Landon, Vincent notes, "women poets' sentimental elegies, more tender, more self-conscious, ultimately more self-destructive than male poets' elegies, turn every poem into a last song; the anagnorisis or self-discovery so central to the elegy often comes in the form of a Sapphic death-wish" (37). There can be no doubt that death plays a part as the real equivalent to the self-forgetfulness or oblivion that occupies the time of aesthetic experience. Yet in the case of Smith, it is the poem itself that is constructed as that which holds the fulfillment of this "death-wish" at bay and provides an ideal foundation for a poetic community of readers who bear this burden. In *Deathbound Subjectivity*, Alphonso Lingis explores a similar idea within an ethical register: "our mortal community, our community in mortality more fundamental than every commonplace established by understanding, than every work we can externalize, has no purpose save to render present the serving of the other unto the abysses of his or her dying, in order that the other be not lost into solitude, into the night and fog" (190). Lingis states earlier that the concern with one's own death is shifted to an Other, such that one sympathetically would "join the other in his or her dying" (188). In many respects, Smith invokes a language of sentiment and sympathy, based on a sense of shared feelings found in eighteenth-century literature, amplifies it through a Petrarchan poetics of existential self-doubt and hopeless melancholy, and arrives at positions that I feel are similar to the ethical

contemporary criticism? Isn't this belated response already written into the temporal fabric of Smith's poems? I shall attempt to argue below that Smith's complex evocations of forgetting and forgetfulness forge a poetic language of forgetting that is used to express what cannot be forgotten because it ought not to be remembered. Given this aversion to memory, Smith seems to intimate that the survival of her poems and the feelings contained therein depend upon a future community of forgetful readers who will be able to come to grips with her traumatic feelings.

Indeed, I would argue that the most adequate figure for the poet, as given shape by Smith in her unfinished final poem, *Beachy Head* (1807), is to be found in the "strange and foreign forms / Of sea-shells" found as fossils upon the chalk cliffs of East Sussex. Smith's poet at first considers their presence on the cliff, and wonders if nature can "mimic" these "fantastic shapes / Of bivalves, and inwreathed volutes." Yet in this moment of suspected natural mimicry, Smith's poet finds reflections of herself and her own suspected "natural" activity. The shells are displaced, both temporally and spatially, yet it is only *as* relics or ruins that they are available for contemplation. In addition, the fossils of both the bivalve and the volute close or curl upon themselves, folding inwards towards a hollow center; only the absence of life remains, then, and it is this absence that the figure of Charlotte Smith occupies within her poems. Like the ruins of white, marble scrolls on Roman columns from which it draws its name, the blanched, "calcified" volute that Smith's poet discovers turns towards the symbolic significance of her own poetry and her relationship to it in a way that is not or no longer public, no longer recoverable as

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discussions concerning the possibilities of achieving sympathy with the Other as found in contemporary literary theory and philosophy.

evidence of a life once lived heroically in the face of suffering, but written always around an absence that is both fragile and "inwreathed."

From the beginning, the revival of interest in the poetry of Charlotte Smith has attempted to negotiate her position within a Romantic canon of male poets. With the publication of Smith's *Collected Poems* in 1993, Stuart Curran argued that Smith's poetry was essential for understanding the importance of Romantic women poets working both within and against masculinist traditions. According to Curran, women writers of the Romantic era were more emphatically interested in the beautiful than the visionary and sublime aesthetics normally considered as essential to the poetic projects of the canonical male poets of Romanticism such as Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley.[7] This is not to say that Curran places Smith outside the purview of the Romantic aesthetics of male writers. Rather, Smith provides access to an "alternative" Romanticism that is both attracted to and troubled by a vision of nature that is familiar and strange, one that resists the transcendent experience and vision of the poet.

Critics who followed Curran emphasized the degree to which writers like Smith need to be seen outside patterns of gendered discourse. Jacqueline Labbé and Sarah Zimmerman note that Smith creates poetic personae which make sentimental rhetorical appeals to readers of her poems.[8] Labbé seems to summarize these positions by stating

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[7] In "The Material Sublime of Women Romantic Poets," John Pipkin argues that Smith's poetry inhabits both spheres: "Charlotte Smith's poetry demonstrates how the material sublime provides a means of self-empowerment for women working within the discourse of Romanticism. Smith's sonnets neither domesticate the sublime in order to express a "feminine" unity with nature, nor do they exhibit the transcendence characteristic of many male-authored poems" (610).

[8] See Jacqueline Labbé, *Charlotte Smith: Romanticism, Poetry, and the Culture of Gender* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), Sarah Zimmerman, *Romanticism, Lyricism, and History* (Albany: State U of New York Press 1999), and Paula Backscheider, *Eighteenth-century Women Poets and their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005). Backscheider ties Smith to

that she wants "to avoid pigeonholing (Smith) as a 'woman writer.' To do so suggests that everything that Smith writes emanates from her position as an embodied female, in the thrall of her own cultural positioning. And yet, Smith's poetry shows instead a writer able to play with gender as simply another aspect of identity, and by extension suggests a more self-conscious society than we have often wanted to admit" (167). Labbé draws Smith closer to a conception of Romanticism that is representative of a "self-conscious society." For Labbé, this means that Smith's poetry attempts to complicate the notion of masculine poetic identity without, at the same time, re-naturalizing or re-hierarchizing gender as the unspoken site of difference. Seen from this perspective, Smith gives shape to a mode of resistance to or critique of the implicitly gendered position of the Romantic poet. This consideration of Smith's appeal to feelings and the sentimental codes inherent within particular audiences resonates deeply with the attempt to recover a feminist poetics that has gone unacknowledged because, in Labbé's estimation, it is not tied specifically to gender as the determining factor.

Zimmerman's insight, that Smith's widespread popularity during the late-eighteenth century is to be found in her indirect appeals to readers' emotions, highlights the importance of *forgetfulness* to an understanding of Smith's poetics: appearing to be absorbed in her own suffering in order to establish a self-conscious forgetfulness, Smith appealed to the sentimental nature of her readers who, witnessing her distress, became

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an eighteenth century tradition of female poets, stating, "we should read the sonnets on their own terms, as we would those of a man, and a man writing a sonnet sequence. Taking as the perspective the lonely wanderer, the bard who can travel and see, Smith derives power from this moral, solitary, traditional figure. She can understand and paint melancholy and the tradition best in her solitary wanderer because she feels it" (329). See also Sitter, *Literary Loneliness*, pp.77-103, for an ample discussion of a perceived retreat from history in post-Augustan poetics.

more interested in her, leading to a greater demand for her work. Other critics have followed her path in analyzing the theatrical performance of Smith's poetic identity.[9] Zimmerman notes how Smith, by appearing self-forgetful as a writer, or, by appearing to transcend the *form* of her poetry, makes her readers feel less like readers and more like listeners or viewers:

> The illusion of being ignored has an unexpected side-effect – the beholder may experience the sensation of entering the picture, precisely because he or she is not made self-conscious in the act of watching, an awareness that can produce resistance. Smith's sonnets achieve a similar effect, via the poet's apparent obliviousness to an audience. What seems to be a desire on her part to turn away from social scenes as she wanders, "alone and pensive," proves captivating. … Fried's paradigm helps make explicit what is implicit in *Elegiac Sonnets*: just as on the stage, the social world is not excluded by the gesture of turning one's back to an audience. Like a member of a theater audience or the beholder of a painting, the reader of a lyric poem must lose the self-consciousness of spectatorship, must feel forgotten in order to forget himself or herself and make the necessary leap of identification. (109-10)

For Zimmerman, Smith's readers were able to "make the necessary leap of identification" in sympathizing with the plights of Smith's poetic personae. According to Zimmerman, Smith's later attempts to write explicitly political texts were met with hostility because Smith had already ingrained into her readers a certain set of expectations that were

[9] In "Charlotte Smith's Melancholia on the Page and Stage," Kathryn Pratt argues that the appeal of the Elegiac Sonnets lay in "representing theatricality … as the inescapable mode of experience" (564).

aligned with her sentimental, autobiographical poetry; these later attempts revealed a much different "Charlotte Smith" than readers had come to know.

While I agree with Zimmerman's insight into the importance of forgetfulness to Smith's work, I would also like to disengage this term from critical estimations of Smith that implicitly relate forgetfulness to biography. Indeed, if there is one defining, and ultimately limiting, connection between eighteenth-century and contemporary readers, it is in the attempt to discover the source of Smith's vaguely defined desire for oblivion in discourses that are more easily comprehensible, such as the functioning of sentimental discourses within the literary marketplace or in the story of her own sad life. At the same time, the use of Smith's life as a basis for understanding her poetry as evocative of an "alternative" Romanticism that is comprehended along the lines of gender or the literary marketplace may also be an indirect acknowledgement that Smith deserves a place within the canon of Romantic poetry. These efforts have not gone unacknowledged by the defenders of a more traditional Romantic canon. Jerome McGann and Marshall Brown have argued forcefully for the need to acknowledge a revolutionary "poetics of sensibility" or "pre-romanticism;" these efforts, however, to police the boundaries of a more traditional field of male Romantic poets serves to displace alternative forms of Romanticism that were *contemporaneous* with the productions of male Romantic poets to a period *prior to* the concrete historical moments of Romanticism, repeating a narrative that both Wordsworth and Coleridge seem to initiate. While it is important to recover Smith as a woman who suffered, it is equally as important to discover ways to recover Smith as a powerful poet without reducing her poetry to the allegorical representations of her own life.

In almost every critical reading of Smith's work, then, one finds repeated the same sorrowful biography, in which is related her failed marriage to an irresponsible profligate who dragged her along to prison in France while being unable to provide for the basic needs of their twelve children. Admittedly, Smith gestures towards these incidents in her various prefaces to the *Elegiac Sonnets*, which was published in ten different editions from 1784 to 1811. As Esther Schor has argued, Smith needed to continue to produce new editions and new justifications for her continued sense of melancholy in prefaces and editions that were longer and more comprehensive.[10] Yet Smith's prefaces do not specifically identify the source of her sense of sorrow. Initially, then, this lends credence to Zimmerman's attempt to locate the source of Smith's performance of self-forgetfulness in her own life story as a basis for economic recompense. At the same time, using Smith's biography as the basis for understanding her poems has served to detract from the complex, literary nature of Smith's poetic experiments and reduced close readings of the poems to little more than attempts to tie together an abstract, poetic grief and autobiographical events. Daniel White has argued that the very vagueness of Smith's "real" melancholy promotes an endless fascination with her poetry as ambiguous evocations of those kinds of feelings.[11] White notes that eighteenth-century critics hardly ever reviewed her poems without commenting directly

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[10] See Esther Schor, *Bearing the Dead: The British Culture of Mourning from the Enlightenment to Victoria* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1994), 48-73.

[11] Daniel White, "Autobiography and Elegy: The Early Romantic Poetics of Thomas Gray and Charlotte Smith," in *Early Romantics: Perspectives in British Poetry from Pope to Wordsworth*, ed. Thomas Woodman. (New York: St. Martin's, 1998), 57.

on her personal life, and this observation could easily be applied to her contemporary critics.

Both Janet Todd and Adela Pinch have attempted to move beyond autobiographical readings of Smith.[12] According to Todd, the close connection between literature and biography was an established feature of sentimental literature. Works of literature were not transparent representations of events from the life of the author; rather, the discourses of sentiment highlighted the ways that works of literature furnished moral examples for life through narratives that involved difficult ethical choices. Pinch moves closer to embracing more nuanced readings of Smith's poetry that pay attention to her craft as a poet and Smith's awareness of the effect of her poems on readers. Pinch explains that "Smith's sonnets highlight the literariness of the melancholy they express. From the first sonnets onward, they seem to argue that their melancholy may indeed be caused by the strange effects of reading and writing" (201). Employing Earl Wasserman's description of Pope's allusive Augustan style, Smith's poems are "like echo chambers, in which reverberate direct quotations, ideas, and tropes from English poetry," such that "the fundamental unit around which Smith's sonnets seem to be built is not so much the image, or even the individual word or line, but rather the artful, pathetic phrase" (201). "Borrowing" lines from other poets, Smith was routinely accused of plagiarism. In order to defuse accusations of plagiarism, Smith responded by footnoting her poems with citations to even the most well-known phrases.

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[12] See Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1986), and Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

Similarly, Susan Wolfson and John Anderson have outlined more sympathetic and complex models of reading Smith's deliberatively allusive style of writing.[13] Indeed, Smith's poems seem to make the breakdown of containment both a narrative and formal necessity, such that the inability to retreat into a vaguely defined, yet comforting space that is far from the troubles of the world is already a comment on the inefficacy of the sonnet form as a poetic model of containment.[14] As we shall see, the failure of poetry to provide a feeling of consolation for the *individual* reader or writer drives Smith to embrace a more diffuse community of readers and writers in place of the evanescent feelings of an empirical and finite individual; in this sense, Smith's poetry alludes to and calls upon other poets from the past and present and holds them together in sympathetic and dialogic communication. This allusive practice founds a more complex form of interaction between Smith and her readers than one based on the interpretive strategies of biography. While Smith's poetic personae's powerful desire for oblivion and forgetting is a melancholic acknowledgment that individual memories cannot be erased from individual consciousness except through death, a sympathetic sharing of these feelings generates a form of communication based not on the viability of individual memories, but within a shared sense of the inevitable loss of individual identity. While Smith posits that the experience of absolute forgetting is impossible except in the loss of individual memories in death, Smith's poetry, which highlights the failure of poetry to console its readers or provide ethical models of behavior, gestures towards the construction of a

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[13] See Susan Wolfson, "Charlotte Smith's 'Emigrants': Forging Connections at the Borders of a Female Tradition." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 63.4 (2000), and John Anderson, "'Beachy Head': The Romantic Fragment Poem as Mosaic." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 63.4 (2000).

[14] See Robinson, "*Elegiac Sonnets*: Charlotte Smith's Formal Paradoxy." Robinson's exemplary analyses

melancholic, self-forgetful community of readers that is exiled from the comforts of poetry.

The forms of self-forgetfulness found in Smith's work can be traced back to her use of the Petrarchan sonnet and its complicated embrace and rejection of poetry as an adequate representation of real feelings. In Smith's hands, the poetic persona of the Petrarchan sonnet, as a disembodied voice that haunts, interrupts, and displaces individual memory and existence, is subtly reorganized, and the temporal paradoxes contained within are radically amplified. Through Petrarch, Smith suggests that poetry is communicated and sustained by a constant speech to silent objects, such as the speechless female figure. Indeed, eighteenth century writers argued over the alleged tediousness of Petrarch's poetry (ironically, in much the same way that Smith's own poetry was dismissed). Smith employed this critical perception of a kind of mute masculinity, wherein the usefulness of poetry is exposed while femininity becomes elusive. The first edition of the *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784) employs this reversal of gendered distinction in order to give shape to a disembodied voice; as we shall see, this is the initial development of a poetics of self-forgetting found in later poems.

For Smith, the reversal of traditional gender roles is counteracted by a silence that cannot be gendered at all, a blankness that relates all poets, male or female, to exiled wanderers who can never fully enter into the fullness of language or public utterance that confirms historical and embodied identity. As Zimmerman, Labbé and others have noted, the representation of self-forgetfulness that Smith employs while appearing to be

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expose the way that Smith breaks down the sonnet form in her early poems.

overwhelmed with grief becomes the medium through which Smith succeeds in conveying her general, allegorical identity or character as “suffering wife” or “mourning mother” to an audience of readers. At the same time, the poet that is able to represent feminine, allegorical personae and silent masculine objects also positions this identity beyond or prior to the gendered bodies marked with memory that populate her poems. Smith’s poems demonstrate a complicated relationship to both the Petrarchan tradition and to the “spirit” of Petrarchanism in the eighteenth-century. It is this complication, in fact, that brings Petrarch into view for the development of the Romantic sonnet and Romantic poetry in general.[15] Following Petrarch, Smith creates feminine abstractions that becomes model for poetic identity and give her poetry a constant source of self-reflective speech and examination.

The use of Petrarch as a guiding spirit throughout the *Sonnets* allows Smith to posit a sympathetic poetic tradition, one that is constituted by different poets, real and imaginary, male and female, who transform the melancholic unattainability of a dead beloved figure into an apostrophe to absence itself, as well as to the futility of poetry to console the poet. Smith is one of the first Romantic poets to recognize the rich possibilities inherent with Petrarch’s fragmentary and self-negating poetry, one which oscillates between the subject and object of poetic enunciation. Smith’s absorption and amplification of Petrarch’s style, initially found in her translations and then within her own elegiac contexts, emphasizes an elusive intersection between love and grief that deeply questions the stability of individual identity. From Petrarch, Smith learns that melancholy resembles desire, and that absence resembles presence. What, then, is the

significance of Smith's Petrarchan oscillation between love and grief, one that never hints at a literal cause for the speaker's sorrow aside from vague discontent and melancholic longing for the past?

"Sorrows that Sense refuses to forget:" Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets*

As a representation of absence, Petrarch's attempt to recollect the past or preserve an image of Laura is constantly compromised by his inability to provide an image of Laura that is objective and untainted by his own conceptions of her. For Petrarch, Laura becomes a figure that stands at the limits of his own memory, yet nevertheless, Petrarch's recollection of Laura as his beloved compels him to return to the site of this melancholic recognition as a paradoxical sense of pleasurable grief. While Smith utilized the Petrarchan sonnet form to subvert the gender distinction of the poetic voice by placing herself in Petrarch's position of poet, she also employed this deeper sense of a fundamental groundlessness of poetic identity as itself something that challenges gender distinctions. As such, Smith "contains" within her poems different versions of Petrarch's paradoxically pleasurable grief.

Judith Pascoe discusses how, for Smith, "the tight formal control of the sonnet form served as a haven in the midst of a storm of wild feeling."[16] Yet at the same time, Smith's poems serve as warnings for the attempt to turn poems into metaphoric sites of containment, for turning the imagination and "wild" or untamed feeling into a poem that

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[15] See Edoardo Zuccato, *Petrarch in Romantic England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 53-60.

[16] Judith Pascoe, "Female Botanists and the Poetry of Charlotte Smith," in *Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776-1837*, eds. Carol Wilson and Joel Haefner (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1994), 17.

mollifies the loss it records. Smith deconstructs the sonnet's formal containment by exploring how the desire for the containment of melancholy, in a number of different contexts, inaugurates the overwhelming feelings of melancholy. Smith's poems invoke the poetic imagination only to extinguish it, allegorically putting into question the efficacy of her own poems as distractions from melancholic grief. As much as Petrarch's attempts to stabilize a beautiful image of Laura in his poetry are undone by the very attempt, Smith's poems seem to deny the consolations of poetry.

Smith early poems ranged widely, from translations of Petrarch to poems written by fictional characters. What binds them together was a shared sense of alienation and grief that transcended their real and imaginary states. As we shall see, Smith also responds to poets who, in the critical lineage of Romanticism, are aligned after her. In "The Glow-Worm," Smith uses an image that is familiar to readers of Wordsworth to discuss the efficacy of the poetic imagination. It should be noted, however, that Smith's poem first appears in the fifth edition of the *Elegiac Sonnets* in 1795; Wordsworth had already used the glow-worm in 1794 as a poetic image of Milton as a sympathetic revolutionary figure, and will use the image of the glow-worm again in 1804 in a Lucy poem.

Smith's glow-worm owes much of its tropological and symbolic function to one of her favorite pre-texts, Thomas Warton's ode, "Sent to a Friend, on his leaving a favorite village in Hampshire" (1750). Smith did not accept that the physical world remained barren of beauty unless transfigured by the poetry. For Smith, the power of the imagination, recorded as a natural world that is inaccessible and unpredictable yet everywhere present, does not fit into the narratives of the development of poetic genius.

Rather, the attempt to contain the natural world within an inner space that is illuminated by the displaced representative of nature is the cause of its destruction.

> When on some balmy-breathing night of Spring
> The happy child, to whom the world is new,
> Pursues the evening moth, of mealy wing,
> Or from the heath-bell beats the sparkling dew;
> He sees before his inexperienced eyes
> The brilliant Glow-worm, like a meteor, shine
> On the turf-bank;—amazed, and pleased, he cries,
> "Star of the dewy grass!—I make thee mine!"—
> Then, ere he sleep, collects "the moisten'd" flower,
> And bids soft leaves his glittering prize enfold,
> And dreams that Fairy-lamps illume his bower:
> Yet with the morning shudders to behold
> His lucid treasure, rayless as the dust!
> —So turn the world's bright joys to cold and blank disgust.[17]

Initially, the "happy child" is outside "on some balmy-breathing night of Spring," resonating with wind imagery that initially blows with hope and calls to mind the wind that inspires Petrarch in the poem that Smith had translated in early editions of the *Sonnets*. The three images the child sees are not merely a coincidental catalogue of natural objects, but are all parts or pieces of a systematic image of nature: the flying, air-bound "mealy" moth, the sparkling "dew" that falls from the heath to the ground, and the glow-worm shining "on the turf bank" all suggest that the "inexperienced" child has learned through his random playfulness that his pursuit of these objects has given them a kind of overall coherence, and that his seemingly chance activities have given him a window into a transformative image of nature of which he is now a part. As much as Petrarch's poetic pursuit of his memory of Laura is figured according to dispersion and

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[17] All of Charlotte Smith's poems are taken from *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, ed. Stuart Curran (New York : Oxford University Press, 1993).

recollection, the child in Smith's poem initially discovers himself as the center of a natural world that is organized around his discovery and recognition of its order.

Following this imaginative logic, it is his recognition of the air-bound, dull colored moth that has caused it to fall through the sparkling dew and become "like a meteor:" as a stone that falls through his own newly-discovered "sparkling" imagination, the glow-worm falls because it assumes the plenitude of meaning of the natural world which seems to give it a material weight. His first speech, indeed, his first words, "Star of the dewy grass – I make thee mine!," connects the glow-worm to his own activity of beating the heath. His speech confirms what he seems to already believe, and naming it "mine" gives him a particular power over the totality that he believes to see. The child becomes, in this way, a poet who feels power over a natural world to which he no longer belongs. Smith gives the imagination of the child a poetic power to reinstate the fallen meteor into the sky, or, in other words, to reify his own imagination by raising the meteor back into the sky.

The first section of the poem, then, is an elaborate tribute to the powers of poetic imagination. Circulating through the poem is an image of the glow-worm in all its constituent parts. The child believes that he can reconstitute the image of the glow-worm from this circulation through an act of the imagination. The next three lines cause another kind of descent: "Then, ere he sleep, collects "the moisten'd" flower, / And bids soft leaves his glittering prize enfold, / And dreams that Fairy-lamps illume his bower." From depictions of an exteriority over which the child believes himself to be master, the poem transforms the child himself into the glow-worm, continuing the natural transitions inherent from the moth, as a chrysalis, to the glow-worm, to the child. The "soft leaves"

that enfold his “glittering prize” now morph, in his sleep, into the leaves of “his bower” that enfold him. The “Fairy-lamps,” his dreams and his imagination, are the final form of the glow-worm, bringing the natural world “into” the child, who analogically creates the container or receptacle of his imagination through a construction of the natural totality from its fragments.

However, as the break of the final line of the poem indicates, the power of the imagination does not last. The child awakens “with the morning” and the light of the sun to discover that his symbol of inner light, the glow-worm, has been extinguished. The poem, at this point, seems to encourage the reader to re-read the poem with “cold and blank disgust,” as the hopes that appear at the beginning of the short narrative in the re-collective power of the child’s imagination are dashed. The process of creating an inner world that is illumined from within is associated with the evanescent temporality of an idle fantasy that the cyclical time of the natural world destroys. The entire process of unifying the natural world takes on the appearance of a hollowed-out aesthetic exercise, centering on the “Fairy-lamp” which is itself merely the source of a dream from which he has awoken. Turning the poem inside out, and fragmenting its fragile, narrative unity, the natural world and its temporal rhythms return to reclaim its powers with a vengeance.

Based on the unstable foundations of poetic subjectivity found in Petrarch, Smith posits that the exclusions of the poet, allegorically represented as the child, from the consolation promised to poetry are revealed in the very work of poetry itself as subject to the irretrievable passage of time. Like the child, the poet is unable to adequately “contain” the inner space of the poetic retreat because the power of maintaining the illuminating lamps of imagination is beyond her control. Like Petrarch, Smith’s poets are

doomed to repeat the futile gesture of establishing a basis of identity in and through poetry. At the same time, the "glow-worm" is also a politically motivated symbol. In "The Glow-Worm," the poet describes a situation that is, in effect, an allegory of her own condition that is everywhere marked with the anteriority of her own suffering: thus, the child figuratively represents the poet's own past, even as the child is not her, and merely a figure of her alienation from poetic consolation. Telescoping the child of "The Glow-Worm" outwards to Smith allows us to see that the effect of the benumbing, Petrarchan melancholy of the *Elegiac Sonnets* is to be found in repeated attempts by the poems to invest poetry with a significance that it cannot sustain, one that infects the ability of the poet to indicate an unavailable reality beyond her own aesthetic figuration. Rather than considering these repeated attempts as a way of performing self-forgetfulness before an audience of readers, as Zimmerman has suggested, we might instead consider that Smith shares with her readers a sense of shared alienation from the consolations of poetic mourning and perhaps even from political efficacy. While Smith silently repeats hallucinatory, ghostly invocations of grief, both political and personal, that hypnotize her readers, there are voices from the haunting, revolutionary past, such as Milton's, that cannot be fully reanimated even as they are evoked

Interrupted Consolation

Earlier in the chapter, I had suggested that the traditional conception of Romanticism as an aesthetic associated with specific male poets serves to displace a historical complexity, one in which Wordsworth and Smith could be considered as responding to each other, rather than merely participating in a historical development of a

Romantic ideology, such that Wordsworth re-lights the glow-worm that Smith had extinguished. The evocations of forgetfulness in the *Sonnets* are representative of the illusory powers of poetry, and the desire to escape the cares and anxieties of the world within the spell of an oblivion that cannot last. In "Verses supposed to have been written in the New Forest, in early spring" and "The Sleeping Woodman," the "real" interrupts the poet's momentary rest, but only as that which highlights the artificiality of poetry and its evanescent consolation.

In "Verses supposed to have been written in the New Forest, in early spring," Smith appears to find some consolation by offering images that will overcome feelings of melancholy in order to discover a sense of temporary rest in the imagination. Here, Smith attempts to stave off feelings of "black despondence" by presenting a scene in which the poet looks upon the natural world for comfort:

> As in the woods, where leathery Lichen weaves
> Its wint'ry web among the sallow leaves,
> Which (through cold months in whirling eddies blown)
> Decay beneath the branches once their own,
> From the brown shelter of their foliage sear,
> Spring the young blooms that lead the floral year:
> When, waked by vernal suns, the Pilewort dares
> Expand her spotted leaves, and shining stars
> And (veins empurpling all her tassels pale)
> Bends the soft Wind-flower in the tepid gale;
> Uncultured bells of azure Jacynth's blow,
> And the breeze-scenting Violet lurks below:
> So views the wanderer, with delighted eyes,
> Reviving hopes from black despondence rise,
> When, blighted by adversity's chill breath,
> Those hopes had felt a temporary death;
> Then with gay heart he looks to future hours,
> When love shall dress for him the summer bowers.
> And, as delicious dreams enchant his mind,
> Forgets his sorrows past, or gives them to the wind.

The poem recreates a natural scene that appears to be objective even as it becomes allusively descriptive of the wanderer's state of mind. The Petrarchan dissemination of images is caused yet again by the wind: from "blown," "Wind-flower," 'tepid gale," "blow," "chill breath," the poem finally wanders back towards the wind to which the wanderer's cares is given. The wind also refers to the seeming impossibility of divorcing an imaginative scene of nature from the interests of the wanderer or the poet. The wind that blows through the poem and that gives it aesthetic coherence symbolizes the "chill breath" of death from the "cold months" of winter and threatens the coherency of the natural scene that is being presented to the reader as the wanderer's subjective gaze. Interrupting the alliterative structures of the first few lines, "as in the woods, where leathery Lichen weaves / Its wint'ry web among the sallow leaves, / Which (through cold months in whirling eddies blown)," "decay," falling after the first wind image of the poem, "blown," reconfigures the temporality of the poem's association of "temporary death" with the imagination, suggesting that the poet's interaction with nature not only defaces its apparent objectivity, but also, that imagination suffers some form of "decay" from the interaction. In a way that perhaps anticipates Keats's odes and the sublime, monumental objectivity before which the poet's identity is dispersed or radically questioned, Smith's wanderer is entranced by an ability to witness the passage of time in cyclical nature through an imaginative projection *into* that cycle, sheltered within perpetual "summer bowers."

The two images that begin the poem ("as in…," "when, waked by vernal suns…") become the mirrors of the wanderer's desires, constructed through his feelings. Thus, it becomes difficult to tell if the natural cycle of "young blooms" rising from the decay of

the lichen inspires the wanderer to feel the same about his or her feelings of "hope" arising from "black despondence," or, if indeed the cyclical "view" of nature *arises* from the wanderer's desire for hope. As in "The Glow-Worm," the figurative distance between seemingly natural processes and the work of the imagination is overwritten with the allegorical identification of the two activities. This hope, however, proves to be imaginary; the allegory itself comes to inhabit the wanderer's sense of self, in that "delicious dreams enchant his mind" and he "forgets his sorrows past, or gives them to the wind." Literalizing the phrase of giving sorrows to the wind means that the wanderer has become entranced by the image of his own seemingly natural making; his ability to see himself at work in nature makes him adept at constructing these kinds of analogies, in which nature in its objectivity, reinforced by the specific biological names of plants and insects, reflects to him an image that appears to be true, foretelling his own future happiness. "Forgetting his sorrows past," then, indicates a slumber that is reminiscent more of reverie and conscious forgetting, a forgetting that is figuratively associated with the wind as the unheard words of the poet, who may have used the poem to display a private feeling that proves to be the sign of an interrupted withdrawal inwards into imagination.

The feeling of withdrawal, then, found here as an essential element of Smith's poetry of forgetfulness, is quite distinct from the ways in which Zimmerman had referred to Smith's theatrical portrayal of the futility of self-forgetfulness. In making this distinction, however, we need to gain some control over the proliferating allegories or comparisons that are at stake. First, let us recall that Zimmerman's assertion regarding the association of theatricality and *vision* with the act of reading a poem: "just as on the

stage, the social world is not excluded by the gesture of turning one's back to an audience. Like a member of a theater audience or the beholder of a painting, the reader of a lyric poem must lose the self-consciousness of spectatorship, must feel forgotten in order to forget himself or herself and make the necessary leap of identification." Implicit in this act of "identification" is a transcendent principle, one that works to leap over the way in which identification is established. What is leapt over in Zimmerman's analysis is that the object of vision *deliberately* neglects being seen; theatrical productions, the natural world and poems are related, we might say, because they turn their backs *on us*. By extension, the "necessary leap of identification" becomes possible only through our generous attribution of feeling towards the object or individual with which we are concerned; additionally, it is this investment of feeling in the object of sympathy that maintains the distance between the viewer or reader and the object. As I have attempted to show in reading "Verses," however, this distance is not established in Smith's works as the contextual field in and across which sympathetic feelings are communicated via works of art, be they plays, paintings, or poems; rather, it is the poem, or work of art, that discounts the objective reality of this contextual field that binds together sympathetic transactions and exposes it as illusion ("delicious dreams"). In other words, the way in which Zimmerman establishes her analysis of the self-forgetful mechanics of Smith's poems vis-à-vis her audience or readers is already an allegory of the way that Smith accounts for poetic illusion as the fit subject of poetry; in other words, for both Zimmerman *and* Smith, the question becomes whether or not the interpretation of poetry displaces our desire to read poetry and exhausts its utility as a source of consolation, such that reading becomes an immersive, self-forgetful experience that partakes of "temporary

death" in evanescent, "delicious dreams" which are immediately subject to immanent "decay."

Inasmuch as "Verses" reinforces the way that Smith inscribes withdrawal beneath the surface of her poems, "The Sleeping Woodman" seems to give an impression of hope that is allusively tied to images that undermine that hope.

> Ye copses wild, where April bids arise
> The vernal grasses, and the early flowers;
> My soul depress'd—from human converse flies
> To the lone shelter of your pathless bowers.
> Lo!—where the Woodman, with his toil oppress'd,
> His careless head on bark and moss reclined,
> Lull'd by the song of birds, the murmuring wind,
> Has sunk to calm though momentary rest.
> Ah! would 'twere mine in Spring's green lap to find
> Such transient respite from the ills I bear!
> Would I could taste, like this unthinking hind,
> A sweet forgetfulness of human care,
> Till the last sleep these weary eyes shall close,
> And Death receive me to his long repose.

William Richey has noted how this poem is different from other Smith sonnets, in that there is a distinct absence of the sympathy that the poet seems to feel for the suffering other. According to Richey, "In ''The Sleeping Woodman,'' … (Smith's) primary goal is to illustrate her own personal misery, and, since it would be virtually impossible to describe in detail both her own misfortune and that of the woodman within the sonnet's fourteen lines, Smith keeps the focus squarely on herself, using this peasant figure merely as an ''unthinking'' foil to her own all too conscious self. Thus, in each case, her basic goal is to elicit sympathy from her readers, but she adapts her approach to best exploit what the poetic form will allow. Whereas in her more explicitly humanitarian poems she largely subordinates her own suffering to that of her poetic subjects, in ''The Sleeping

Woodman'' she gives her readers only the information that is necessary to highlight her own misery."[18] Richey's identification of the poet's misery in "The Sleeping Woodman" points towards the deeper structure of the poem and its presentation of a voice of abject suffering. For Smith, the distance that separates the Woodman from the poet marks out a seemingly insurmountable distance from others in both space (isolation, solitariness, exile, wandering) and time (the past as asserting itself within the present as a recollection that cannot be forgotten). These spatio-temporal considerations infect everything beyond the origin of the voice, as other writers, nature, other figures, are leveled within a field of epistemological alienation.

For Smith, the desire to partake of the "sweet forgetfulness of human care" is an echo of a line from Pope's translation of the *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus's crewmen have just passed through Scylla and Charybdis and complain of their ceaseless wandering. While the opening of Smith's poem is suggestive of a contrast between nature and Smith's melancholy, the language of the poem at this point suggests that the "lone shelter" and "pathless bowers" are representative of an imaginary scene and a retreat inward to the "shelter" or "bower" that her melancholy seems to necessitate and figure as possible receptacles of rest or forgetfulness. Yet the "momentary rest" of the woodman also suggests that the "sweet forgetfulness of human care" is not destined to last, further developing the notion that the retreat into the bower is itself momentary and imaginary. For Smith, the poem is itself a kind of shelter or bower that is only a harbor of "momentary rest," and, indeed, not a rest at all, but a *desire* for rest and forgetfulness

[18] William Richey, "The Rhetoric of Sympathy in Smith and Wordsworth," *European Romantic Review* (Dec 2002; 13 (4)), 432.

that cannot avoid the interruption of lived experience. Smith signals this function through the indirect quote from Pope's *Odyssey*:

> Then, where a fountain's gurgling waters play,
> They rush to land, and end in feasts the day:
> They feed; they quaff; and now (their hunger fled)
> Sigh for their friends devour'd, and mourn the dead;
> Nor cease the tears' till each in slumber shares
> A sweet forgetfulness of human cares.

Smith's text calls attention to its constructed nature and its origins in an imagination that is itself a repository of texts and pieces of poetry, figuring its "transient" or "momentary" respite from the sorrows of the "real," seen as that which the poem, like Odysseus himself, appears to always already avoid.[19]

Oblivion: The Joys and Sorrows of Forgetfulness

So far, I have argued for the importance of the Petrarchan thematics of the failure of poetry to give permanent shape or consolation from the passage of time. In "To Oblivion," Smith presents forgetfulness and oblivion as figures that oscillate between direct addresses and averted gazes. To a certain extent, this poem recalls the allegorical and Janus-faced "partial Muse" of the first sonnet of the first edition, as well as the poet's "earliest hours:"

> Forgetfulness! I would thy hand could close
> These eyes that turn reluctant from the day;
> So might this painful consciousness decay,
> And, with my memory, end my cureless woes.

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[19] As I have already suggested, Susan Wolfson and John Anderson remark on the literary allusions of Smith's poems. Discussing *The Emigrants* (1793), Wolfson remarks that it is "a canny intertextual performance, and its deepest polemics are about tradition itself" (510-1). For Anderson, Smith's *Beachy Head* is "a very modern work of art, an elliptical and self-referential collage. Smith builds her fragments of fragments, fashioning a mosaic of broken tiles" (551).

> Sister of Chaos and eternal Night!
> Oblivion! take me to thy quiet reign,
> Since robb'd of all that gave my soul delight,
> I only ask exemption from the pain
> Of knowing "such things were" – and are no more;
> Of dwelling on the hours for ever fled,
> And heartless, helpless, hopeless to deplore
> "Pale misery living, joy and pleasure dead:"
> While dragging thus unwish'd a length of days,
> "Death seems prepared to strike, yet still delays."

In the apostrophe to forgetfulness, Smith's poet sets up a paradox that is suspended throughout the poem. Balancing a desire for absolute ending, death and loss of memory with a gradual fading out consciousness, Smith's poem evokes a desire to discover a state of *exemption* from memory that may or may not be possible. Asking for some form of relief from her incurable sadness, Smith initially asks forgetfulness to "*close* / These eyes" and "with my memory, / *end* my cureless woes." At the same time, Smith does not ask for the end of consciousness itself: "so might this painful consciousness *decay*." Within the logic of the poem, *decay*, as a gradual wasting away or wearing out, is associated with "eyes that *turn reluctant* from the day" in the second line in that both refer to a movement that is not completed. The ambiguity of this line, in that either the eyes will themselves become reluctant to gaze on anything at all, as in "*turn reluctant* from (gazing on) the day," or that the eyes will "turn *reluctant* (as if averse) *from the day*" yet still gaze on something else that is *not* the day, implies that the decay of consciousness that is asked for in the appeal to forgetfulness is itself suspended by these two possible readings. On the one hand, to consider this line as invoking "eyes that are reluctant to gaze," or, eyes that struggle against (*re-luctar*: to struggle against) seeing, would seem to indicate that the poet's eyes no longer wish to look but that they must, for

some reason, gaze. On the other hand, to turn reluctant from the day indicates the poet's wish to turns *without* reluctance away from the day.

In turning away from the desire to look or to look upon the day, Smith's poet *turns* towards mythic *figures* of forgetfulness: "Sister of Chaos and eternal Night! / Oblivion! take me to thy quiet reign, / Since robb'd of all that gave my soul delight." Yet again, in turning towards these figures, the poet encounters another difficulty. The figures, "Sister of Chaos and eternal Night" and "Oblivion," are now invoked to take the poet to "thy quiet reign." The next line, "Since robb'd of all that gave my soul delight" is ambiguous, yet it appears to be attached to the "quiet reign" of the previous line. On the one hand, while it is certainly possible that the poet is stating that he or she has been "robb'd of all that gave my soul delight," it is more likely that it is the "quiet reign" that has been "robb'd of all that gave my soul delight." The underlying sense of the poem, however, through the compounding ambiguities of turning reluctant from the day and desiring to return to a "quiet reign / Since *robb'd* of all that gave my soul delight" turns the poet simultaneously into two mythic figures: Demeter and Persephone. The final lines of the poem, "dwelling on the hours for ever fled, / And heartless, helpless, hopeless to deplore / 'Pale misery living, joy and pleasure dead:' / While dragging thus unwish'd a length of days, / 'Death seems prepared to strike, yet still delays'," indicate that the speaker could be either Demeter, who must wait to see her daughter as she spends time with Hades in the Underworld, or Persephone, who would "deplore / '*Pale* misery living'." In both cases, as the poem seems to keep both possibilities open, as the desire for oblivion opens up a separation between mother and daughter in which both wish to be elsewhere and with the other. For example, Demeter's eyes would "*turn*

reluctant from (or struggle against) the day" because her daughter is in the underworld; alternately, Persephone would "turn *reluctant from the day*" in re-turning to the underworld. The structure of the poem serves to *displace* these two from each other, to confuse the subject and object of the lament, while constantly turning them *towards* each other within the same metaphorical space of the poem. In this sense, the desire for forgetfulness as evoked through the poem is a turn towards a separation as the only common ground that they share.

Indeed, this turning and twisting appears throughout the successive editions of Smith's *Sonnets,* which return again and again to the task of giving an impression of an identity that is always formed, contested and dispersed through the very process of writing poetry, one that attempts to discover a communal feeling that does not necessitate illusory consolations of self-forgetfulness. The dispersal of individual identities that are in search for one another across and through poetry is also the only possible articulation of a community that keeps the individual ends at bay. Smith employs a Petrarchan oscillation between poetic subjectivity and objectivity as an oscillation between the poet's ability both to construct images of consolation and interrupt them or announce their failure. Smith's poets seem to wonder if there is a way to avoid this kind of oscillatory movement. Through a desire to establish a distance between the melancholic past and a hope for the present, Smith's poetry is unable to constitute a self that is forgetful of the process *of* self-forgetfulness.

Addicted to Feeling, Interrupted: Artificial Forgetfulness

After investigating the limits of these attempts to interrupt of the "real," Smith finally considers, or returns to consider, the forgetfulness that poems contain as a drugged experience or anesthetized numbness for a pain that will not cease, constructing an image of a time outside of time that will pass without memory and without the ability to remember. The first indication of this alteration is in sonnet 48, "To Mrs. ****;" here, Smith outlines the illusory forgetfulness that does not transcend the limitations of the body, but, rather, is a constant reminder of the temporal embodiment of the poet.

> No more my wearied soul attempts to stray
> From sad reality and vain regret,
> Nor courts enchanting fiction to allay
> Sorrows that sense refuses to forget:
> For of calamity so long the prey,
> Imagination now has lost her powers,
> Nor will her fairy loom again essay
> To dress affliction in a robe of flowers.
> But if no more the bowers of Fancy bloom,
> Let one superior scene attract my view,
> Where heaven's pure rays the sacred spot illume,
> Let thy loved hand with palm and amaranth strew
> The mournful path approaching to the tomb,
> While Faith's consoling voice endears the friendly gloom.

Smith's poetic persona here exhibits a sense of benumbed resignation and final exhaustion with life. The negations of the first four lines ("no more," "nor courts enchanting fiction," "sorrows that sense refuses to forget") indicates the embodiment of the poet's identity. The "soul" is tied down to "sad reality," and the material world of experience, the world of the body as aging, wearied, and attached to the passage of time, refuses to "court" enchanting fiction. At this point, it should be clear that the Petrarchan motif of *courting* Laura through poetic images has been expanded to include an

inaccessible world of happiness that lies at a far remove from a melancholic reality and the ineffectual images that Smith's poets have built. In this sense, the poem is a meditation on Smith's own poetic work as an attempt at self-consolation.

The poet begins this process through a series of replacements. The ineffectual bowers of Fancy turn into a hope for the consolation of the "tomb," which is shrouded with a Petrarchan, paradoxical "friendly gloom." The image of the imagination as a glow-worm that shines in the darkness, as relayed in "The Glow-Worm," is replaced with "heaven's pure rays." A final substitution, less clearly made in the poem, occurs at the end. Within the tomb, Smith wishes to hear a *voice*; for readers familiar with Smith, the recording of a voice within her poems is strange, as the typical narratives are descriptions of silent encounters between a poet and a pastoral natural world or figures within it. I would argue that "Faith's consoling voice," which "endears the *friendly* gloom," acts a replacement for the poet's own voice of imaginary friendship to her readers that endears the gloom of "sad reality." Later, I will describe in more detail how Smith envisions the possibility of a hope for the future in a voice that appears felt in its absence or silence that Smith's poet cannot hear while alive, (re)marking an overwhelming sense of the inescapable recurrence of hopelessness.

As we have seen, the earlier poems and editions of the *Elegiac Sonnets* were concerned with poetry's role in consoling the poet's feelings of melancholy and loss through an impossible forgetting of the past. Although these earlier poems about the failure of poetry to console provide for moments of self-reflection and self-critical analysis, later poems allow us to discover how Smith imagines the ways in which poetry is not linked to the worlds that provide the settings of these poems, but, rather, linked to

the transitory experience of artificial stimulation. In "Nepenthe," Smith explores how peace and freedom from the disturbing effects of memory may be overcome through artificial means that are *self-consciously* employed against the "sad reality" of life. Earlier poems had emphasized that the consolation provided by poetry was necessarily and naturally inevitable according to the cycle of life and death as found in nature. The title of "Nepenthe" indicates a drug, one which Smith references in a footnote to the poem as being procured by Helen of Troy. In this poem, as with "To Mrs. ****;" Smith explores the relationship between sympathy and oblivion through the female body. As we have seen already, Smith's poetry frequently operates within a dense web of literary allusions; here, Smith signals authors who have been held up as political and aesthetic opposites in eighteenth-century literary history: Pope and Milton.[20] The "Nepenthe" episode is found in Pope's translation of the *Odyssey*, yet Smith also references Milton's masque, *Comus*. As with Smith's earlier invocation of real and imaginary authors, Pope and Milton are aligned together within a discourse of sentiment.

> Oh! For imperial Polydamna's art,
> Which to bright Helen was in Egypt taught,
> To mix with magic power the oblivious draught
> Of force to staunch the bleeding of the heart,
> And to Care's wan and hollow cheek impart
> The smile of happy youth, uncursed with thought.
> Potent indeed the charm that could appease
> Affection's ceaseless anguish, doom'd to weep
> O'er the cold grave; or yield even transient ease
> By soothing busy Memory to sleep!
> --Around me those who surely must have tried
> some charm of equal power, I daily see,
> But still to me Oblivion is denied,

[20] See Robert Griffin, "The Eighteenth-Century Construction of Romanticism: Thomas Warton and the Pleasures of Melancholy," for an account of how Pope's affinities with Milton were displaced by mid-eighteenth century critics and poets.

There's no Nepenthe, now, on earth for me.

The poet emphasizes the doubled significance of "nepenthe" by leading the reader to the footnotes in Pope's translation on the "dispute" over the nature of the poison. The note explores the historical evidence for such potions in the ancient world, but also points out that "some take Nepenthe allegorically, to signify History, Music, or Philosophy." Thus, we can take the subject of this sonnet to be both the care of the self and the art of the intellect. At the same time, Smith indicates that Nepenthe can be *taken* in a number of ways and by different authors for various reasons. Nepenthe, the drug that leads to oblivion and "sweet forgetfulness of care," can be taken physically or allegorically. In which ways can on *take* allegories? Can one *take* poems? And how long does the sense of consolation last?

How can one *take* allegories, then? Or, in another sense, how does one *take* or imbibe the memories of others? Can memories, which are tied to individual, empirical existence, circulate beyond one's sight, or, be heard otherwise and elsewhere? Through "Nepenthe" and the inclusion of a poem, "Ode to the Poppy," by a *dead poet*, Smith explores how an addiction to the pleasures of forgetfulness of poetry, through the metonymic association of allegory with poetry, such that one *takes* allegories, provides both consolation and the impossibility of consolation. In these poems, Smith hopes to be able to both construct and consume the fatal drug of forgetfulness that is present in the poetry of both Pope and Milton. This gesture towards her literary precursors links them together as poets who evoke the despair of melancholy even as the work of eighteenth-century literary history and, indeed, Romantic literary history, sought to keep them separated. The discourse of a desire for oblivion, which is a familiar mark of Smith's

poetics, carries with it a form of consolation that cannot be consciously experienced by the poet, who desires the "art" to write poems that effectively "staunch the bleeding heart." Employing allusions to Pope and Milton, "Nepenthe" is a complex meditation on how Smith's poet becomes associated with these earlier poets by imaging herself in their company.

The force that subtends this illusory company of dead and dying poets can be seen if we consider the allegorical personages of forgetfulness. As "Nepenthe" demonstrates, the poet imagines a past that has no visible signs in the present in order to gain some form of control over memory and enact the least possibility of a *conscious* forgetting; while the poem of consolation, the elegiac, is meant to turn aside melancholic suffering through mourning, Smith's poetry interrupts the elegiac consolation in favor of a more intense feeling of the impossibility of forgetting within a poetic longing for forgetfulness.

Epitaphs for Identity: From Forgetting to Forgotten

The brief narrative of critical forgetting to which I alluded earlier in this chapter is a testament to this questioning both within and about Romanticism and its origins. As a privileged mode of memory and recollection, the traditional critical evocation of Romanticism has difficulty dealing with modes of forgetfulness that neither turn inward as opportunities for self-reflection or meditation nor form bases for creativity and artistic self-definition.[21] The *momentariness* of self-forgetfulness in Romantic lyricism acts as

[21] David Haney alludes to the possibility of reading more deeply in Coleridge's famous line from the *Biographia Literaria* regarding "that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith." The term of the suspension of disbelief, "for the moment," is not an innocent or ambiguous element of this phrase. Rather, the "moment" of suspense is redeemed when the suspension ends. Tracy

an origin for creativity which is founded on the impossibility of its meaningful interruption. For Smith, forgetting and oblivion, impossible retreats from the world of experience, are already compromised by the self-forgetfulness that poetry is meant to provide as the means of retreat. Thought of as a retreat, then, the poetics of self-forgetfulness and oblivion are concerned with the spatial or conceptual positioning between or amongst writers and readers, rather than actors and spectators, and their position in relationship to a mode of being in the world that is mutually alienating.

As that which drives and troubles the commodification of mourning in the literary marketplace, Smith's poetics of oblivion situates Guinn Batten's insight into the nature of melancholy within the work of the canonical male poets of Romanticism, one which is based in "a profound awareness of the significance of a fundamental but forgotten loss, a loss that persists as a "nothingness" or absence that is in fact replete with irrecoverable but nevertheless emotionally charged presence."[22] When melancholy becomes the foundation for an economics of mourning, we may perhaps glimpse the reasons behind the contemporary "illegibility" of Smith's poems. In other words, self-forgetfulness is associated with a kind of silence and incapacity to communicate, and its performance with the *failure* to communicate that which it is representing. In Smith's translations of Petrarch, and her use of quotations from other poems, poetry mimics speech by substituting itself for the inability of the author to speak for herself. In short, we might say that the *Elegiac Sonnets* represents a life of silence and anonymity, a life that was,

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discusses the "self-sacrifice" of Coleridge's pedagogic model, stating that the value of works of art for ethical judgment demands a certain, or limited, form of self-sacrifice that is not absolute, but that depends upon an already formed ethical sense.

[22] Guinn Batten, *The Orphaned Imagination: Melancholy and Commodity Culture in English Romanticism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 19.

both within and without, all too determined by forces outside Smith's control, one in which she was unable to speak for herself because it was difficult to discover the location of identity beyond these forces impressed upon her. In the end, these forces are not the stuff of Radcliffean Gothic nightmares, but the daily toil of existence. We might also say that the *Sonnets* found resonance with readers who also needed to feel self-forgetfulness *as if* it were an experience of literature and poetry, as an experience that provided a form of consolation in a world that did not seem to allow for the unmediated experience of self-forgetfulness or authentic introspection, a world in which identities, whether gendered, politicized, commercialized or otherwise normative, were all too present.

This alignment of literature with isolation is not without precedent in the eighteenth-century. As John Sitter notes, in reference to the literary loneliness of writers such as Thomas Gray, and his "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," political or historical engagement was less essential than a retreat *from* politics and history: "the post-Augustan poetic world first evident in the 1740s is typically less rich in narrative analogues and more abundant in detached images of seclusion and protection; it is a world which is often visually indistinct or darkened; and it is a world where consolation is prized over confrontation, stasis over strife" (103). In "The Sleeping Woodman" and "The Glow-Worm," Smith uses mid-eighteenth century conventions of self-forgetfulness and transform them into impossibility of a retreat into the bower of poetic bliss. In *Reason in History*, Hegel, along with his later critical inheritors, will judge these conventions as exemplifying a narcissistic emotionalism in language that is distinctly feminized as barren or unable to (re)produce dialectical conclusion: "it is not in the interest of such sentimental reflection really to rise above these depressing emotions and

to solve the mysteries of Providence presented in such contemplations. It is rather their nature to dwell melancholically on the empty and fruitless sublimities of their negative result."[23] Hegel represents this seclusion or barrenness as a refusal to participate in the world, and as a detachment that stands back from the shipwreck of history: "out of the boredom with which this sorrowful reflection threatens us, we draw back into the vitality of the present, into our aims and interests of the moment; we retreat, in short, into the selfishness that stands on the quiet shore and thence enjoys in safety the distant spectacle of wreckage and confusion" (27). For Smith, we might suggest that this wreckage and confusion, whether through legal persecution or historical gender biases, is *productive* of the empty and fruitless sublimities that recur throughout her work, and is recursively present as a kind of cultural melancholy that comes to mistakenly represent female identity itself as a retreat from the world. At the same time, her poems are not simply representations of melancholic feelings; rather, they give voice to a refusal to accept the illusory consolations of poetry as sufficient for the world of "real" suffering beyond the poetic frame. Conveyed through a familiar Petrarchan paradox, Smith's poetics of forgetfulness and oblivion record memories that "*sense* refuses to forget."

***The Emigrants* and the Limits of the Sympathy of Communities**

Even as these identities in the *Sonnets* experiment with the bare survival of identity within and through encounters with the poetic imaginary, Smith also calls on specifically gendered images to explain the relationship that she will have with the future.

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[23] Hegel, *Reason in History*, trans. Robert S. Hartman (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1953), 27.

The Emigrants, Smith's long blank verse poem of 1792-3, describes a melancholic female wanderer's conflicted reaction to the suffering of French émigrés in the wake of French Revolution and the exile of French aristocrats during the Terror, structuring an opposition between the artificiality of sight and the authenticity of sound. Sound and hearing voices, for Smith, subtend community, which was indicated earlier in Nancy's notion of a community composes of being-together. Near the beginning of *The Emigrants,* Smith's poet, a solitary wanderer lost in thought upon the beach at Brighton, describes a group of émigrés approaching her from a distance. Within this group, Smith's poet sees a figure that closely resembles Marie Antoinette, the banished wife of the French king, Louis XVI. The description of this "Mother" and her state of mind is a complex evocation and fitting conclusion to Smith's own melancholic considerations of forgetfulness as a form of poetic activity. As her children play, Smith observes the Mother:

> Their Mother, lost in melancholy thought,
> Lull'd for a moment by the murmurs low
> Of sullen billows, wearied by the task
> Of having here, with swoll'n and aching eyes
> Fix'd on the grey horizon, since the dawn
> Solicitously watch'd the weekly sail
> From her dear native land, now yield awhile
> To kind forgetfulness, while Fancy brings,
> In waking dreams, that native land again!
> Versailles appears – its painted galleries,
> And rooms of regal splendor; rich with gold,
> Where, by long mirrors multiply'd, the crowd
> Paid willing homage – and, united there,
> Beauty gave charms to empire – Ah! too soon
> From the gay visionary pageant rous'd,
> See the sad mourner start! – and, drooping, look
> With tearful eyes and heaving bosom round
> On drear reality – where dark'ning waves,
> Urg'd by the rising wind, unheeded foam

Near her cold rugged seat … (lines 213-32)

For the Mother, the shock of the real is found in "drear reality," in its emptiness and pointlessness. Like Smith's earlier poetic personae, she attempts to recall a pleasant past that is suffused with the signs of artifice, such that the "painted galleries" and "long mirrors" which multiplied "the crowd" who paid "willing homage." The Mother unites the multiplicity of the crowd in her figure at the center of court of artificiality. This rings especially true if we recall the ways that Petrarch often invokes mirrors as symbolic of his own poems to Laura.

The second part of *The Emigrants* draws Smith's poet into the poem. Like the Mother, the poetic voice begins to doubt whether or not forms of poetic consolation are available to her. Smith then begins to construct a new form of identity from the wreckage of the old:

> Yet there *are those*, whose patient pity still
> Hears my *long murmurs*; who, unwearied, try
> With lenient hands to bind up every wound
> My wearied spirit feels, and bid me go
> "Right onward" – a calm votary of the Nymph,
> Who, from her adamantine rock, points out
> To conscious rectitude the rugged path,
> That leads at length to Peace! – Ah, yes, my friends
> Peace will at last be mine; for in the Grave
> Is Peace – and pass a few short years, perchance
> A few short months, and all the various pain
> I now endure shall be forgotten there,
> And no memorial shall remain of me,
> Save in your bosoms; while even *your* regret
> Shall lose its poignancy, as ye reflect
> What complicated woes that grave conceals! (lines 364-79)

In this passage, Smith alludes to a passage in Milton's *L'Allegro*, in which the Nymph on the "adamantine rock" is Liberty, and James Beattie's "On Liberty," both of which

indicate the degree to which Smith takes on the role of the minstrel and prophet. For Smith, allusion creates a link not only between poets of the past and herself, but also models the transfer of feelings to a community of listeners who sympathetically and literally feel *for* her through "Faith's consoling voice."

In opposition to a poetic construction of the world through the "long mirror" of the imagination in Petrarchan artifice, the "long murmurs" of Smith's haunting voice reaches an audience that will forget her "complicated" feelings of grief in the face of their own mortality and the passage of time. In the *Elegiac Sonnets*, Smith had invoked the experiences of the child of "The Glow-Worm" in order to demonstrate the uselessness and transitory nature of poetic consolation. Smith imagines that the reader of *The Emigrants* is also doomed to find that a "lucid treasure," a living work that speaks to present "complicated woes," will become "rayless as the dust." At the same time, this admission of the inevitability of *material* forgetting, such that the intentions and feelings metaphorically contained within the written representations of the grief-stricken narrator are lost in the transmission, is also a call to *not* forget. This call is also a reflection of the way in which Smith continues to modulate her positions regarding the usefulness of poetic forgetfulness as a means to reflect upon the transitory nature of individual experience and historical calamity, and the need for both to be inscribed and left behind, even if the original feeling is forever lost in the irreproducible nature of individual experience. Smith's own poem contains the traces of a "complicated" past that marks a literal break, from one book to the other in *The Emigrants*, between the French Revolution to the traumatic suffering of the Terror, in which sympathy for others, found in representations of universal *human* suffering of the French émigrés, runs up against a

lack of sympathy for members of a fallen aristocracy that, in Smith's own phrase, "deserve the woes they feel."

What remains most fascinating about Smith's construction of a *forgetting* community (and so not an ideal community of aesthetic forgetfulness), a community that will have always been bound together through poems that are in the process of already being forgotten, and made up of individual readers who hear her ghostly voice when reading her, is that it anxiously models in advance the critical, and occasionally embarrassing, problem of allusiveness as it is found in Romantic criticism. James Chandler, in "Romantic Allusiveness," discusses the way in which critics who were interested in authorial intention, such as Harold Bloom and Earl Wasserman, were challenged by poststructuralist critics who sought to replace allusion with the linguistically driven concept of the *intertext*. As related by Chandler, Wasserman finds, in Pope's allusions in *The Rape of the Lock*, traces of authorial intention that speak to a specific audience who is to respond to Pope's poem:

> If this has been an admissible commentary on *The Rape of the Lock*, it would imply that the mode of existence of Pope's poetry … ought to be defined broadly enough to include a creative act by the reader. For it suggests that the reader is not only to appreciate the poet's invention in finding appropriate allusions but is actively invited by them to exercise, within poetic reason, his own invention by contemplating the relevances of the entire allusive context and its received interpretation. … Such literature as this is constituted not only by its own verbal texture but also by the rich interplay between the author's text and the full

> contents it allusively arouses, for these allusive resonances are not peripheral but functional to the meaning of the artistic product.[24]

According to Wasserman, this passage refers to Pope's belief that his text will find resonance among a group of readers who will "have the kind of ready knowledge Pope demands" (427) and the "facts known to any serious reader" (429) of his era. Against this historicist reading, Chandler offers (and chastises) the intertextual analyses of Michel Riffaterre, who seeks "to disavow authorial intention while freely employing the concept of allusiveness" (464). Smith's poets straddle these two worlds of reading: on the one hand, Smith's poets employ the voice of the Augustan poet speaking to "serious readers" who will understand the tropes and allusions being employed within her poems; on the other hand, however, the voice of Smith's poets appear to recognize that it is doomed to the same fate as these earlier texts and allusions, all of which are namelessly fitted into a larger, more inclusive *text* that brings them anonymously in a "system" of linguistic structures. Wasserman's "eighteenth-century echo chamber" (to which Pinch will herself allude), in which what is said is *literally* repeated within an informed group of readers, is reformulated by Smith into an echo chamber that gradually wears away the intentional, living sources of a call-and-response echo. Smith's modes of allusion convey, in the wearing away of a present community of readers, the traces of passionate, intense feelings, all of which are divorced and wandering away from their material experiences, to a future community of readers that may not recognize the exact connection between speaker and sound, author and written word. Even though Smith's poetry seems suffused

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[24] James Chandler, "Romantic Allusiveness," *Critical Inquiry* (Spring 1982; 8 (3)). 443-4.

in hopelessness, she still has hope for a world to come that will be utterly different from her own. She alludes to herself by calling upon her own poem and literally transforming images into sound, such that the "long mirrors" that impotently reflect the exiled Mother of Book 1 are changed into "long murmurs" that are still heard by others, even as this sound is lost and turned again into images ("as ye *reflect* / what complicated woes that grave conceals"). Smith's sympathetic construction of her own identity against the artificiality of the French Mother anticipates M.H. Abrams's seminal work of Romantic criticism, "The Mirror and the Lamp." For Abrams, Enlightenment poetics was characterized by reflection and the exterior reality of things: "objects . . . derive their influence not from what they are actually in themselves, but from such as are bestowed upon them by the minds of those who are conversant with or affected by those objects." The powerful voice that Smith imagined as possible for her future readers is meant to transcend the limitations of these forms of Enlightenment poetics even as she recognized herself in the imaginative work of the French *émigré* Mother.

The sorrows that her senses "*refuse* to forget" in the first poem of the *Elegiac Sonnets* are not worn away by a long and painful life. Smith, like many of the characters that inhabit her later novels, seems constantly reminded that the experience of the present is defined by and constrained to an impossibility to escape or forget about the past. At the same time, Smith is able to position her own feelings of suffering within a poetics of oblivion that founds a community of readers. As we will see in the next chapter, William Godwin's novel of 1805, *Fleetwood, or, The New Man of Feeling*, extends the interrupted consolation of the genre of the elegy into an authorial identity that is constituted by the feeling of coming constantly into contact with its own limitations. For Godwin,

sympathy is no longer constructive of a transparent feeling of community based upon a rejection of aesthetic consolation, but of political power over others.

Chapter Three

The Fate of Feeling:

William Godwin and Post-revolutionary Sentiment

Consciousness … appears to be one of the departments of memory. Now the nature of memory … is exceedingly obvious. An infinite number of thoughts passed through my mind in the last five minutes of my existence. How many of them am I now able to recollect? How many shall I recollect tomorrow? One impression after another is perpetually effacing from this intellectual register. Some of them may with great attention and effort be revived; others obtrude themselves uncalled for; and a third sort are perhaps out of the reach of any power of thought to reproduce, as having never led their traces behind them for a moment. If the memory be so capable of so many variations and degrees of intensity, may there not be some cases with which it never connects itself? If the succession of thoughts be so inexpressibly rapid, may they not pass over some topics with so delicate a touch, as to elude the supplement of consciousness?
-William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*

Forget the suffering / You caused others. / Forget the suffering / Others caused you. / The waters run and run, / Springs sparkle and are done, / You walk the earth you are forgetting.
-Czeslaw Milosz, "Forget"

In the previous chapter, I argued that Smith's poetry gave a definition for oblivion that was designed to strip feeling, which confounded the lived experience of the past and the present, of the irresolvable trauma with which it had became categorically associated by sharing these feelings among a community of readers. Smith's poetry alters the eighteenth-century epistemological purpose of recollecting feeling as explored by Locke wherein to affirm one's identity means re-affirming the existence of past experiences in the present in a closed circuit exchange with oneself. Transforming feeling into something that is constantly divested or disavowed in a repeatedly expressed desire to forget feeling, Smith's poets project their anticipated material absence and death to future anonymous readers through imagined acts of sympathy that they cannot share. They cannot feel Smith's suffering except, as in Keats's formulation, in *not* feeling it. Sympathy, in this sense, creates the illusion of feeling by denying the reality of feeling

for others; Smith's poets and, at times, Smith herself explicitly identify with the suffering figures of the stock sympathetic passages found in sentimental literature, such as Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* and Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling*, and discover that sympathy is a one-way street for the observer of suffering rather than its victim.

In this chapter, I will argue that William Godwin, in both his literary and theoretical writings, addresses the question of feeling and forgetting in the Romantic period from a more overtly political perspective. Rather than forging the bonds of a community based on the sharing of feelings too traumatic for the individual to bear, Godwin's exploration of forgetting seeks to expose the political utility of forgetting as a subversive means for gaining individual power in appealing to the mercy of an audience or group of readers. In *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer*, Godwin attempted to free the form of historiography from an overtly totalizing narrative, and, instead, draw the reader into the affective atmosphere of the past that in many ways will come to resemble Nietzsche's attempt at active, historical forgetting. In *Antonio*, Godwin's 1800 play about the ghostly yet harrowing effects of self-forgetting before the law of the father, this theme is explored through the psychopathology of politics and power. In *Fleetwood, or, The New Man of Feeling*, Godwin's 1805 novel, these two earlier evocations of forgetting are fused together in a devastating critique of sentimentalism in the guise of a novel of sentiment; in *Fleetwood*, forgetting is always at work as a destabilizing force within personal and historical memory, yet this force is never wholly disinterested or ethical in nature. In the political reading that Godwin describes, the desire to forget or exonerate guilt that one feels is made in a universal appeal to human emotions that nevertheless is always motivated by an attempt to accrue power. In many respects, *Fleetwood* is an admission

by Godwin that his utopian dreams had, in the wake of the French Revolution, gone terribly astray; it is also an indictment directed at counterrevolutionary ideology that had appropriated the language of sentiment as a way to excuse injustice. For Casimir Fleetwood, it is sympathy that allows him to *forget* suffering, to rework the events of the past along the lines of his own "development" as an individual within the totalizing narrative of his identity formation, and to erase the specificity of the past as it is written into the present. Finally, I turn to a brief pamphlet, written shortly after the publication of *Fleetwood*, in which Godwin gives a possible shape to the ways in which memories may be able to survive outside of their potential appropriation by political forces. In "Essay On Sepulchers," Godwin explicitly addresses the question of the survival of memories. From an individual perspective, Godwin discusses how one might keep alive the memory of someone who has died without allowing that memory to be altered by one's own perception. At the same time, however, in order to still live on in memory, the dead must not be allowed to control the actions of the survivor. Godwin posits the creation of an *impersonal* history driven by a feeling for the past rather than the factual recording of past events because, for Godwin, both objectivity and excessive sentimental attachment is always and inevitably a disguise for attempts to assimilate political power.

What is the nature of this strange feeling or the impersonal? As an idealist, Godwin discovers that it is only possible to refer to this kind of feeling in an unimaginable future in which our necessary attachment to the past is not distorted by our own self-interested desires. In many ways, it makes of history a text always waiting to be written and fundamentally incomplete. For Godwin, if there is indeed a true or ideal

structure of feeling regarding the past, it must come to resemble a form of critique that is not constrained by a search for absolute meaning.

As one of the most powerful early influences on the revolutionary sympathies of canonical English Romantic poets, Godwin enjoyed a great measure of fame during the late eighteenth-century for his own investigations into a radical philosophy that posited the formation of ideal republican communities and communication based upon mutual sympathy. He had inherited the intellectual and cultural tradition of English Dissent, and adapted it to the needs of the decade following the French Revolution. Rousseau was very appealing to Godwin because his Dissenting upbringing had prepared him to accept the radical, yet highly rational, criticism of society and government that were found in Rousseau's texts. Godwin's first and most profoundly influential work, the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), attempted to provide a rational demonstration of virtue and good works, and to deduce the values of the French Revolution from essential human nature. Contemporaries were highly enamored of Godwin's positions: Wordsworth remarked, "Throw aside your books of chemistry, and read Godwin on necessity." Jacobins, the English supporters of the ideals of the French Revolution, were deeply invested in Godwin's theories of the perfectibility of humanity through the free employment of reason and the rejection of the "superstitions" of religion and national institutions. Later Jacobin sympathizers were also very interested in Godwin's work. From novelist Thomas Holcroft, to Elizabeth Inchbald and Godwin's wife Mary Wollstonecraft, to later figures such as Shelley, Byron, and Keats,[1] and Godwin's

[1] Ford Keeler Brown, *The Life of William Godwin* (London: J. M. Dent & sons, ltd., 1926). In his biography of Godwin, Brown states, "Keats admired (Godwin's second novel, *St. Leon*), and Shelley and

daughter and Shelley's wife, Mary Shelley, Godwin's influence on the English reaction to the French Revolution and its aftermath was extensive.

For Godwin, the promise of the French Revolution was to be found in the recovery of a deep, cultural memory of the public wisdom in the social body itself, a rediscovery of the power of rational thinking as the motor to the engine of progress. It was also a specific political event that ratified the foundation of his Dissenting beliefs and, indeed, Whiggish Dissenting beliefs of the eighteenth-century. As the French Revolution turned to the Terror and the Napoleonic era of the First Empire, however, Godwin, along with Smith and a number of their contemporaries, began to see how much the rational philosophy that he had constructed would not be an effective method for creating permanent change in social or political institutions. At the same time, a number of his allies who stood in support of the French Revolution began to reconsider their positions; several of these figures began to openly attack Godwin in speeches and sermons. Gary Kelley has argued that Godwin discovered that his political theories were more "a rationalization of his own emotional and intellectual experience."[2]

At the same time, it may be more appropriate to state that Godwin discovered the limitations of his reform efforts not through failure, but through the effective social quarantining and ostracizing of individuals who offered *any* form of dissent. Indeed, the slings and arrows that Godwin suffered during the Revolutionary era did not cease during

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Byron praised it extravagantly. The story of Byron's admiration was told many years afterwards in Maginn's articles in Fraser's. 'Why do you not write a new novel?,' he asked Godwin, then in his old age. The philosopher replied that it would kill him. 'And what matter?,' Byron returned; 'we should have another St. Leon.'" (146-7).

[2] Gary Kelly, "'The Romance of Real Life': Autobiography in Rousseau and William Godwin," in *Man and Nature: Proceedings of the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies,* eds. Roger Emerson, Gilles Girard, and Roseann Runte (London, Ontario: Faculty of Education, Univ. of Western Ontario, 1982.), 94.

the post-revolutionary years and beyond; rather, they increased as Godwin was transformed into the scapegoat for the perceived failures of the Revolution. The intensification of this antagonism can be found in the success of the counterrevolutionary ideology that Burke employed. Jerome Christensen argues that Burke had constructed a crisis of sorts in English society and, at the same time, provided a model for overcoming it: "the first step that Burke took towards ending 'differences of all sorts' was to condense differences into an antithesis of on sort, pro- or anti-Jacobin; the second, to personify difference as the general threat to an individual and national integrity that must be protected at all costs."[3] Godwin did not shy away from constructing a problematic identity between tyranny and revolution, however, even if his purpose in dealing with these extremes was to point out their shortcomings. Burke's aggressively antithetical construction of the political scene left little room for any practical application Godwin's enquiring spirit of rational investigation. As we shall see, the effect of this kind of loss of place within the social and political, a kind of exile from the public sphere had a direct effect on the portrayal of psychological damage that Godwin represented in *Fleetwood*.

On the Possibility of Sympathetic History: The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer

In 1803, two years before the publication of *Fleetwood*, Godwin published his *Life of Geoffrey Chaucer*, a text that Walter Scott would criticize in *The Edinburgh Review* for its lack of narrative and general confusion of historiography and biography. Scott's satiric barbs hide a deeper concern and a recognition that Godwin is

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[3] Jerome Christensen, *Romanticism at the End of History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000), 80

experimenting with the writing of history in a way that resembles his own. In his review, Scott mocks the "unfeeling prolixity" of Godwin's text by noting its inability to focus on Chaucer himself, instead ranging over a number of topics: according to Scott, Godwin proceeds to "give a minute detail of the civil and common law, of the feudal institutions, of the architecture of churches and castles, of sculpture and painting, of minstrels, of parish clerks, &c., &c., while poor Chaucer, like Tristram Shandy, can hardly be said to be fairly born, although his life has attained the size of half a volume."[4] In a final insult, Scott jokes that he "was at a loss to know how a whole edition" could be disposed of, "till I conjectured that, as the heaviest materials to be come at, they have been sent on the secret expedition … for blocking up the mouth of our enemies' harbors" (219). In 1804, these enemies' harbors are French, and, as Scott recognizes, the feeling that a French invasion could take place was very keenly felt. Yet the joke also hides a refusal to acknowledge that Godwin would ever change from his radical, dissenting views; by stating that the texts could be used in "blocking up the *mouth* of our enemies' harbors," Scott aligns Godwin with the *idealism* that threatens England, and alleges that the text's chaotic character gives voice to the chaos that France would perform on England and English history. While *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer*, then, would block an invasion by putting words into the mouths of the invaders, it also suggests that the enemy is already within.

In many respects, Godwin's *Life* is an example of sentimental history in the mode of Susanna Dobson's 1775 translation of *Life of Petrarch* by the Abbé de Sade, uncle of

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[4] Cited in Edgar Johnson, *Sir Walter Scott, The Great Unknown* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 218.

the Marquis de Sade. Yet it is also a highly ambitious scholarly study which not only expands upon the brief sketch of Chaucer's life provided in Thomas Tyrwhitt's 1798 edition of the *Canterbury Tales*, but also provides, as its title promises, "sketches of the manner, opinions, arts and literature in England in the Fourteenth Century." A great deal of the text is devoted to sections such as, "Origins of the English stage," "Natural philosophy in the fourteenth century," and "Plague of London in the year 1349." In the midst of all these historical particulars, the details of Chaucer's life or even speculation about the bearing of these events of his life are only referred to in the most oblique fashion.

In his attempt to re-imagine an entire world, Godwin seems to be fully overwhelmed by his research into the historical era such that it seems as if the book was not completed but abandoned, as his publisher fairly demanded an end to Godwin's work on the project. In the "Preface," Godwin explains his dilemma in facing the totality of historical events and, indeed, history itself:

> I had advanced as far as the middle of the second volume, when I saw my materials growing under my hand, and became sensible that, if they were fully treated, the work would extend beyond the dimensions originally prescribed to it. … In fact, less is perhaps lost by this compression, than at first I was apt to imagine. It had been my object to collect generally those particulars of contemporary manners, literature, and story, which contributed to make Chaucer what he was: but the ample survey of what occurred before he was fifty-seven

years of age, may seem sufficient for this purpose; nor is it likely that his mind underwent any essential revolution after that period.[5]

Godwin's difficulty in "fully treating" these historical particulars forces him to truncate the volume and omit discussion of the *Canterbury Tales* – allegedly the work most responsible for Godwin's interest in Chaucer in the first place. Godwin himself argues that "there is no production of man that displays more various and vigorous talent than the *Canterbury Tales*" (xvi), and so it must have been painful for Godwin to abandon the *Life* at the end of Chaucer's fifty-seventh year. Yet the evolution of the book suggests that the *Life* became less of an interpretation Chaucer's poetry and more of an attempt to fathom the ways in which historical context impacts the production of a work of art. As a way of turning aside from the fashionable "memoir" that both Wordsworth and Coleridge denounce in the *Lyrical Ballads*, Godwin's commitment to delving deeply into the historical archive and exploring the cultural and social milieu of Chaucer's life is an essential contribution to the developing methodology of literary biography as a species of writing that focuses on the changing "character" of the times at different historical moments and the ways in which the present may feel more closely the felt experience of those who have lived in the past by recreating a vast contextual apparatus. Eschewing the convenient fictions of a progressive narrative with a tidy teleology, Godwin's *Life* employs an antiquarian methodology in telling the tale of the life of an individual.

In regards to the development of *Fleetwood*, several crucial elements of the *Life* bear mentioning. Godwin's inability or unwillingness to give a coherent narrative shape

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[5] Godwin, *The Life of Chaucer* (London, Printed by T. Davison, for R. Phillips, 1802), xiv-xv.

produces the perhaps unintended effect of underscoring the impossibility of a complete historical treatment of a subject, or, alternately, the ways in which narrative may be construed as an act of selection of personal or historical materials that is never directly recorded into the narrative itself. As we will discover, Fleetwood confides in his reader that his process of selecting and relating the events of his life that give meaning to his "errors" has an element of randomness. The *Life* may be seen to give shape to a gulf between the beliefs that an individual has about the workings of history upon identity formation and the records of history itself.

Yet another essential aspect of this project was the decision to produce such a biography at all. While various "lives of the poets" had been produced throughout the eighteenth-century, and Gibbon and Hume had contributed extensive national histories, Godwin's use of social and political history to give life to a writer's productions marks a synthesizing moment in the way that history and sentiment are employed in imagining the formation of Chaucer's character: "It was my purpose to produce a work of a new species" (ix). Godwin's choice of the "first poet in English" as the focus of history illustrates his conviction that England's literary history is a vital national resource that, far from being outworn, continues to exert a living presence on those who would "befriend" writers through the works they leave to posterity, as the later "Essay On Sepulchers" will make clear. Godwin uses the language of friendship to describe the beneficial effects of discourse and reflection: "the reader of soul proceeds, from esteem of the work, to friendship, to sympathy and correspondence with the author" (x). The sympathy established through literary engagements with dead authors, then, forges links between the past and present; for Godwin, forging these links is more essential than

attempting to artificially shape the past from a dispassionate, disinterested, expansive, and necessarily incomplete, view of the materials of history. In Chaucer's case, it is "because *his works* live" that he, Chaucer, merits attention.

In Godwin historical contextualization, Chaucer and works have a potent life because they represent in English history an essential turning point, one that moved away from feudalism and towards reason and Enlightenment ideals. "When the enormous and cumbersome mass of the feudal system was more than half crumbled away, when the popular part of our constitution began to raise its head, and man in a collective sense learned to look inward upon himself" (317). This moment of potential, according to Godwin, had been suppressed, in the wake of the civil wars of the seventeenth century, by the Restoration. For Godwin, the Restoration's suppression through "acts of oblivion" or hypocritical amnesty towards the revolutionary parliamentarians and Cromwell defines, in many ways, how the shapers of an authenticated history must forget its violent origins through instructions to insurrectionists or agents of information to not recall these hidden beginnings for the public record. In this sense, Godwin explicitly aligns Chaucer with Milton and himself by associating the plague with the Terror:

> It is fallen to the lot of few poets to witness an event so awful, so desolating, and so astonishing as this. If it be true, that to the concoction of a great mind are required, not only original stamina of a very peculiar sort, but also great and powerful impressions to call all the secret springs of the soul to act, then the plague of 1349 may well be regarded as a principle epoch in the life of Chaucer. Though he has left no documents on the subject of his works, we may be well assured that he saw many things at this time, and heard more, the recollection of

> which could never be effaced from his mind. There is something in a calamity of this sort, that irresistibly tends to remove the ordinary and plausible medium through which human affairs are viewed … that is calculated to lead a great and noble mind in particular (living and surviving amidst this human desert) to recur to itself for resources, and to become conscious of its worth and its powers. (410-11)

Chaucer's poetic genius was sparked by the sights and sounds of the terrifying plague of London in 1348-9. Chaucer is linked with Milton in this instance. According to Godwin, "Milton, in the period of the plague in London in 1665, retired to the village of Chalfont St. Giles in the county of Bucks, eighteen miles from the metropolis; and it was here that he brought to a conclusion his *Paradise Lost*. Chaucer, at the period of this public distress, was a young, and Milton an old man; but Chaucer perhaps, like Milton, retired to the groves, and did not cease to be a poet: he persevered a certain internal sereneness and activity, while the world seemed to be perishing around him" (411-2). At the end of this chapter, Godwin ironically reminds his readers that a period in which people were dying horrible deaths during a natural disaster also gave rise to a nostalgic chivalric order: "the institution of the order of the Garter, one of the most splendid and sumptuous festivals of the reign of its magnificent founder, took place" (413). Godwin directs his attack against early nineteenth-century Burkean tradition and the Reign of Terror in describing the procession of the Order of the Garter as a "stately march between walls of funeral sadness and putrefying carcasses" (414). Godwin was "glad that Chaucer wrote no poem to celebrate the memorable triumph" of the English aristocracy, and his silence on this

issue aligned him with Godwin's own silence to describe the historical ascendancy of the aristocracy.

In proposing this history, Godwin seem to intimate that Chaucer still has moral or ethical agency within the present. The sheer vastness of the amount of history present in the *Life* serves as a lasting testament to historical difference, but Godwin seems determined in these works to extract or even resurrect some sympathetic, transhistorical element from the materials of history. Previously, Godwin had pointed towards the sympathetic power of literature in the *Enquirer* and *Political Justice*, but he would more fully articulate his ideas regarding the moral powers of imagination in his later fictional and dramatic works, and these ideas would become a part of his legacy to the second generation Romantics. Referring to Chaucer, Godwin states that the poet is "the legislator of generations and the moral instructor of the world," a phrase that seems to anticipate Shelley's statement in "The Defense of Poetry," in which poets act as the "unacknowledged legislators of the world." Given the refusal to submit to historical narrative in the *Life*, and the repeated intimations that sympathy and friendship cannot be bounded by time, Godwin seems to move towards an idea of imaginative literature as anti-institutional and, indeed, anti-narratorial. In other words, Godwin's notion of literature as *moral* stands against an idea of literature as systematic, instrumental or moral in the reductive sense, of literature as acting as the vehicle of simple moral statement. The *Enquirer's* rejection of Rousseauvian models of education as tyrannical, such that the teacher merely instills in the student a moral sense that is alien to the student's own experience of the world, further explicates this position.

For Godwin, literary success depends on a style and subject that fostered conversation and critique. As Godwin's educational theories developed, however, he began to stress the necessity to read books over conversation, promoting change through print and the anonymous public sphere. In "Of Learning," an essay in *The Enquirer*, Godwin argued that books are "entirely at our devotion, and may be turned backwards and forward as we please," while conversation "is fortuitous and runs wild; the life's blood of truth is filtrated and diluted, till much of its essence is gone."[6] Books, in some fashion, speak to us. These ideas had coalesced into *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer*, a tribute to a poet, much like Milton or Shakespeare, who used the imagination to project their works to an unimaginable futurity.[7]

The figure of Godwin's Chaucer is unlike Caleb Williams, who, although desirous of establishing connections with the world around him and leaving behind a transparent record of his experiences, seems unable to effectively communicate with anyone at all and bemoans his irretrievable isolation. Chaucer, on the other hand, is able to use his imagination to transform his "semi-barbarous" age and transport it into the future *through* writing, effectively speaking to ages that are defined by historical contexts that would have been impossible for Chaucer to consider. Godwin's *Life* is able to

[6] Godwin, *The Enquirer* (London: Printed for G.G. and J. Robinson, 1797), 363.

[7] In general, critics have not discussed *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer* or *Antonio* at all. Indeed, *Fleetwood* has generally been omitted from discussions of Godwin's work. Clemit references *The Life* briefly in the context of Godwin's association of the transition from the medieval to the Renaissance period with the transition from the seventeenth-century to the Enlightenment: "the individual's growing capacity for self-analysis, which is linked with freedom from political and social inequality, leads to the development of a specialized poetic insight: the liberating public context of Chaucer's time enables him to perceive the world around him 'with senses such as never belonged to man … who was bred a slave.' It is this exemplary human sympathy that makes him a type of true poet" (82). I would suggest that the penchant for "self-analysis" that Clemit finds Godwin exploring in *The Life* as the mark of a "true poet" is the very same kind of rationalization that Godwin critiques in *Fleetwood*. Clemit mentions *Fleetwood* in conjunction to *The Life* and on few pages of her study, *The Godwinian Novel*, without going into much detail.

explore ideas as to how the imagination helps articulate beliefs in a wholly improvisatory and fundamentally *open-ended* sense of individual development, such that the historian is able to write back to figures of history. At the same time, Godwin's insistence on the importance of reading over communication, even as reading becomes more dialogic than conversation itself, betrays a growing sense of isolation, and even a sense that *real* connections between contemporary individuals are almost impossible to fully establish. This sense of friendships or relationships that are almost, but not quite, perfect will be explored more fully in *Fleetwood* as a cause of madness and, indeed, the belief in fiction itself.

The use of the imagination in forging connections between individuals slowly begins to replace the priority of rationalism, perfectibility and logic in Godwin's considerations. A passage from the preface to *Bible Stories* elucidates this theory of the imagination: "Imagination is the ground-plot upon which the edifice of a sound morality must be erected. Without imagination we may have a certain cold and arid circle of principles, but we cannot have sentiments: we may learn by rote a catalogue of rules, and repeat our lessons with the exactness of a parrot, or play over our tricks with the docility of a monkey; but we can neither ourselves love, nor be fitted to excite the love of others."[8] Indeed, for Godwin, imagination is the essence of humanity in the way that it preserves a sense of uncorrupted access to the "heart:" "Imagination is the characteristic of man. The dexterities of logic or of mathematical deduction belong rather to a well regulated machine: they do not contain in them the living principle of our nature. It is the

[8] Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, vol. 5, ed. Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), 313-4.

heart which most deserves to be cultivated: not the rules which may serve us in the nature of a compass to steer through the difficulties of life; but the pulses which beat with sympathy, and qualify us for the habits of charity, reverence and attachment" (314).

Godwin's "sentiment" is a translation of sensibility that includes the complicating factors of history, and is not simply a rejection of them or of narrative progress, as Mackenzie's *Man of Feelings* seems to do, given its fragmented structure and narrative based on feeling rather than temporal incidents. Looking for an alternative to the analogy of rule-bound man as a "well regulated machine," Godwin mines the methods of sensibility for strategies that would express impatience and protest the ways of the world. In many ways, this tribute to imagination sounds much like Wordsworth and Coleridge, with its deliberate intimations of a world to be found beyond the bounds of empirical observation. For Godwin, however, the problem of granting works of the imagination a "living" essence that is, in many ways, not merely a figure but real, emerges when we consider such works as themselves textual and possessing physical existence, and, in that sense, subject to death and finitude. Books, as containers of imaginative thought, might seem ideal for the practice of encountering a variety of opinions from a variety of places and times, but reading requires submission and allegiance to a *thing* that is neither conversational nor interactive. In praising books, Godwin hopes to overcome the dangers of deception and subterfuge in actual relations with others while, at the same time, giving the reader a power to respond that is outside of the practices of time-bound conversation, a power that is nevertheless *based* on the principles of exchange rooted in conversation.

A clue as to how Godwin will address a problem that is in many ways insoluble for him can be found in the way that he begins to re-imagine the role of memory and

forgetting in *Antonio*, *Fleetwood* and the later "Essay on Sepulchers." The problems of memory become intertwined with the notion of the *name* as a marker of individual identity. *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer* addresses this question in the following manner: "the first and direct object of this work, is to erect a monument to his (Chaucer's) *name*" (v). In other places, Godwin claims that great writers such as Chaucer often will produce a text that is a "monument of literature" and worthy of sustained life. In simultaneously describing his own work and the work of Chaucer as monuments to an imaginative capability geared towards the future found in Chaucer's *name*, Godwin blurs a crucial distinction between a representation and the thing represented, between the work of the author and the work that commemorates that work, and between individual memory and the memories of others.

The Law of the Name: *Antonio: A Tragedy*

In 1800, Godwin's *Antonio: A Tragedy* was performed at Covent Garden. Although it was a critical and popular failure, an analysis of the play demonstrates the way in which Godwin employed a version of Othellian jealousy in *Fleetwood*.[9] *Antonio* is about the danger of politically powerful individuals remaining blind to the events of the everyday world, and attempting to re-write that history to suit them, no matter what the cost. Yet the play also enacts a crisis of interpretation: how can one *know* others without *acknowledging* their existence as such? Is it even possible to acknowledge others? [10]

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[9] See Marvin Rosenberg's "The 'Refinement' of *Othello* in the Eighteenth-Century British Theater" for an explanation as to the way that Othello was turned into a sentimental play in the eighteenth-century.

[10] Aside from Lamb's review, *Antonio* has been woefully neglected. The redoubtable early twentieth-century critic and Godwin specialist B. Sprague Allen provides interesting historical context for Godwin's

The play takes place in the Spanish court during the end of the Crusades and the beginning of the Spanish Inquisition during the latter half of the fifteenth century. The narrative revolves around the return of Antonio, son of a nobleman, from the Crusades, and his discovery that his sister, promised to marry a fellow crusader, has instead married a Spanish courtier. Antonio becomes enraged when he discovers the marriage, and accuses his sister of forgetting her virtue: "oh, let me then remind thee, nor be thou deaf to the sound, of what thou owest thy father, what to society, to virtue, and thy God!"[11] Antonio's sister Helena stands her ground, however, and this act of rebellion is directly addressed to the Enlightenment historians, and to the aristocratic Burke, who are unable to discover anything new in history, and to Robespierre, Saint-Juste, and the instigators of the French Terror: "thou fool, how dar'st thou thus address thyself to me? Thou soldier, sophist, dissertating pedant! Who think'st to chain the sallies of the heart; and to seek'st

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theatrical productions in "William Godwin and the Stage." Allen, like much of the early critics of Romanticism, such as Abrams, Bloom, and others, situates Godwin in an international context: "I shall not be concerned with the anarchic radicalism of Political Justice, but with the relationship of some of Godwin's novels to certain isolated dramas in England, France, and America" (359). Recent interest in Romantic drama may provide a new context for study of *Antonio*. In an article on Thomas Holcroft, Pixérécourt, and Romantic melodrama as developed in England and France between 1800 and 1802, Diane Long Hoeveler argues that, "Holcroft is not a name one frequently cites or sees cited, and certainly if he is remembered at all today it is as a writer of Jacobin novels, a compatriot of Wollstonecraft, Inchbald, Godwin, and Helen Maria Williams. But it would appear that it is more accurate to see Holcroft as the man who wrote—or more accurately stole—the first British melodrama from France" (49). Of course, Holcroft had been writing letters to Godwin in 1800 on drama ("'Has your Tragedy (*Antonio*) been performed ? I think it would suit the German stage; but the German stage, honour excepted, is almost barren of emolument. Of my Comedy, according to your account, there is little hope.'" [quoted in Paul 2:18) and was in the audience for *Antonio*'s single performance in December of 1800, the same year he saw Pixérécourt *Coelina* and two years before his own translation of the French work. Hoeveler's concluding remark provides an interesting commentary on Godwin's work at the time: "Holcroft revealed the moral vacuity at the heart of "the temple of morality" that aristocratic Britain had constructed for itself, while he attempted instead to erect an alternative "temple of morality," a nascent Jacobin stage presided over by a sharp-tongued maid who was morally centered enough to understand that society was based not on outmoded codes of rank and privilege, but on forgiveness, generosity, and human decency" (69). *Antonio*'s Helena is indeed portrayed on a "nascent Jacobin stage" and is as perceptive as the heroine of Holcroft's translation of the French melodrama, but she finds herself trapped in a "temple of morality" that allows no escape.

[11] Godwin, *Antonio: A Tragedy in Five Acts* (New York: D. Longworth, 1803), 36.

to change the warm realities of this fair globe, into a scenic show of empty motions, figures without souls. How I despise thee! How I laugh to scorn thy lordly wisdom!"(36). Through Helena, Godwin states that Antonio would see the world as "a scenic show of empty motions, figures without souls" (36-7), of a history, as it were, already enacted, of a marriage already performed before it had taken place.

In the language of Stanley Cavell, Antonio is incapable of "acknowledgement;" he is unable to see his sister except as a character of a particular history that must take place. According to Cavell, "it isn't as if being in a position to acknowledge something is weaker than being in a position to know it. On the contrary: from my acknowledging that I am late it follows that I know I'm late … but from my knowing I am late, it does not follow that I acknowledge I'm late … One could say: acknowledgment goes beyond knowledge (Goes beyond not, so to speak, in the order of knowledge, but in its requirement that I do something or reveal something on the basis of that knowledge."[12] Cavell's skepticism is quite similar to Godwin's definition of skepticism, in that both posit a mistrust of the power of reason to define existence: "*The Claim of Reason* suggests the moral of skepticism to be that the existence of the world and others in it is not a matter to be known, but one to be acknowledged. And now what emerges is that what is to be acknowledged is this existence as separate from me, as gone from me … The world must be regained every day, in repetition, regained as gone" (172). Not only is Antonio late for his sister's wedding, one might say, he is also much more profoundly too late to do anything at all except acknowledge what he is incapable of accepting; ironically, this has been foreordained by his new step-brother, Gusman, who predicts

Antonio's eventual madness: "how most ingeniously the human mind devises means of torment" (5).

In the play, the failure to acknowledge others results in the collapsing of the boundaries between knowledge and violence, exposing the hallucinated limit that seems to separate the two. The play further complicates the value of imaginary monuments to the past by exploring it in a tale about the recovery of patrimony through the living presence of the name of the dead father. Paying close attention to theatrical conventions, the play demonstrates the abuse of the powers of the imagination that Godwin seeks to establish in other contexts. In the *Life*, Godwin writes a monument to Chaucer's monument, and this is an act of imaginary dialogic communication between Godwin and Chaucer; Antonio seeks to enact vengeance for the dead father and absent fiancée of his sister, yet Antonio has no guarantee that the dead father or absent fiancée would wish to have their names associated with the acts of murder and violence that Antonio authorizes in their name. In this sense, Antonio is a play about the Terror as a historical event that bases its own authority in a revolutionary moment that is recalled, in Godwin's terms, through acts of forgetting about the moral strictures of the revolution. *Antonio* underwrites the power of the *name* of the dead and absent to organize the fate of the living.

At the same time, while Antonio appears to be a monster of instrumental reason and the law, it is also the case that the language of sentiment at the beginning of the play is also couched in languages that seeks out the truth through conversation rather than the

[12] Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 256-7.

discovery of a shared sense of feeling. The first lines of the play, "*Why* are these tears? What *means* that smothered sigh? (a pause) / Am I no more the partner of thy heart? / Hast thou then ceas'd to love me?" (1). Later, awaiting a reply from Helena, Gusman asks, "Whereof this pause? How dost thou torture me?" (2). Communication, as in the *Enquiry* and *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer*, forms the basis of both real and imagined communities, yet the abuse of communication transforms sympathetic feeling into demands for knowledge.

The play makes it clear that Antonio is in a world that seems to have passed him by; he is forced to relinquish his mythic status as a national hero in order to become a detective who searches after the truth in evidence. At the same time, the world "as it is" is complicit in the creation of Antonio, as it appears that their social world has grown out of Antonio's sense of honor; indeed, for society, Antonio is already more a figure than a man, and Antonio, in his own eyes, must assume the role of a figure, of an abstract law, that returns to seek vengeance on a world without grounded principles except the shifting terrain of feeling, which can and has changed. To this degree, the sentimental world against which Antonio rails is no less guilty than the aristocratic one he thinks he is defending.

The ending of Antonio enacts the tragedy of the play through physical violence and death, which Godwin seems to suggest as being the only means of resolving the fundamental epistemological similarity of sentimental and rational language. The violence at the end of the play also signals a historical shift: if Antonio's *father* cultivated tranquility and familial happiness, then Antonio delivers the catastrophic end to that

period of time in the present.[13] In the midst of a confrontation between Antonio and Helena in the final act, Antonio murders his sister as she has refused to give up her marriage to Gusman and retire to a convent. Unable to change history to suit his purposes, Antonio eliminates the cause of his grief, killing in one motion history, the past and time itself. This act also demonstrates that Antonio has always felt that his sister was his enemy; and, in failing to acknowledge her, he discovers a voice that will haunt him forever: "Revive, my Helen: live a little longer! I cannot lose thee yet! Bless me again with that angelic voice! – This is indeed the pageantry of justice!" (52). We realize that brother and sister are bitter enemies when Godwin has Antonio state, after another failed attempt to make Helena follow his commands, "did I not seek this conference that I might pour in Helen's ear conviction?" Altering *Hamlet*, wherein Claudius murders Hamlet's father by pouring poison into his ear, Godwin aligns poison and death with *conviction*, with the knowledge of being correct and "just." In the language of the *Enquirer*, Godwin states that universal history's cancellation of the possible, unrealized futures prohibits us from conceiving "what it is of which social man is capable, sentencing us "to dance in fetters," "blighted in every grander and more ample development of the soul" (364-5).

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[13] In one of the many characteristic reverses that he enacts on Godwin's narratives, Scott will turn this historical pattern around: while Godwin's texts tend to move from an ideal or utopian past, a Rousseauvian state of nature in many ways, to a chaotic, amoral present, Scott will locate violence in the past in order to narrate the ways in which the present escapes the past (see Ian Duncan's analysis of *Guy Mannering* and *Old Mortality*, for example, in his *Modern Transformations*). In both Godwin and Scott, however, the past, whether real or imagined, has a strong, alluring effect on the present. This similarity also explains, in many ways, their mutual admiration for Henry Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling*. Everett Zimmerman explains Scott's fascination with Mackenzie in the following manner: "in this space between the sense of history as what happened and history as our construction is room for the development of the historical novel, with Mackenzie's admirer Scott as its chief practitioner. Scott inserts the fiction of a private person (Waverley) into the context of historical events, thus allowing us to follow the character's process of construing those events through the impediments of bias, accident, and limitation" (299). The framing of the constructed nature of "history" in Scott answers to the inability of Fleetwood, for example, to establish any distance at all between the past and present and "to become (his) own historian" (237).

The effect on the outraged theater audience of the first and only performance of the play was striking. According to Charles Lamb, who attended the opening with Godwin, the effect of the killing of Helena "was, as if a murder had been committed in cold blood. The whole house rose up in clamorous indignation demanding justice. … I believe at that instant, if they could have got to him, they would have torn the unfortunate author to pieces" (quoted in Paul 2:37). Attempting to perhaps pacify his friend, Lamb speculates that it was not the action of the play that produced this effect, but rather that it was the poor performance by John Kemble, the famous actor and playwright playing Antonio, and that the audience had not been paying attention to the words of the play, but to Kemble's inappropriately calm demeanor. The audience, then, "found themselves betrayed into the accomplishment of a murder, a perfect misprision of parricide" (quoted in Paul 2:55). Reading through Lamb's report, however, reveals that the play worked all too well: while the introduction of the unforeseeable into history can have catastrophic effects, introducing the unexpected into a theater-going experience can awaken the audience from the "fetters" of predictability and probability. The shock that the audience felt at the only sudden and decisive act in the whole play, reserved *for* the end of the drama, and the effect of the famous John Kemble as the actor who delivered the blow, a casting decision for which Godwin had fervently pleaded, demonstrate Godwin's awareness of the moral effect of his play to condemn his own audience.[14]

[14] In a series of letters, Godwin pleaded with Kemble to play Antonio: "You anticipate, sir, the application of all this eager, but I hope not ungentlemanlike, expostulation. The truth must be spoken, though with modesty, yet firmness. The play can have no justice done it, unless the character of Antonio be in your hands. By how much the bolder is the pencil with which I have pourtrayed him, by how much the nearer I have suffered his character to border upon what has scarcely a precedent, by so much the more does he require the support of an eminent performer" (quoted in Paul 2:50).

Seen through the dual lenses of the *Life* and *Antonio*, Godwin founds the act of communication on the desire to possess something that does not exist, or, more cryptically, that no longer or cannot exist. In this sense, the desire for a form of transparent communication, one that is distinct from the artificiality and conventionality that Romantics found in the poetry of eighteenth-century, is driven by desires that are similar to those which lead to *jealousy*. Jealousy is clearly visible in *Antonio* through allusion and plot. As with *Hamlet* and Caleb Williams, *Othello* haunts *Antonio*; the play set in Moorish Spain, and Antonio is rumored to be a great hero, with an eloquent and persuasive speaking voice. Antonio's feelings for his sister could be attributed to a repressed incestuous jealousy, a feeling that could only be resolved through her death; absent and gone, like his father and friend, Fleetwood is authorized to feel for his sister in a way that her life and living presence before the law precludes. Yet this reduction to latent, illicit and repressed feelings is only adequate as an explanation of Antonio's character. The play demonstrates that, somewhere in the past, feeling and reason were aligned against each other for reasons that are impossible to discern. Like Gusman and Antonio, who both search out the reasons behind their feelings of alienation, Godwin directs the meaning of the play outward to a silent audience that, like the King's guards who appear to ring in the action in the final scene, silently witness the horror that takes place. Godwin critiques the audience's complicit silence, figured in the guard's silent spectatorship of the action on stage, by shocking them with the final, irresolvable violence of the play.

In the *Life*, Godwin attempts to reconstruct a vivid historical context that supports his imagined sense of sympathy for Chaucer.[15] In Fleetwood, objective historical context is decidedly missing in the midst of the *real* that his narrative voice seems to record so intensely. It is the challenge that Godwin poses to his reader to recognize within Fleetwood's elaborately constructed edifice of confession and autobiography *other* kinds of absences, sacrifices and losses that have symbolic currency beyond the figural transpositions of Fleetwood's narrative that seek to contain them. Although Fleetwood acts as a moral monster in his acts of disinterested torture, we must see that these acts are contained within a narrative that reduces them to the sympathetic unfolding of his own identity, and that turns the people in his life and their tales into personal tableaus. Wondering, then, whether Fleetwood really *feels* terrible about what he has done is ultimately less important than in considering how he *recollects* the value of these past events.

In this sense, Godwin responds, as it were, to the criticism leveled at him by Scott in his review of *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer*. The disinterested historical perspective that Godwin attempted to construct, wherein the picture of the past is represented in all its

[15] I note Godwin's *sympathy* with Chaucer here in order to provide insight into the way in which Godwin navigated the distinctions between history and fiction as between sympathy and empathy. The distinction between sympathy and empathy is notoriously difficult to trace out in eighteenth-century aesthetics and ethics. Whereas sympathy keeps a distance from the object that it contemplates, empathy involves a more direct sense of substitution and a blurring of the boundaries between self and other. According to Bate, "the sympathetic imagination grasps, through a kind of direct experience and feeling, the distinctive nature, identity, or 'truth' of the object of its contemplation" (132). Sympathy had a "broad moral application" (132). Empathy, on the other hand, or the German eighteenth-century version, *Einfühlung*, sprang from a direct sense of fellow feeling that was so powerful that it could be imagined as being anterior to or overwhelming of morality. Indeed, the reaction of readers to Goethe's *Werther*, who felt so powerfully *for* Werther, was often described using *Einfühlung*. Although I have argued for Smith's blurring of distinctions between poetic subject and object in a Petrarchan register, it would not be incorrect to sense this mode of *Einfühlung* at play in her poems (especially considering that one of her first poems was addressed to Werther himself).

complexity in order to establish an imaginative connection with the past, was turned, by Scott, into an example of Jacobin historiography, disconnected from a clear narrative and chaotic; the only valuable use of this very long text would be, ironically, to stop up the mouth of French harbors, silencing the French influence in England by symbolically silencing the fears of a French invasion. Scott's critical maneuver intimated that real invasion from France could be overturned by a metaphoric silencing of English writers, as if Godwin's texts were covert messages to France that, if silenced, would prevent the French from arriving. The disinterested historical becomes the interested political through this symbolic diversion of Godwin's text from the hands of his reader to the harbors of France. In *Fleetwood*, Godwin parodies sentimentalism by denouncing its attempts to involve everything, even all its alleged "errors," into a totalizing historical narrative structure that assigns meaning to events only in reference to an individual economy of confession and redemption. Through *Fleetwood*, Godwin demonstrates how the personal *displaces* the political through a process of self-sympathetic selective remembering.

Godwin, as we have seen, was deeply concerned with the possibility of using transparent communication as the basis for establishing morally virtuous social and historical worlds. Through *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer*, Godwin attempts to establish a connection with the medieval poet through an imaginative reconstruction of his world in the present. In culling materials from the archives, Godwin attempts to give Chaucer a hallucinated presence before the reader. In *Antonio*, we saw the dark side of this attempt to give life to the dead and absent. Godwin's resurrects the late Renaissance crisis of judgment, in which interpretation is hampered by the competing explanations, in order to

confront a late eighteenth-century world. The post-revolutionary world of England, allegorically associated with the birth of the Inquisition, is characterized by a powerful sense of nostalgia for, on the one hand, the groundlessness and contingency of immediate feeling and sentiment and, on the other, the inflexible enactment of abstract, absolute laws that Godwin associated with the Burkean narrative of chivalric sentiment. At the same time, the language employed by its characters demonstrates an interpenetration of the language of feeling and reason, of a passion for the law (Antonio) and lawful, legally sanctioned passion (Helena and Gusman). While Antonio becomes a monster by the end of the play, as he kills his sister in cold blood, he immediately regrets an inability to *speak* with Helena any longer. While the *Life* presents the fiction of speaking with ghosts as the basis for the retrieval of culture and history that has been forgotten, intimating that the most vivid form of communication with others in the present ought to be based on this kind of "reading," *Antonio* demonstrates that any attempt to produce this kind of communication will result in horrific tragedy. In one sense, Antonio appears as a monster of Enlightenment instrumental reason: a self-destructive figure that enacts the epochal shift to the modern world in which is law divorced from the contingent material world and the ideal, philosophical forms struggle with the world it is meant to govern. Within the Gothic Spanish scene of the play, Godwin melds together the chivalric, the sentimental, and the rational in the figure of Antonio, such that the birth of instrumental reason also signals its self-destructive life. It may be argued that *Antonio* signals a turning in Godwin's thought, one in which the utopian rationalism of his early tract, *Political Justice*, is both rejected and idealized beyond the realm of the possible. For Godwin, figures that become passionately, unconsciously attached to the objective idea

of reason and its authoritative voice via personal experience are irretrievably doomed to speak and see only ghosts, to divorce experience itself from moral culpability, and to traffic in absence.

Unremembering Confessions: *Fleetwood, or, The New Man of Feeling*

In an effort to circulate widely the radical political philosophy he articulated in his first major treatise, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), Godwin frequently wrote novels that exemplified the social and political injustices he addressed in his other works. Although it is Mary Wollstonecraft, his first wife, who is typically remembered for her work in deconstructing stereotypical eighteenth-century gender roles as based on sentiment and feeling, Godwin appears to have shared her dedication to this project. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Wollstonecraft argued that women were literally imprisoned within expectations and educational models that restricted their gender; in her novel, *The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria* (1798), Wollstonecraft provide graphic demonstrations of this condition. Godwin took a similar approach in his fiction, and attacked the issue from the perspective of damaged masculine identities and pathological social conventions as defined for men. Although it can be argued that Godwin, like Rousseau, attempted to garner sympathy for his own vaguely misogynist tendencies in fictional form, Godwin nevertheless consistently worked to expose the ways in which traditional constructions of masculinity fostered aggression and jealousy between men that threatened the ideals of sympathy that men were supposed to uphold as the chivalrous exemplars of a conservative Burkean culture.

For Godwin, the imminent destructiveness and *self*-destructiveness of interactions between men undermined the possibility of a rational utopianism, perfectibility of human nature grounded in the development of an ideal political community based upon individual sincerity, full and honest communication, and mutual benevolence across class divisions and in all social relationships to which Godwin clung. In his third novel, *Fleetwood, or, The New Man of Feeling* (1805), Godwin exposed a conception of an anti-social masculinity, much like in *Antonio*, that was based, in his estimation, upon what we have come to define as a recognizably Romantic and self-destructive obsession with a lost innocence or childhood as the basis for subjective identity.[16] Indicting the nostalgic poetics that Wordsworth devises from his recollections of the natural world and childhood, Rousseau's educational models and self-forgetful reverie, and the counter-

[16] One of the more fascinating comments on Godwin's novel comes from Stendhal. In an 1805 letter to his sister Pauline, Stendhal recommends *Fleetwood* highly: "Try to read … *Fleet Wood*, the new novel by the original W. Godwin. Above all, I recommend all of this last work which is possibly a masterpiece" (195). It is quite striking to hear Stendhal recommend *Fleetwood* as a masterpiece some twenty years before he embarked on his own course as a novelist. It may not be an exaggeration to state the Godwin's work is best be understood as a source for the complex psychological novels by authors ranging from Chateaubriand to Balzac that were produced in France in the early to mid-nineteenth century. As an author compulsively attracted to and repelled by subjective experience, and who both values and disdains the role of the imagination in social and moral life, Godwin easily fits into the *mal du siècle* milieu of post-revolutionary France. Paul de Man's Heideggerian description of irony resembles the varieties of passionate, anti-romantic Romanticism of authors from Godwin to Constant and Stendhal that gave birth to nineteenth-century realism: "Irony divides the flow of temporal experience into a past that is pure mystification and a future that remains harassed forever by a relapse within the inauthentic. It can know this inauthenticity but can never overcome it. It can only restate and repeat it on an increasingly conscious level, but it remains endlessly caught in the impossibility of making this knowledge applicable to the empirical world" (de Man 1983, 222). Although there is much to say about de Man's evocation of irony here, I would like to note that the rather Gothic feeling generated by and complicit in the knowledge of never being able to overcome but only restate inauthenticity "on an *increasingly* conscious level" (indeed, de Man's transposition of *repeating* to *increasingly* indicates the temporal predicament of consciousness as an affective form of self-awareness that seems to go nowhere, and highlights the vertiginous nature of [the] feeling as I am describing it), is a complex characteristic of novels in both England and France in the Romantic period, loosely defined. Furthermore, I would assert that this characteristic is developed mutually, from British and French authors reading each other's works, and not independently. Finally, it might also be argued that de Man's famous reading of the "Boy of Winander" episode in Wordsworth's 1805 *The Prelude*, as found in his essay, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," exposes both Godwin's influence upon Wordsworth and Wordsworth's place in the cross-Channel *mal du siècle* I am gesturing towards here.

revolutionary fantasies of Burkean feudalism,[17] Godwin asserts that memories that are obsessively and dangerously fetishized become psychological "errors" or "blots" on the surface of the mind. These instances of recollected moral deviancy, driven to a kind of psychological damage through Fleetwood's intense self-analysis, become the foundation for his fictional construction of a purely interior world of allegorical references and resemblances, one that transforms his isolated memories into a coherent narrative that defends the anti-social tendencies he appears to condemn in himself. Fleetwood's passionate desire to find a male friend within the narrative is a reflection of his desire to be read by sympathetic readers; as such, the tightly constructed narrative of his confession of guilt is an attempt to anticipate and prevent the misunderstandings or misinterpretations that he may be subjected to in the future.

To relieve intense individualistic suffering, it is certainly possible, as William Brewer has argued, that the homosocial nature of Fleetwood's obsessive desire to have "a friend, who is to me as another self, who joys in all my joys, and grieves in all my sorrows" (148) expresses an intense, almost homoerotic longing for male companionship; yet it is clear that Godwin wishes to explore the limits of male friendship that separate culturally sanctioned relations between fathers and sons and externalized, narcissistic *amour de soi*. For Godwin, this intense feeling reflects a shift from the moral aesthetics of sympathy as a model of social community towards a model of subjectivity build upon

[17] Although he is frequently characterized otherwise, Tory conservative Edmund Burke, as Christensen has argued, was no less of a radical figure than Godwin, and, indeed, Burke was influential for both conservative and liberal thinkers during the era of the French Revolution. According to Christensen, Burke fantasized about a return to a "quasifeudal model" of government "that had little actual pertinence to Great Britian, where the administrative monarchy that was the future of postrevolutionary France was already in place and progressively undermining privilege by the steady expansion of a fine-grained network of financial and social regulations" (81); indeed, this Burkean dissatisfaction with "financial and social

self-interested empathy, replacing a physical longing *for* the other towards a longing *to be* the other that constantly cares for the self.

According to Rousseau, an infamously poor father who abandoned his own children, *amour de soi* is characteristic of a desire for *commiseration*, for others to feel for you. For Rousseau's self-representation, as for Fleetwood, to have or ask others to feel for you is both an empathetic principle and a literal truth: I know myself through the feelings that I lack. In the *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* (1754), Rousseau analyzes the difference between *amour propre* (desire for self-survival) and *amour de soi-meme*, and locates powerful feelings of hopeless alienation in the savage man trapped in an enlightened world: "Nothing, on the contrary, would have been as miserable as Savage man dazzled by enlightenment, tormented by Passions, and reasoning about a state different from his own."[18] The savage man, then, seeks out commiseration as a search for pity and sympathy from others: "Even if it were true that commiseration is nothing but a sentiment that puts us in the place of him who suffers, a sentiment that is obscure and lively in Savage man, developed but weak in Civil man, what difference could this idea make to the truth of what I say, except to give it additional force?" (153). In Godwin's novel, Fleetwood states, "the desire to possess (companionship) was one of the earliest passions of my life … and, though eternally baffled, perpetually returned to the assault."[19] Fleetwood's reference towards an aggressive, yet commiserating, metaphor indicating his longing for companionship aligns

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regulations" will appear in *Fleetwood*.

[18] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men*. in Peter Gay, *The Basic Political Writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau* (Indianapolis: Hackett Press, 1987), 150.

[19] Godwin, *Fleetwood, or, The New Man of Feeling* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000), 149.

him with the Rousseauvian "savage" who is trapped within an unfamiliar world and searches for a "friend" who might lessen his feelings of isolation and loss of a natural world. As with the creature in his daughter's later novel, *Frankenstein, or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818), Fleetwood's isolation within the world seems to cause him to commit the "errors" or "blots" that he later comes to regret.

In historicist terms, *Fleetwood* provided the stakes upon which an epistemological crisis of sympathy was repeatedly reinvented and reoriented throughout the nineteenth century in a masculinist idiom. If Wollstonecraft critiques the society in which women were trapped with unjust expectations or transformed into stunted social beings, then Godwin's critique of stunted, deformed masculine identity, one in which a lost child that speaks through a man's body and against the unstoppable passage of time, is based on the ways in which this form of gender identity finds ways to transform alienation and isolation into forms of impotent power. In *Fleetwood*, Godwin constructs a figure imprisoned within own his mind as an act of self-induced evasion, one whose ideal constructions mark the point of overlap between Godwin's and Wollstonecraft's attempts to break down gender differences and find a common theme of suffering and alienation in both men and women, one that is both the obverse and justification of Godwin's more philosophical, utopian dreams.

Godwin begins the novel with Fleetwood's childhood, describing how he was raised by his melancholic father in the wilds of Wales after the death of his mother. As Gary Handwerk notes, Fleetwood's childhood and "natural" education are those advocated by Rousseau: "Fleetwood is raised as a child in just the kind of setting that

Rousseau recommends."[20] Yet there is much more at stake in Fleetwood's depiction of his childhood. In the opening lines of the novel, Fleetwood remarks on his own divided past and the sign of guilt that accompanied his birth:[21]

> I was the only son of my father. I was very young at the period of the death of my mother, and have retained scarcely any recollection of her. My father was so much affected by the loss of the amiable and affectionate partner of his days, that he resolved to withdraw for ever from those scenes where every object he saw was associated with the ideas of her kindness, her accomplishments, and her virtues; and, being habitually a lover of the sublime and romantic features of nature, he fixed upon a spot in Merionethshire, near the foot of Cader Idris, for the habitation of his declining life. … My father loved me extremely; his actions towards me were tender and indulgent; he recognized in me all that remained of the individual he had loved more than all the other persons in the world. (53)

In this highly compressed retelling of his own birth, Fleetwood accounts for his status as a cursed child and a sense of being haunted by an absent woman for whom he will constantly feel guilty in the face of his father's melancholic existence. Rather than being seen as a "new" individual or man of feeling, a proper son to his sentimental, feeling

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[20] Quoted from Godwin, *Fleetwood*, 15.

[21] Although it is beyond the scope of this analysis, the correlations between Godwin's *Fleetwood* and Shelley's *Frankenstein* cannot be emphasized enough. The guilty births of the creature and Fleetwood bear uncanny resemblances, and both instances indicate how Godwin and Shelley denounce a species of Romantic genius that appears, in Godwin's work, to have been constructed alongside Wordsworth's own poetic experiments with natural sympathy. Recovering the genealogy of Romanticism in these texts, a project that Godwin himself began, provides greater insights into the modes and varieties of the imagination as constructed by Wordsworth, Godwin, and Shelley. For more work in this direction, see William Brewer, *The Mental Anatomies of William Godwin and Mary Shelley*, and David Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy*.

father, Fleetwood presents himself as being haunted by a fragment of an inaccessible past that is outside his control. He is indulged and loved by his father not because he is his child, then, but because he is evocative of his mother. One of the marks that Fleetwood's father leaves upon him will consequentially produce the doubling of his voice throughout the novel, a doubling that is reflective of his recollection of his past and his judgment of them in the present. Indeed, the representation of language itself is crucial to the development of Fleetwood's representation of himself. As we have seen, he "was the only son of (his) father," and he "was very young at the period of the death of (his) mother," and has "retained scarcely any recollection of her." Already, Fleetwood erases or forgets the feminine from the scene of his birth in two senses: one the one hand, his mother is dead, and on the other, by labeling himself as "only *son*" of his father, he allusively acknowledges or hints that he may have sisters, but that they are unworthy of being remembered.

As I have already intimated, by the time that Godwin published *Fleetwood*, his concerns with Rousseau were being driven through an engagement with depictions of the natural sublime as found in the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Yet the descriptions of the wilderness in Fleetwood are more of a response to his feelings of guilt within his domestic estate than an enjoyment of its natural freedom. Fleetwood's early childhood is devoted to exploring the "wild and magnificent scenery" (17) of Wales, and he is attuned to the natural world like a Coleridgean "Eolian harp" (30). Many of these early scenes mimic Wordsworth and Rousseau, further entrenching the split, guilty consciousness that marked his birth: "In Merionethshire, I had been a solitary savage. I had no companions, and I desired none. The commerce of my books and of my thoughts

was enough for me. I lived in an ideal world of my own creation. The actual world beneath me I intuitive shunned" (29). Describing his activities as a child, he waxes into Wordsworthian lyricism: "often have I climbed the misty mountain's top, to hail the first beams of the orb of day, or to watch his refulgent glories as he sunk beneath the western ocean" (54). Fleetwood's narrative voice, however, interrupts this recollection by bluntly stating, "I was a spoiled child" (54). Later, we will see Fleetwood repeat this sentiment in judging the merits of a literary club with which he participated by evoking the language of the sublime, a feeling that seems to even erase his own specific past: "I was the spoiled child of the great parent, Nature. I delighted only in the bold and the free, in what was at one and the same time beautiful and lawless" (223). In his childhood recollections, we see that the evocations of the "bold and the free" arise from the natural world and its images, which "talk to us of that venerable power which is operating every where, and never sleeps. But their speech is dumb; their eloquence is unobtrusive; if they tear us from ourselves, it is with a gentle and a kindly violence, which, while we submit to, we bless it" (54).[22] Rather than acting as a Wordsworthian balm, nature becomes the site of a domesticated, feminized violence, one that is "gentle and kindly," and that offers a displaced mirror for his own feelings of guilt and psychological disfigurement. Fleetwood's delight in nature derives from his ability to give speech to this natural, feminine silence and to submit the real, which he constantly wishes to evade, to the ideal worlds of his own creation. In this early yet pivotal sense, the feminine is a silent world

[22] The importance of *Fleetwood* to more modern depictions of a perverse masculine identity cannot be overstated. This characteristic of a silent natural speech can also be found in the beginning of Herman Melville's novel, *Pierre, or, The Ambiguities*, a novel that, like *Fleetwood*, make use of the languages of sympathy in order to expose its dangerously powerful application to a world that was no longer

that empathizes with Fleetwood and through which he may speak or displace, rather than overcome, his own sense of isolation.

Reflecting on his childhood, Fleetwood admits to dreaming and falling into periods of Rousseauvian "reverie" in these natural scenes, a feeling that "determined the color of my riper years" (56).[23] Indeed, Fleetwood's description of waking and sleeping dreams reveals how Fleetwood's narrative strategy is related to this natural, unobtrusive and feminine eloquence that nevertheless hides a more dramatic violence than nature, and that is intimately connected to the language of empire and domination. According to Fleetwood, the difference between reverie and the dreams of the night is based on a sense of power: "with the visions of the night there is ordinarily mixed a depressing sense of impotence; things without are too strong for us: in those of the day we are all-powerful; obstacles no longer present themselves than they are conquered; or, if it is otherwise, we willfully protract the struggle, that we may prolong our pleasure, and enhance our triumph" (56). This passage is characteristic of Fleetwood's use of language, in that Fleetwood's description is presented as a fact, or, as two possible ways of understanding a general sense of waking consciousness and its powerlessness or lack of control during sleep. Yet the language of the passage, and Fleetwood's narrative, demonstrate that these two elements are deeply interconnected with each other. As with Fleetwood's descriptions of his desire to have a male companion who commiserates with him, the polarities between which he oscillates is a helpless impotence and struggle and

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epistemologically available to sentimentalism. For a trenchant analysis of *Pierre* as parody, see Robert Miles, "'Tranced Griefs:' Melville's Pierre and the Origins of the Gothic," *ELH*, 66(1), 1999.

[23] For an evocative reading of Rousseauvian reverie within contexts that mirror Godwin's own sense of exile, see Paul Hamilton, *Metaromanticisms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 56-61.

aggression *Fleetwood* is an indictment of Rousseauvian and Wordsworthian natural education not because it shows children who are morbid failures, but because it demonstrates that children can gain a great deal of narrative and subjective power through a form of *amour propre* and imaginative, narcissistic sympathy for oneself.

In the case of *Fleetwood*, recollecting the past does indeed awaken Wordsworthian "feelings … of unremembered pleasures" that are not valuable in and of themselves, but through their imaginative association with other events in life. Yet the drive to transform these feelings into valuable knowledge or moral guidance in the present is fraught with difficulties for Godwin because there is no proper ending point in this development. Parallel to Godwin's consideration of the moral value of history as founded in ways that the potentially unremembered importance of events are discovered only in the imaginative chains of association between unlikely agents and actors of history (such as Chaucer and Godwin, for example), as well as Godwin's description of the individual's place in society as driven by his rational sacrifice of his own individuality to the common interest, the value of individual memories is not to be found in their immanent, representative content as a mimetic scene that is intuitively and transparently understood; rather, it is only through the development of an idea or concept that links them together.

The dreams of the night, in which Fleetwood feels hopelessly impotent, come to resemble the helplessness he feels in the real, social world. The most important event in the first period of Fleetwood's life details the way that Fleetwood recollects his rescue of a young peasant boy and a lamb. At the beginning of this scene, Fleetwood presents himself from a divine perspective, "on the edge of a precipice" (60). Below, he sees a

young lamb “had wandered by some accident to the middle of the precipice, and a peasant was pursuing it, and endeavoring to call it to his arms. I shuddered at the sight” (61). Fleetwood is pulled out of his omnipotent reverie by an opportunity to display his ability to rescue the young peasant and the lamb, both of whom fall into a lake and are almost drown. Yet, as we see, Fleetwood himself needs rescuing. He leaps into the lake to rescue the two, and quickly discovers that he cannot save them himself; all three are saved by a young woman in a rowboat, who is the peasant’s lover, and who, as Fleetwood later mentions, has “a masculine intrepidity” (64), unconsciously shaming him. Fleetwood discovers in this scene that he does not have the physical prowess that he imagines he possess in his reveries. In spite of her assistance, Fleetwood later dreams about the incident in a way that validates his presence: “my heart whispered me, ‘This would not have existed but for me!’”(65).. At the same time, Fleetwood exults how his “own gratification was forgotten” (65) while engaging in benevolent tasks. Using his father’s money, Fleetwood quickly bestows upon the young man, his old father, and the young woman a small sum, and, economically speaking, keeps them afloat: “My attachment to them was that of a patron and a preserver” (67). Throughout the narration of this episode, Fleetwood alters the meaning of the events as they pass: he appropriates the place of the “masculine” young woman and imagines himself as their “preserver.”

Through his childhood, Fleetwood learns to manipulate a separation between the real world and the ideal world, discovering that it is women who frequently expose his helplessness and inaugurate endless streams of self-analysis. His youthful assertion that he had rescued the peasant boy and the lamb emphasize that his ideal self is not only preferable to his real identity, but actively working to suppress it. The characterization of

the young woman as "masculine" at once determines Fleetwood's sense of competition with women and his later hatred of them, forming the basis for his friendships with men that are based on a shared repulsion with women that spills over into their own relationships.[24] Yet by leaving this linguistic trace in the novel, by referring to her as "masculine" and then taking her place later in the short narrative sequence, Fleetwood performs a sublime narrative operation that discovers threats in the world around him that he is able to domesticate, excise or, in the end of the novel, unfeelingly eliminate. Fleetwood no longer *feels* sympathy for the young man and lamb, but convinces himself that the *language* of sympathy can be used to accrue a sense of individual power. As such, when Fleetwood moves from Wales to Oxford and to Parisian society, he is forced to suppress his own idealism: "I no longer gave free scope to the workings of my own mind, but became an artificial personage, formed after a wretched and contemptible model" (32). In all of the episodes of life after childhood, Fleetwood will harbor a secret animosity towards "things as they are." Fleetwood's natural imagination, incipient charity, and love of solitude are not characteristics, but defense mechanisms driven is by his hatred of society and feelings of guilt, and by women that he feels drive him to seek solace in the company of other men in which he may reflect his own aggressive misogyny and lost innocence.

At the same time, Godwin turns Fleetwood into a Rousseauvian narrator who uses his considerable imaginative powers in an attempt to transform his misanthropic

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[24] It is in this sense, I would argue, that *Fleetwood* is deeply concerned with homosocial bonds and not homoerotic desires, as characterized by Brewer. The impotence and absence of fulfillment within masculine friendship, a source of both commiseration and aggression, is characteristic of Fleetwood's friends and mentors.

tendencies into the basis of a strange form of sympathy. Unlike Rousseau's self-proclaimed exceptionalism, Godwin, in the preface to the novel, ironically locates Fleetwood's narrative act within the banal, everyday experiences of "every Englishman" (5), installing a profound misogynistic violence beneath a surface of chivalric sympathy and sentiment that suppresses the reality to which it is allergic; in other words, Fleetwood is like every Englishman who would excuses the suffering that he has caused through appeals to his own, unconscious misanthropic actions, all of which have been crafted by society. The idyllic childhood that finds its apex in Fleetwood's rescue of a drowning peasant and his lamb, for example, is figurally fulfilled and demolished, and thus rendered even more desirable, during his later time at Oxford, a period of his life that begins to undo his belief in a benevolent world, and that anticipates his own madness and jealousy. The impact of society on Fleetwood turns his idyllic past into a form of resistance against the world and, at the same time, transforms his narrative into an interlocking series of events that gloss and bring to light the lost possibilities of earlier events.

At Oxford, Fleetwood falls in with students who symbolize counter-revolutionary figures. He discusses how he began to associate with a group of young reprobates and became involved in a cruel trick against a new student, Withers. Withers, a proto-revolutionary poet, has written an epic poem about the Fifth Labor of Hercules, in which Hercules cleans out the mountains of manure in the Augean stables. The students ask him to read his piece, all the while mocking him behind his back. Indeed, Fleetwood's unconscious rivalry with Withers as an artist induces him to invite the reader to mock Withers by repeating the poem within his own narrative. Then, the students trick Withers

by arranging for him to listen to a puppet they have built of the headmaster, ventriloquized by one of the students, who "expels" Withers. At first, Withers, the naïf from a country town, believes that the puppet is, in fact, the headmaster. He finally discovers the series of tricks, becomes despondent, and devolves into madness. Finally, he commits suicide by throwing himself into the Thames.

It is clear that Withers' poem is an allegory of the defeat of Godwin's radical reform movement, as the ridiculous poem about the cleansing of the stables becomes a historicized version of the impossibilities of reform in a post-revolutionary age that see an idealistic hopefulness for the future as a sign of weakness. In the economy of the novel, Withers's madness serves to prefigure Fleetwood's eventual madness over an imagined jealousy. On its own, however, the scene in Oxford reads Fleetwood's later madness as an attempt to contain the resonances that this scene has on the reading of the novel as a whole, demonstrating that Fleetwood is not, in fact, mad, but is himself *constructing* a scene of madness as a means of explaining his later jealousy. Fleetwood's feelings of beneficial power in Wales is immorally realized and punished by the ambiguous, almost unstated belief that he in fact contributed to the fall and drowning of Withers. The vaguely erotic "sigh" (59) that brings William, the peasant from Fleetwood's youth, back to life is fulfilled in the silence and ravings of Withers's madness; indeed, both of these uses of language reappear in Fleetwood's own scene of Othellian jealous rage in response to an imagined infidelity by his wife. After saving William, Fleetwood silently tells himself, "this would not have existed but for me!" (64); during the tormenting of Withers's by his classmates, however, Fleetwood finds himself comparing it to his childhood in Wales negatively. Oxford, in this sense, is his

first experience of the cruel world beyond his childhood retreat. Reflecting on his youth, Fleetwood is able to compare these two events, one as the fulfillment of the other, and to wish that he would have made different decisions; his early life, and the visual, theatrical *tableau* that he witnesses after rescuing William taught him, in the manner of Diderot, that spectatorship is a position of god-like power. Yet Fleetwood's *sympathy* for Withers, his feeling for Withers's suffering, which takes place in the narrative present, attempts to make up for his silent acquiescence to Withers's plight by seeing it through the lens of his idyllic childhood. The lyricism of his youth, and the vision of nature, is replaced by what we might call the *performance* of disinterestedness and the always belated nature of sympathy, such that Fleetwood, the objective narrative chronicler of his own story, finds again that it is always too late to relieve suffering. For Fleetwood, the failure of sympathy as a way of understanding the world is transformed and raised into a fictional ideal: the narrator is necessarily distant in space and time from his objects of analysis, and "the failure of sympathy," its sheer uselessness, fosters a narrative principle of objective realism that is conveyed with the passionate immediacy of the traditional novel of sentiment.

In the progress of the narrative of *Fleetwood*, Withers loses his individual identity by becoming the immoral antithesis to William in Wales, and so is the first "fall" of Fleetwood. On the surface, Fleetwood feels pity for Withers; but it is clear that Fleetwood is not only *not* helpless, but is also an active participant in the psychological torture of Withers and feels some guilty satisfaction in his demise. Language once again plays a role in Fleetwood's recollection of these events at Oxford. Appearing to critically reflect on his experience, Fleetwood uses the paradoxical relationship of sympathy and

suffering to justify the benevolence of his narrative acts and the particular kind of education that he sees his confession as providing for humanity in general. As we have seen, Fleetwood presents the Wordsworthian lyricism of his childish responses to nature, and his preference of the ideal world of the imagination to the real, only to ironically admonish them as foolish; he is, as he states, much more naturally fitted to be a "judge" in life. In yet another seemingly timeless maxim, Fleetwood states, "youth, if once it has broken through the restrains of decorum, is the minister of cruelty. Even in me, whose disposition was naturally kind and humane, there was too much of this" (90). Fleetwood then goes on to describe sympathy not as a means of bringing individuals closer together outside the bonds of society, but, like the voice of the law, custom or reason, as a kind of narrative trick; as much as one can speak in the voice of reason, one can also convincingly speak in the voice of sympathy and suffering.

Through the scene of ventriloquism, Godwin notes that sympathy is a flawed epistemology for understanding or improving the world because it can be performed through a language of feeling that is merely a performance of feeling, even and especially through the language of immediacy and passion that carries with it a kind of cultural authority from sentimental novels and Godwin's own philosophical beliefs. Specifically, as a *thrown* voice, ventriloquism plays a central role not only in Fleetwood's description of Withers' tale and subsequent demise but also in the representation of his own voice in the present as a constructed fiction. Godwin's criticism of political ideology as a kind of ventriloquized voice that speaks through individuals is both a sign of his allegiance to Rousseau's denunciation of the artifices of society and his critique of Rousseauvian education found in *Emile* as a replication of that ventriloquism, such that the student

"sees" a world that the mentor has prepared for him and through which he communicates with him. Pamela Clemit has noted how Charles Brockden Brown, the late eighteenth-century American novelist who was heavily influenced by Godwin and who influenced Godwin in turn, employed ventriloquism in *Wieland, or, The Transformation* (1798) as a way to demonstrate "the misappropriation of scientific knowledge for personal gratification" (133). According to Clemit, the main character in *Wieland* employs ventriloquism to spy on and "feed his obsessive curiosity" (133) about the heroine of the novel.

Placing ventriloquism in Fleetwood's experiences at Oxford allows Godwin to blur Brown's use of ventriloquism as a sign of "obsessive curiosity" with Coleridge's consideration of "Reason as a ventriloquist" in a social and institutional sense: if "reason" or even feelings can *speak* through any "uncouth vessel," they can also be tainted or *dis*figured by speaking *through* one. As the schoolboys speak through the wooden figure of the headmaster and cast judgment on Withers, they come to symbolize the inability to trust the origin of the voice in the mouth of the speaker. Replicating Fleetwood's split personality, or, rather, speaking *for* it, the meaning of language that represents events in Fleetwood's recollected experiences becomes disassociated from the ethical authority of voice that speaks it. Indirectly, this scene draws attention to Fleetwood's motives and his unreliability as a narrator. Building on the social criticisms of his earlier novels, Godwin uses ventriloquism to dislocate the origin and moral authority of the voice: as in *Antonio*, where the imaginary voice and auratic power of the father spoke and acted through Antonio, Godwin here points out that English institutions may speak *as if* they have some basis of traditional legitimacy, but the results of their actions display a lawless

vindictiveness masquerading as the law, one that is directed towards change or agents of reform like Withers. As we shall see in later passages of *Fleetwood*, however, it becomes impossible to discover beneath the masquerades or misrepresentations of the law, or from the authorial or fictional voice that ventriloquizes, any vestiges of an original, morally just authority or point of reference that is not acting as the most perfectly disguised or mimicked voice, or, as "misrepresentations" or "ventriloquism" that are no longer possible to discern as such. The Wordsworthian innocence in the natural world or instances of charity as chronicled in Fleetwood's early narrative merely orient the reader to the beginning of a moral and personal fall that will have already transformed these recounted scenes into the ballast which Fleetwood will use to stabilize his attempts to regain or simply attain them. That the tyrannical and seductive power of language is allied with and driven by the perversion of feelings that "Fleetwood" himself embodies and ventriloquizes stands over and above what language is meant to accomplish as an instrument in recollecting images of probable or possible events from the past.

Unable or unwilling to fully recognize his own participation in Withers' suicide, Fleetwood finds that his ability to judge a world that is so abhorrent to him is made both more palatable and compromised by his pride. After leaving Oxford, Fleetwood goes to Paris with Sir Charles Gleed, a fellow student. In Paris, Fleetwood is swept up in the artificiality of French life, yet he finds that he is unable to fit in. Fleetwood compares himself with Sir Charles, who is discovered to be a "man of simple perception" as against Fleetwood, who is a "man of imagination" (83). While Sir Charles revels in salon society, Fleetwood flatly denounces his friend's worldly ambitions: "to express the difference in one word: what the farmer saw was external and in the things themselves

what the poet saw was the growth and painting of his own mind" (85). Rather than allowing him to integrate into the social world, Fleetwood's powers of the imagination cause him to disdain it. Indeed, it is precisely this blindness that prevents Fleetwood from discovering that his Parisian mistress, who is seen in retrospect as a terrifying exotic figure, "rather an Asiatic sultana, in her turn of mind, than a native of our western world" (107), has been deceiving him.[25] Ironically, it is Sir Charles who reveals these infidelities to Fleetwood, who responds, "it is impossible to express how sudden and terrible a revolution this discovery produced in me!"(109). Although it would appear that this moment of disillusionment would cause Fleetwood to begin to accept the social world, he recounts, in an image that would not be out of place in Wollstonecraft's fiction, that he had felt like a victim in a Gothic narrative:

> I felt like the personage of a fairy tale I have somewhere read, who, after being delighted with the magnificence of a seeming palace, and the beauty of its fair inhabitants, suddenly sees the delusion vanish, the palace is converted to a charnel-house, and what he thought its beautiful tenants, are seen to be the most withered and loathsome hags that ever shocked the eyes of a mortal. (114-5)

Nevertheless, in spite of this revelation through the loss of the bewitching figure of the eastern "Asiatic" temptress, Fleetwood maintains, "my sensibility was not one atom diminished by my perpetual disappointments" (116). Indeed, Fleetwood's ability at

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[25] In his imaginative recollections, Fleetwood constantly ships his perceived enemies and rivals off to the corners of the British Empire, whether it is to Asia or the West Indian colonies. It goes without saying that *Fleetwood* provides an implicit critique of British nationalism in favor of a more cosmopolitan and Enlightenment perspective. As we shall see, Godwin couches Fleetwood's attempt to defend his paternal estate from imagined rivals and false plots within the language of Burkean sentiment, which locates the foreign, savage Other within the nation. Through *Fleetwood*, Godwin places this imaginary sense of being under siege within a misanthropic, mad figure who sees the world itself as allied against him.

imagining Gothic visions of reality behind the picture of the world as Sir Charles sees it augur the problems that his overactive imagination will both produce and excuse.

Fleetwood retreats from Paris to Switzerland for consolation: "I hastened … from Paris … and plunged amidst the wild and desolate scenery of Mount Jura" (116). Yet the natural world has been forever tainted by his experiences of *la monde* in Paris: "the instant I plunged into solitude and the retreats of uncultivated nature, my reveries became endless and inexhaustible" (117). His imagination haunts him with images of his faithless mistress: "where no human form was to be discerned, there the figure of the Countess de B- flitted before me" (118). Wandering in the Romantic scenery of the Alps, Fleetwood reflects on how difficult it has been for him to write the narrative of his life and explains why he has felt compelled to include "a tale of debaucheries" that he experienced in Paris within his narrative confession:

> Most earnestly do I entreat the reader to pardon me, for having thus much interspersed these pages with a tale of debaucheries. It is not, I solemnly assure him, that I have any pleasure in the recollection, or that I glory in my shame. … I do not look back on (this incidents) without aversion … Why have I introduced it then? Because it was necessary to make my subsequent history understood. I have a train of follies, less loathsome, but more tragic, to unfold; which could not have been accounted for, unless it had been previously shown by what causes I, the author, and in some respects the principle sufferer, was rendered what I was. I was a misanthrope. My misanthropy was a conclusion, however erroneous, that I unwillingly entertained. I felt what I was, and I pined for the society of my like. It was with inexpressible sorrow that I believed I was alone in the world. My

> sensibility was not one atom diminished by my perpetual disappointments. I felt what man ought to be, and I could not prevent the model of what he ought to be from being for ever present to my mind. (115)

For Fleetwood, the "new" man of feeling, what man "ought to be" becomes the foundation for his transformation of the world around him through the imagination rather than through concrete acts of charity. Fleetwood's passion for reason and analysis overwhelm his own conscious recollection of events, and turn the experiences of self-forgetting in his past into elaborately staged exercises to excuse whatever rage or violence he feels as an outcast from the very society he despises.

Fleetwood begins the final incidents of his novel, a tale about the Othellian jealousy he felt for his wife, by describing the low state in which he had arrived after becoming disillusioned with a foray in politics as a successful member of Parliament. In a moment of Burkean nostalgia over the past, Fleetwood laments, "I saw that the public character of England, as it exists in the best pages of our history, was gone. I perceived that we were grown a commercial and arithmetical nation; and that as we extended the superficies of our empire, we lost its moral sinews and strengths" (226). Indeed, the "wealth of either India has been poured upon us, to smother that free spirit which can never be preserved but in a moderate fortune" (226). Ironically, as we have seen, Fleetwood tends to feel a strange attraction to the colonial, Gothic Others of his tale, such as Fleetwood's first mistress, the "Asiatic" Parisian countess. Indeed, while the imperial imaginary in Fleetwood's estimation is reduced to finding new ways to exploit commercial interests, Fleetwood's own imagination is able to maintain its distance from grosser world of economic desires for wealth by embracing "novelty and change," which

also have a "*sovereign* power over the human mind" (228, my emphasis). Indeed, in this final retreat from the public world, Fleetwood decides to recapture a sense of this lost England through the extermination of the bewitching, revolutionary colonial Other from his own paternal estate.

Setting up this final section of the novel, Fleetwood relates to us his encounter with Macneil, "who was supposed to have possessed the confidence of the celebrated Jean-Jacques Rousseau," and his family. Mary Macneil is one of Macneil's daughters, and Fleetwood begins to feel an attraction towards her. His initial description of Mary emphasizes her literal transparency, as against the artificiality of Parisian women:

> Mary had a complexion which, in point of fairness and transparency, could not be excelled: her blood absolutely spoke in her cheeks; the soft white of her hands and neck looked as if they would have melted away beneath your touch; her eyes were so animated, and her whole physiognomy so sensitive, that is was scarcely possible to believe that a thought could pass in her heart, which might not be read in her face. (246)

Indeed, Mary does not appear human as much as an immaterial, imaginary being whose transparency and bookish readability seem perfectly suitable as the mirror for Fleetwood's own imaginary constructions of her.

While Mary and Fleetwood eventually become husband and wife, Mary does not seem *absolutely* perfectly suited to be Fleetwood's ideal friend. For Fleetwood, the ideal friend is a male friend, a "*brother* of the heart" (230), as he is "impressed with no favorable prepossessions toward the female sex" (252). Before his death, Mary's father predicts Fleetwood's future plight by comparing him to Robinson Crusoe (the only novel

that Rousseau's mentor allows his pupil to read in *Emile*) and Prospero from *The Tempest*. Macneil is a radical believer in the innate moral goodness of mankind, and proposes the following prediction of Fleetwood's future:

> "I have sometimes had the thought," continued Mr. Macneil, "of composing a little novel or tale in illustration of my position. I would take a man, as my friend Fleetwood, for example, who looks with a disdainful eye upon his species, and has scarcely the patience to enter into discourse and intercourse with any one he meets. I would put him on board a ship; he will, of course, be sufficiently disgusted with every one of his companions; all of a sudden I would raise a most furious tempest: I would cause him to be shipwrecked on a desert island, with no companion but one man, the most gross, perverse, and stupid of the crew … My fastidious misanthrope would no longer have a world or a nation, from which to choose his companion … By degrees he would find a thousand resources n this despised sailor … How these two companions would love one another!" (249-50).

Indeed, the jealousy he feels for Mary will be seen less as a belief in her infidelity as a need to have a male friend who understands his mind.

In his retreat back to Merionethshire with his young wife, Fleetwood discusses the events leading up to his jealousy and madness. In one of many ironic evocations of *Paradise Lost* that begin to appear more frequently in the latter half of the text, Fleetwood expostulates on the "pure now purer air" (IV, ln. 153) that Milton's Satan senses as he approaches Eden in book four of *Paradise Lost*; as Fleetwood and Mary embark on their journey back to Fleetwood's estate in Wales, he states "it seemed that the spirit of kindness still gained new strength, as the scene was perpetually shifted before

our eyes, and as we breathed an atmosphere for ever new" (287). When Mary begins to express her own feelings at Merionethshire, however, Fleetwood's dream of a perfectly transparent companion begins to darken; unlike the silent natural world, through which and against which Fleetwood is able to project himself, Mary's *own* speech, originating from her own experience with Fleetwood, interrupts Fleetwood's dream of domestic bliss.

Given the older Fleetwood's bizarre eccentricities and love for solitude, young Mary begins to lose her feelings for Fleetwood and starts to resemble a character from Wollstonecraft's fiction. She quickly becomes "disturbed" and suffers from "distemper" (321). Fleetwood, anxious to return her to health, takes her to Bath, and she quickly recovers. Yet for Fleetwood, "Bath, of all places on earth, I detested" (325). He devolves into ceaseless speculation on his condition of being enslaved to Mary as a lackey. Again mimicking Milton's Satan, Fleetwood begins to plot a revolt in his feelings: "Certainly man, particularly the man whom Heaven has endowed with inventive faculties and a comprehensive intellect, was made for something better than this. I was now engrossed by a single individual; I was playing a subservient and humble part in her train" (327).

At this point, Fleetwood seeks out his "distant relations," his young cousins, who will play an important role in the political unconscious, at it were, of this final act of his confessions, containing "the events which have pressed with so terrible a weight on my heart, and have formed my principle motive to become my own historian" (234). In yet another instance of foreshadowing, Fleetwood very carefully introduces us to his last, and, as we shall see, perhaps most important mentor, his "nephew," Gifford. Gifford is

described in vaguely feminine terms as "a youth of dark complexion, and elegant figure, sagacious, shrewd, supple, and insinuating" (332); his darkness is symbolic and also racial, because, as we have learned earlier, he is the illegitimate child of his cousin and a "young officer, a West Indian of color" (328). As with his discussion of the "bewitching" Orient through his experiences with his mistress in Paris, the discourse of slavery in *Fleetwood* is an interesting one, given Fleetwood's frequent references to his psychological slavery to his passions and to Godwin's own discussion of Rousseuavian education as a kind of enslavement in the *Enquirer*. At the same time, this discussion of slavery and the West Indies furthers identifies Fleetwood with Burke, who, in his *Letters on a Regicide Peace* (1796), set up a series of comparisons between developments in France and revolutionary San Domingo. Ensnaring him in a false plot that accuses Mary of infidelity with Kendrick, Fleetwood's other nephew, an unspotted and "beautiful" (336) youth, Gifford takes Fleetwood to the "Continent" on a gross parody of the Grand Tour during his bouts of madness and jealous rage, deepening the connection between the revolution in the West Indies and revolutionary France that Burke is attempting to make in his *Letters*. Finally, as Fleetwood himself admits, he has always been "the spoiled child of the great parent, Nature" and attracted to "a bewitching vibration of sound" that is "unexpected" and promises "so pure a delight" (223). Unlike the sympathetic comparisons that arise between women and slaves in Wollstonecraft and other early nineteenth-century women writers, the comparison between men and slaves is productive of a sense of mutual hatred towards the world that paradoxically draws them together. The relationship between Gifford's Iago and Fleetwood's Othello, then, is a parody of the sentimental relationship itself as an impossible relation between modern masculine

savages, one that is not based on any institutional relationship, such as marriage, but on shared *ressentiments* between men; in this case, it is the fact that Gifford is Fleetwood's *illegitimate* nephew, and that Fleetwood feels that he himself is unworthy of his father's estate. Further, his relation with his other nephew, Kendrick, provides him the opportunity to reunite with an idealized image of his own childhood, for whom Gifford acts a kind of *doppelganger*. In his initial description of Kendrick, Fleetwood even characterizes Kendrick as a young "soldier" (336), who would defend Fleetwood's estate in the future; yet, at the same time, Kendrick is an appropriate vessel to be filled with Fleetwood's own imaginary ideals, or, at this point, ideology: "there was a brilliancy in his eye, a modest blush in his cheek, and a sensibility in his accent, that, all together, constituted one of the most interesting *objects* that can be imagined" (336, my emphasis).

The reader is left with the grim prospect, at the end of the novel and in spite of Fleetwood's obvious madness, that Fleetwood will become the first Rousseauvian mentor to Kendrick, given that Fleetwood writes him into his will and provides him with a substantial sum; it is "a testimony that, of all the men living on the face of the earth, he was the one that most deserved my love" (421). Reconciling himself with his dead father, for whom he accosted himself for leaving to die, and his abandoned wife, with whom he has an overwrought reconciliation at the end of the final book, returns the narrative to its beginning and its restored natural paradise, with Gifford put to death by "the hands of the public executioner" (423). Fleetwood successfully, if only imaginatively, purges from his own small estate in Wales, the province of his father, this illegitimate "foreign influence" and reclaims his heritage. Gifford represents, within the logic of the novel as a whole, the embodiment of everything that Fleetwood has been

attempting to forget about his own past. Gifford is clearly representative of Iago in Fleetwood's mind, and this provides Fleetwood the opportunity to deal rather harshly with Gifford in the end.[26]

If, as Coleridge has noted, Iago's primary motive is "motiveless malignance," or, that he wreaks havoc on the other characters' lives for his sadistic enjoyment from the suffering of others, then it would appear that Gifford and Fleetwood share certain characteristics that are all too clear to Fleetwood himself. Indeed, within the logic of the narrative, which, as we must always recall, is a logic that is Fleetwood's own, Gifford symbolizes Fleetwood's dark side, and his death, at the end of the novel, symbolically purges Fleetwood of his own errors. At the same time, Gifford also presents himself as Fleetwood's last and perhaps most effective, mentor, and the representation of Gifford that Fleetwood presents is a perfect representation of the novel's narrator himself. Consigned to execution on the scaffold for his trickery, Gifford closes the novel with a scene of death with which Fleetwood refuses to sympathize and which perfectly mirrors the guilty birth that Fleetwood experience in its opening paragraph. Gifford must suffer death as a projected embodiment of Fleetwood's sin as a Satan in his own Welsh garden: after consigning his memory to oblivion, Fleetwood states that he, the master of sympathy, "will shed no tear upon the bier of Gifford," because, he asks, "for what society, or plantation of men, in the remotest corner of the globe, was he fitted?" (423). Fleetwood's final resolution of his Othellian jealousy towards his wife promotes a

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[26] In one of his many alterations to *Othello*, Godwin makes Fleetwood's antagonist Gifford a dark figure. Transferring his own "blots" or instances of moral error to Gifford allows Fleetwood to regain a lost sense of purity or innocence as associated with his other nephew, Kendrick, who is "a florid and beautiful boy, alert and nimble in his motions, and singularly open and ingenuous in his demeanor" (336).

regained Edenic estate as substitute for and retreat from the crass commercialism of empire that Fleetwood discovered had corrupted his idea of Parliament. Forgotten behind the boundaries of the paternal estate in Merionethshire are the ills of the world, both in terms of "things as they are" and the empire.

In the end, the difficulty in seeing Godwin's criticism of the appropriation of sympathy can be found in the fact that it is a criticism of the appropriation of sentimentality from within the very genre itself. Compounding this difficulty is that Godwin still feels a residual kind of allegiance to the ideals of sympathy. In *Fleetwood*, Godwin argues against Rousseauvian reverie and Wordsworthian lyricism, demonstrating that the recollected scenes and landscapes of memory become the sites upon which the impossibility and impotence of the masculine subject to coincide with itself is urgently and aggressively mapped out.

What can we draw from Fleetwood's practice of being his own historian? The multifaceted personality that Fleetwood presents to us is infinitely more complex than the character of Caleb Williams because Fleetwood's narrative voice writes the individual episodes of his life into a totalizing narrative structure that is based solely on his attempt to forget or disguise his own errors within overly imaginative bouts of what we might call *irrational* analysis. Fleetwood's imaginative powers enable him to color his actions with a potentially limitless self-analysis that wears away and displaces any feeling for or solid representation of the events he has experienced in his life. In other words, Fleetwood's attempt to analyze his past as his own truthful "historian" alienates him from himself and his past. Fleetwood sums up his own dilemma in the following manner:

> There are but two principle sources of happiness to the man who lives in solitude: memory, and imagination. The recollections which offered themselves to my memory gave me no pleasure. That period of my life which was most fraught with impressions, and which, therefore, made the principle stock of my memory, was hateful to me. … The actual affairs into which the passions of man have obtruded themselves, ambition, and vanity, and shame, and love, and jealousy, and despair, take so much faster hold of the mind, than even when we would expatiate in worlds of fancy, these affairs will push forward, and is spite of us make a part of the landscape we delineate. (217-8)

As it is with Charlotte Smith's poetic personae, Godwin's Fleetwood discovers that the past and its "sorrows that sense refuses to forget" are ineradicable ingrained into memory. At the end of his tale, Fleetwood is left to write his confessions and disclose the painful memories that haunt him. Quite naturally, Fleetwood, the self-analyst *par excellence*, provides us with the moral of his own tale: "When I came to myself, the *spots* I observed upon the vesture of my innocence, made me feel a still deeper loathing for the foul and miry roads through which I had journeyed. … My entire future life was devoted to the expiation of five years of youthful folly and forgetfulness … (yet) I had contracted a *contamination*, which could never be extirpated" (216, my emphases). Even as these "spots" that Fleetwood has contracted from his experience of the world are considered permanent, Fleetwood nevertheless continues to attempt to regain the "unspotted mind" of childhood innocence (217). These attempts only add to the spots that sully his mind and *obscure* his figure. As in Fleetwood's projected identification with Gifford, we might say that Fleetwood ironically "talks like an oracle" (337) who predicts his own future

from within his narrative self-fashioning, and that Fleetwood's fascinated self-analysis conveys the impression of "a general physiognomy (which) conveyed the idea of something obscure and problematical," of which I was at a loss to expound" (337).

Romantic Survival, Fragments of Memory: Godwin's "Essay Upon Sepulchers"

If we were to read *Fleetwood* from a more generous moral perspective, we might state that one of Fleetwood's most intractable problems is his inability to properly understand himself and his own emotions, and that he consequently causes others to feel the frustrations that he cannot excise from his own mind. In *The Enquirer*, in an essay entitled, "Of Choice of Reading," Godwin intimates the difficulty entailed in the act of reading or comprehending a text derives precisely from a freedom of discovering meaning that may not exist in the intention of the author: "authors themselves are no more infallible in this respect, than the men who read them. If the moral be invented first, the author did not then know where the brilliant lights of his story would fall, nor of consequence where its principle power of attraction would be found. If it be extracted afterwards, he is often taken at a disadvantage, and must extricate himself as he can. … But one of the most remarkable remarks that suggest themselves under this branch of the subject is, that the true moral and fair inference from a composition has often laid concealed for ages from its most diligent readers. … It seems that the impression we derive from a book, depends much less upon its real contents, than upon the temper of mind and the preparation with which we read it" (119-21). Through Fleetwood's narrative deceptions, Godwin demonstrates an interconnection between hypocritical self-deception and the most sincere act of reading.

To this degree, what could possibly linger on or remain within texts if their intentional meaning or authorial voice is set adrift? For the texts by Godwin that I have analyzed up to this point, the deeply intertwined relationship between feeling and forgetting or is established in order to posit the destructive desires that lurk below the surface of an imaginary retreat into self-forgetfulness or the assumption of other identities. In spite of this danger, Godwin explores how the repression of the individual by history can only be overcome by an imaginative leap backwards into the past on the part of the reader, whether that reader is analyzing his own past or the texts of others. Balancing these concerns of readerly freedom and the ideas or texts of history, Godwin promotes a complex notion of *survival* in the publication that follows Fleetwood, the 1809 essay, "Essay Upon Sepulchers:" for Godwin, survival is not indicative of an overcoming of loss in a triumphalist, delusive sense, but rather the continued existence of a person or idea beyond their historical moment or epoch, and indeed beyond their own imaginative projection into a future without them, in a way that refuses to constrain that existence to a repeated iteration of a coherent, unchanging identity. Survival demands a profound isolation and solitude that is neither heroic nor revolutionary, but rather one that is driven by dispossession, alienation, and fragmentation. As with Smith's survival of her own attempts at fashioning a version of Romantic memory through aesthetic forms, Godwinian selfhood is derived from absent or disfigured totalities that, in the future, will have had no meaningful or epistemological relevance. In other words, as a human fragment of a (revolutionary) past that no longer exists outside of a memorial culture that seeks to erase it, Godwin's survivor must give his identity to a future that may or may not comprehend it.

In the "Essay," Godwin confronts the idea of personal dissolution, but also the possible evanescence of his own utopian rationalism through a meditation on the ruins of the graves and reputations of forgotten authors. Rather than craft an embrace or a hysterical rejection of a Romantic poetics of the sublime, Godwin points towards a soberer, more restrained sublime that allies itself with the social world and the world of the human, worlds that are evoked as constantly passing. In this essay, existence is defined as a state fraught with uncertainty, as if present experience were always colored with the feeling of ultimately being written out of the historical register. Godwin's essay is not a tract on the need to recollect the past, nor a heroic cry from a survivor of catastrophe, but appears as a collection of future-directed fragments, a concatenation of individual encounters with the dead that give to the dead a kind of haunting life and voice through the life of those whose existence is constrained by the knowledge of their own immanent demise. Godwin does not rely on the imagination to bring the dead back as *figures* to be represented, but as disembodied *voice*s that literally speak *to* us. Like the frail individual experience that it investigates, the essay attempts to define an encounter with the past that is telegraphically transmitted and amplified through the imagination. These dead voices are not only those of famous authors from the past, but also the voice of the essayist himself mingling with them. For Godwin, the past, lodged already in the present, disfigures noiselessly yet speaks silently through the passing present to an unknown future.

Elements of the preface to the essay summarize a great deal of the themes and concepts contained within, and provide a warning of sorts to its readers. Although the essay is to be about sepulchers, Godwin emphatically denounces an idolatry of the name

of the dead or absent other. In the preface to the "Essay," Godwin discounts the idols or ideology of representation through allusions: "I trust that none of my readers will be erroneous enough to consider the vivid recollection of things past, as hostile to that tone of spirit which should aspire to the boldest improvements in future. The genuine heroes of the times that have been, were the reformers, the instructors, and improvers of their contemporaries; and he is the sincerest admirer of these men, who most earnestly aspires to become 'like unto them'."[27] Godwin collapses a number of references in this passage. Echoing a problematic engagement of teaching and tyranny as found in his collection of essays on education, *The Enquirer*, as well as prefiguring Shelley's "A Defense of Poetry," Godwin maintains that the "heroes of the times that have been" are best suited to be the "instructors of their contemporaries" (7). The undocumented Biblical quotation that ends the preface to the essay, however, directs us to the Psalms and a warning against the heathens and idol-worship. The past ought to be important to us, Godwin states, but not as something to be blindly followed or into which we project our own habitual impressions. As we shall see later, while a factual account of history is to be avoided, a sympathetic reading of history must be set aside as well.

Godwin begins his essay by recounting his feelings of loss and mourning in the wake of a friend's death. For Godwin, death is a "calamity" because it "keeps the world in infancy" (9) following the path set out by eighteenth century empiricists, Godwin states that when someone dies, all of his or her sensory impressions, his or her "experiences," are lost forever. And so any knowledge that the dead may have gained is

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[27] Godwin, "Essay Upon Sepulchers," in *The Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, vol, 6, ed. Mark Philp (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1993), 6.

also lost, and the world must begin again to accumulate this knowledge: speaking of his friend, Godwin states that in spite of his greatness and importance to him, there is "very little of him that survives, in his memory, and his works" (10). Death is also a calamity because unlike "health, fortune or character," which we lose by degrees, death arrives unexpected and all at once: "in a moment, to me … he is nothing" (11). The brief amount of time, between death as an ontological event and oblivion as a threat to memory, will be used by Godwin to highlight a criticism that he wishes to make of his own time, and one which carries over into Wordsworth's contemporaneous essay on a very similar topic: a general resistance to any form of memory that exists outside of *habit*.

In the wake of his grief, Godwin begins searching for the means to preserve some vestige of his friend and finds it in the others who outlive him as a monument to the dead man's life. Here, then, the question of the sepulcher is less a matter of the dead body: "let us put out of the question for the present the dead man himself, and think only of survivors." For Godwin, the past becomes a fragment or ruin that is founded upon the discarded dead body, which, as we recall from the preface, we ought not to consider as an idol to be venerated as if it were the representation of a real person. The dead body is not a figure to be idolized, nor is it an avenue towards "abstraction and mathematical or syllogistic deductions" (11) that would found our understanding of the dead body. In what sense, then, is human imagination and human feelings to be considered as lasting if not from sensory perception or from theoretical abstraction of general or objective theorems? Anticipating Paul de Man's reading of Wordsworth's "Essay Upon Epitaphs," we might suggest that Godwin's "Essay on Sepulchers" is a species of autobiography-as-

survival. What is one to do when one lives beyond one's own relevance, or, more plainly, what is a revolutionary to do when the revolution is over? The fickle nature of fame as it has treated him is certainly on Godwin's mind when he states the following, an understated criticism of Thomas Gray's famous elegy:

> Go into any country church-yard. Three-forths of the tombstones, you will find dated within the last twenty or thirty years. Yet as many persons died in the years that preceded, and the passion for tombstones is probably now not greater than it was formerly. The best chance that a monument can have, is to be enclosed within a church, or to be fixed against its wall: it may then last three or four centuries. (15)

Unlike Gray, who mourns the "mute, inglorious Miltons" of a country church-yard, Godwin avers that there will be no monuments to mourn. Like Shelley's later "Ozymandias" (1817) and "Triumph of Life" (1822), Godwin's essay notes that everything, including the very idea of history itself, is subject to the passage of time and its ruinous oblivion. Tacitly acknowledging his views against institutional religion, Godwin ironically notes the survival of monuments "within a church" as three or four hundred years: in the scope of time, there is no difference between twenty years and three hundred years, as all is subject to ruin.

At the same time, Godwin is unwilling to dismiss the need for a powerful force that binds together disparate people across time and distance. Opposed to the seductive force of the narrative of history as romance, which demands a kind of passivity and employment of the imagination to project oneself into history, Godwin advocates for an employment of the fragments and ruins of history, the funeral monuments and sepulchers,

one that acts as a conduit to the past through which the past quite literally speaks to and through us. There should be no confusion on this point: for Godwin, it is not our imagination working to create the voice of Shakespeare or Milton in our own minds, but the actual voice of Shakespeare and Milton speak to us. Godwin makes this clear throughout the essay:

> Portraits may be imaginary … but the dust that is covered by his tomb, is simply and literally the great man himself. … The aspiring and lofty minded men of former times were seen by me as I passed along, and stood in review before me. … They are not dead. They are still with us in their stories, in their words, in their writings, in the consequences that do not cease to flow fresh from what they did: they still have their place, where we may visit them, and where, if we dwell in a composed and quiet spirit, we shall not fail to be conscious of their presence. (20)

Considering these quotations, we may ask how the conduit, between the present and the past and, implicitly, between individuals, operate if it is not an imaginative projection.

The remainder of Godwin's essay is full of images of essays, such as wandering and traveling as if by accident, and it is this element of chance or contingency that somehow undergirds and undermines the operation of the imagination as a power that is itself always open to interruption and change. As with an essay by Montaigne or Bacon, "accidents" and breaks into the passage of the essay occur with great frequency. As a characteristic example, and to prove a point, Godwin will state, "in the autumn of the same year accident led me to Reading in Berkshire," or, "I never understood the annals of chivalry so well, as when I walked among the ruins of Kenilworth Castle." Godwin's final gesture towards overcoming or "paralyzing the hand of oblivion" is to be found in

his suggestion for the publication of a "Sepulchral Atlas," a book that marks the location of the blank, wooden monuments throughout the countryside that Godwin is ostensibly recommending as a solution the preservation of the memories of the dead . Is this a book that could even be made available, or published? In what sense does it address the problem of idolatry in the Biblical allusions from the preface?

The catalogue of these locations, acting as a "precious relic to the man of sentiment … and a traveler's guide," will allow a reader to visit these monuments to the dead in the imagination. The most important element of the "Sepulchral Atlas" for Godwin, then, is that it would be a book without mediator, or, a book with an impersonal author. As Godwin acknowledges, there would only be references to the location of the tombs or monuments which the reader would encounter in his or her place in the telegraphic traveling or essaying of individuals across time and space. The reader of this "Sepulchral Atlas," however, would not be an anonymous reader of texts; rather, in the language of Godwin, the reader would be a survivor who "reads" books by impersonal authors, or, in other words, who experiences books at a level removed from conscious engagement and that is disengaged from consciously acquired unconscious activity, or habit.

The traveler, then, or author as essayist, does not know in advance where he is going or what he or she is writing. Rather, the essayist silently tracks a movement that is both predictable in theory (if we recall the abstract nature of physical de-composition that Godwin dis-cards earlier) and unknown in practice. The image that Godwin chooses to discuss the "influence" of the dead and their works is a pebble falling in a pond. The concentric circles that spread from the pebble, a fragment of their possible impression,

touch the farthest corner of a pond or, in Godwin's example, an ocean. In similar fashion, the survivor of an encounter with the dead or with death itself perpetuates the fragments of past existences within the unconscious, telegraphic network of humanity that stretches from Britain to China. According to Godwin, the reach of the great authors of the past cannot be measured:

> The poorest peasant in the remotest corner of England, is probably a different man, from what he would have been but for the writings of Shakespeare and Milton. Every man who is powerfully and deeply impressed by the perusal of their works, communicates a portion of the inspiration all around him. It passes from man to man, till it influences the whole mass. I cannot tell that the wisest mandarin now living in China, is not indebted for part of his energy and sagacity to Shakespeare and Milton, even though it should happen that he never heard their names. (25)

This remarkable passage condenses, as it were, a number of possible readings. The encounter with the dead author through texts functions like a pebble and transmits the "inspiration," the divine breath that is transformed into a human voice, "from man to man" in a relay that does not depend on conscious engagement or habitual practices. Rather, it depends on a kind of passive sacrifice of the self, such that living beings, who are now survivors of their own imaginative foreboding of death, may have a minimal grasp upon the value of knowledge as it exists in the world of abstract laws and reasons. In other words, if the body is doomed to the dust, and we ought not to concern ourselves with it in death because it is fated to oblivion, then the body may still be valued as an

unconscious relay for culture, even if there no guarantees for an absolute future that redeems the past.

In "Logos and Techne, or Telegraphy," Jean-Francois Lyotard also confronts the figuring/disfiguring question of the telegraphic; he wonders, in a more contemporary sense, about the survival of memory in an information age in ways that appear to channel Godwin:

> Current technology, that specific mode of tele-graphy, writing at a distance, removes the close contexts of which rooted cultures are woven. It is thus, through its specific manner of inscription, indeed productive of a sort of memorization freed from the supposedly immediate conditions of time and space. The question to follow here would be as follows: what is a body (body proper, social body) in tele-graphic culture? It calls up a spontaneous production of the past in habit, a tradition or transmission of ways of thinking, willing, and feeling, a sort of breaching, then, which complicates, counters, neutralizes, and extenuates earlier community breachings, and in any case translates them so as to move them on too, make them transmissible.[28]

For Lyotard, the body is a site of resistance in a "hegemonic teleculture on a world scale (that is) already posed" (50). Yet for Godwin, the empirical tradition of experience as housed in the body makes this problem seem irrelevant. Human memory, figured as a "Sepulchral Atlas," a world-map of monuments for the dead, is tied to the merest semblance of the dignity of a natural forgetting (or death), such that forgetting becomes

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[28] Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Logos and Techne, or Telegraphy," in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 50.

that which human memory must imperfectly strive to overcome and enshrine, and with which one silently communes in the movement towards creating a social or cultural body that is influenced by voices that are heard and shared with each other, such that telegraphic transmission is not from a single source, but multiple points projecting to each other. Individual feeling is transmitted and shared within this expanding circle of influence even as the body that felt and experienced that feeling is forgotten and left to oblivion.

While Smith's poetics of oblivion initially posits a desire to retreat into a timeless, imaginary space, her Petrarchan-inspired poetic personae discover that the illusory consolations of poetry cannot assuage the sorrows they are designed to contain. For Godwin, a survivor is someone who has considered his or her own mortality through the deaths of close friends, and struggles, in a language that exhibits both reason and feeling, and memory and forgetting, to overcome the paralyzing fears that this imaginary encounter with oblivion produces within the self. This desire to overcome the fears of death and consequent, inevitable forgetting beneath a tombstone that does not fully mark out or contain individual existence is similar to the paradoxical desire for a vestige of future life that Smith had located in the "bosoms" of her readers in *The Emigrants*. Smith does not think that she will achieve lasting fame through her works, but, rather, would survive her own demise in the responses of *readers of feeling*.[29]

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[29] For Smith, survival in the form of a post-memorial reinscription in the hearts of her readers is built on the unstable foundations of the Petrarchan notion of *fama* (fame). For Petrarch, the eternal nature of fame is bounded by the temporal duration of a dream of eternity and subject to loss and ruination. As explained by Guiseppe Mazzotta in a discussion of Petrarch's *Trionfi*, a poem that portrays Petrarch's dream-like and "imaginative journey of self-discovery" through encounters with various allegorical personages, "Petrarch is the poet of the mind's spirals and of its dialectical growth until it plunges in the abyss where the ruins of time, love, death, and fame vanish. From his shifty and purified standpoint, the spectacle of the world is

The tragic irony of Godwin's *Fleetwood* is that it mocks Fleetwood's moral development at the very moment that he accepts responsibility for his unmotivated "errors." The comforting notion of an autobiography as the progressive coming to consciousness of an autonomous self, one which evolves through the forgetting of past within a genre designed to forgive transgressions, is radically undermined by Fleetwood's attempt to give narrative sequence to the events of his life. In the end, the narrative of Fleetwood appears as a vicious circle along which the obsessive repetition of the same dilemma, the unconsciously self-inflicted loss of his paternal estate and inheritance, is replayed over and over again throughout the course of his life. As such, Fleetwood reenacts an identical pattern of events that moves closer to an inheritance of those memories at the cost of the world around him. Unable to give coherent shape to his past, Fleetwood's tale becomes a network of echoes, allegorical and inverted repetitions, and mirroring events that gives shape to a complex system of internal reference, depriving each individual memory of any moral value as each operate in reference to others. Fleetwood's attempt at self-forgetting results in a severing of the relationship between

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consistently reduced to a mere catalogue of events and objects for the self. … Totality is available as a dream, just as is a dream the view of the self as a subject whose gaze attains a global understanding of the world and its values. … Petrarch's ethics is the dream of an absolute viewpoint wherein the self appears as a fragment of a larger world, and the world itself comes into being through the poet's dream" (101). If for Petrarch fame is only possible in the dream of the poet who only imagines portraying the totality of the world and must awaken to its continuing fragmentation, then we might consider fame as residing in the strange way that Smith imagines her readers to *hear,* or *learn* and so remember, her poems. Derrida discusses *apprendre par coeur* (to learn by heart): "the memory of the 'by heart' is confided like a prayer … to a certain exteriority of the automaton, to the laws of mnemotechnics, to that liturgy that mimes mechanics on the surface" ("Che cos'è la poesia?," 231). The tension inherent in learning Smith's poems by heart, the vehicle of her form of Petrarchan fame, involves a form of mechanical forgetting which repeats without understanding the meaning of the words repeated. In other words, Smith thinks that her readers will perhaps feel a form of sympathy for "her," her poetic voice, that is radically different from the experiences that are the basis for her poetic evocations of melancholy. Unlike the typical evocations of a Romantic conception of an infinite or totalizing *poiesis* that transcends time, Smith's Romantic poetic is based in the communication of a radical finitude, or self-sacrifice, which entails the forgetting of self.

one's own putative story and its moral significance. Each scene gestures towards or recalls not only other passages, but more trenchantly, the obsessive *need* to recall or rewrite other scenes in the book as well as the utility of the book itself. This network appears to tarry with the negative of the past, as found here in isolated, lived experience that is cut off from a disinterested perspective on the progressive flow of time, bringing to the fore the ineradicable emotional presence of guilt and culpability that is buried within transcendent Wordsworthian memory and highlighting the unreliability of fixed interpretations of individual passages, individuals or even words themselves.

Chapter Four

"I say the tale as 'twas told to me:"

Walter Scott's Forgetful Memories and Romantic Nostalgia

How poetic the simple incident seemed, told just thus! Homer was always telling things after this manner. And one might think there had been no effort in it: that here was but the almost mechanical transcript of a time, naturally, intrinsically, poetic, a time in which one could hardly have spoken at all without ideal effect, or, the sailors pulled down their boat without making a picture in "the great style," against a sky charged with marvels. Must not the mere prose of an age, itself thus ideal, have counted for more than half of Homer's poetry? Or might the closer student discover even here, even in Homer, the really mediatorial function of the poet, as between the reader and the actual matter of his experience; the poet waiting, so to speak, in an age which had felt itself trite and commonplace enough, on his opportunity for the touch of "golden alchemy," or at least for the pleasantly lighted side of things themselves? Might not another, in one's own prosaic and used-up time, so uneventful as it had been through the long reign of these quiet Antonines, in like manner, discover his ideal, by a due waiting upon it? Would not a future generation, looking back upon this, under the power of the enchanted-distance fallacy, find it ideal to view, in contrast with its own languor--the languor that for some reason … seemed to haunt men always?
-Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean* (1885)

Stay yet, illusion, stay a while, / My wildered fancy still beguile! / From this high theme how can I part, / Ere half unloaded is my heart!
-Walter Scott, "Marmion: A Tale of Flodden Field"

From the principle of contingency in history and historiography, as found in his *Life of Chaucer*, to the destructive possession of the present by the past in *Antonio*, and the telegraphic projection of the past into the bodies of the present in the "Essay On Epitaphs," Godwin attempted to discover the means of preserving the past without allowing it to dominate the present. The complex notion of the past as living (on) through *survival*, as elucidated in the "Essay," provides the most adequate articulation of Godwin's attempt to keep the feelings of the past from being forgotten within the ideological and institutional regimes that ostensibly seek to preserve them. In this chapter, I will argue that the suppression of memory plays an essential role in Walter Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, and, consequently, sets the stage for the ways in which

nostalgia becomes the foundation for a new kind of narrative principle of sympathetic recollection. *Nostalgia*, in this sense, invokes a feeling of imaginary community with a past that is thought of as separated from the present. I will contend that Scott records the voice of the bard as an exiled lyric poet who is available to recount and lament a lost, more authentic time without a properly lyric "I," a figure who must be in the end transferred to the margins of society in favor of the work that he recounts. Moving away from the overtly political problems associated with feeling and forgetting in Godwin, Scott gives the bard, the book, and the heroic characters within a nostalgic value that is transmitted into the present without melancholic feelings of loss and historical oblivion.

Traditionally, the work of Walter Scott has been discussed in relation to the origins of the nation and national identity in the Romantic period, and in the ways that the various concepts of the nation are rooted in the establishment of a collective, cultural memory that predates the civic and social structures of the Enlightenment. Noting that he gave shape to these concepts through poetry and fiction, however, recent critics have accused Scott of sidestepping the complexities of national, cultural existence and historical difference both in Scotland and elsewhere by fomenting delusive images of an idealized chivalric past or nostalgia for a bygone era. Indeed, even as many of Scott's narratives seem no more than glossy reminiscences of a feudal past, Scott is further accused of appropriating these narratives and their characters from female novelists; unlike Godwin, whose novels demonstrate how masculinity is unavoidably and permanently disfigured by the use of the discourses of sympathy and sentiment that it cannot fully cast off, Scott accounts for feminine sentiment and sympathy as either the

dominant markers of an ideal, unrealistic domestic space or as signs of youthful passions that must be exorcised in the social, political, and cultural education of male characters.

Many of these accusations have used as the basis of their critique Benedict Anderson's construction of the ideal imagined community of the nation in *Imagined Communities*. According to Anderson, the nation is not defined by physical space or geographic borders but exists through a print culture that disseminates images of the nation to its readers. In locating the nostalgia for the nation in tales from the past and shared memories that seem to resemble a form of historical amnesia, Scott turns the possibility of the "real" existence of the nation into a fictitious ideal that can only exist within a past that has already passed. Recent critics have argued, however, that there is significant difference between the work of memory in Scott's novels and Anderson's theoretical models. Cairns Craig, in "Scott's Staging of the Nation," rebukes Scott's attackers by arguing that these critiques say more about the limitations of Anderson's model of the nation than about Scott's use of the imagination in constructing an image of the past.[1] By allowing "the malign specter of the nation as communal hallucination" to enter into his argument, Anderson registers his disenchantment with the continued existence of the modern nation as an anonymous sphere of "empty, homologous time" that allows for no cultural differences. Craig feels that there is a conflict at the heart of Scott's use of the imaginary and is representative of the struggle between national identities within a vision of English history. In spite of these struggles, according to

[1] Cairns Craig, "Scott's Staging of the Nation," *Studies in Romanticism* (Spring 2001: 40 (1)).

Craig, the imagination provided for the means to freely define the future of the nation beyond these conflicts:

> Scott understood that the dramatization of the nation was not about its fictionality or its truth, but about the values which its imaginings tested and which they projected as the path of action for the future. … The real and ironic success of the notion of "imagined communities" lies in the fact that it makes the nation an aesthetic construction. "Imagined communities" may be a term of despair about rational politics or history, but it is a term which puts artists back in the position of being the "unacknowledged legislators" of the world, makes arts again central to all those processes of politics to which, in other views, it has seemed so marginal. (27-8)

While Craig argues that Scott participated in a deeply Romantic belief in the power of works of art to construct possible future images of the nation based on shared pasts, Scott felt deeply skeptical about the construction of the modern nation based on idealized images of a lost or forgotten past. Although Scott appeared to praise the traditional aristocracies and feudal landowners of the past, I contend that he is also deeply suspicious of how this past is employed in or transmitted to the present. In his first verse romance, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), the heroic past is deliberately set against the sentimentalized present, in which allegiances to traditional figures, patriotism and ideals of chivalry are misplaced or forgotten in favor of the revolutionary economic and political forces of change that Edmund Burke attributed to the threats to national institutions as posed by the French Revolution.

As I will hope to make clear, several constitutive elements of Scott's fears about revolutionary change were indeed shared by Smith and Godwin. However, the construction of their identities as French sympathizers, by both their critics in the *Anti-Jacobin Review* and elsewhere, purposefully occluded any recognition of their eventual dissatisfaction with the revolution. The connection between them all hinges on the way that "fear" is defined; following Rousseau, "fear" both creates and is produced by the debilitating anticipation of death, which in turn becomes the basis for a mode of writing about the impossibility of community and communication. For Smith, the extensive popularity of her poems served as the basis for an identity that was permanently alienated from authentic interaction with others; if she was able to exploit the sympathies of sentimental or melancholic readers by appearing self-forgetful in a performance of profound sadness, as many critics argue, then it was at the cost of allowing history to understand her poems and construction of emotion in a more complex way. Both human bodies and natural objects carried with them the material markers of experience through the passage of time, yet it was precisely this experience that could not be completely recollected. Godwin's masculine denunciation of sentimental literature, and the confusion between literature and life that it produced in both authors and readers, may have opened up a future in which the feelings of sympathy *could* be used as a basis for a new aesthetic community through imaginative projections into the minds of others. At the same time, Godwin could only sense this renewal of emotion in a negative sense, as emotion without feeling; paradoxically, then, only the *absence* of genuine emotions could gesture towards a possibly redeemed future that Godwin could nevertheless not imagine

without feelings. The nation, according to Godwin, *must* remain unrealized and fragmentary because its imaginary value, given full shape in both Fleetwood's fulfillment of his inheritance and paradise regained at Merionethshire as well as in Antonio's deluded and destructive reenactment of an idealized moral order, is categorically open to abuse through the seductive ideology of power. For these reasons, the value of imaginative literature resides in its deeply critical stance against the appropriation of the imagination and sympathy by institutions. Encounters with the great figures of the past must be purely individual.

Even though Scott aligned his conservative sensibility against the revolutionary politics of Smith and Godwin, the difficult distance that both Smith and Godwin attempted to maintain from the structures of imaginary experience within literary texts can also be seen in Scott's works. Although Craig, for example, alleges that Scott's texts advanced the case of the aesthetic as a basis for national identity, one might also argue that the material conditions of the present against which Scott seemed to react were also those that allowed him to become a very successful writer, publisher and reviewer. In "Walter Scott and the Birth of a Nation," Andrew Lincoln observes that Scott's perspective on the task of poetry in his verse romances was tempered by an ironic distance that disturbed Scott's wholehearted embrace of the works of art that he produced to praise the very past he admired.[2] Discussing the frame narratives that contain many of the tales within Scott's poems, Lincoln argues that "the poet is self-consciously belated in relation to the themes of his poetry. Paradoxically, the minstrel's alienation suggests the

temporary recovery of a lost purity which the adult must see ultimately as fantasy. A sophisticated self-awareness, then, licenses the apparent naiveté of the minstrel persona and the anachronistic romance forms associated with it. The pose distinguishes Scott from the visionary romanticism of Wordsworth, which asserts an heroic triumph over its own doubts, and relates him to the more skeptical and ironical romanticism of Byron and Keats, for whom the poet's imaginings may always be unmasked as deceiving fantasies" (5-6, my emphasis). Once again, as with Smith, Godwin and Wordsworth, we find here the value of recollection based in its evanescence and, consequently, in maintaining a permanent moral and epistemological separation between the past and present.[3]

For Smith and Godwin, however, evanescence does not allow for a transcendent return to the present; rather, evanescence becomes the distinguished characteristic of an identity rooted in the fear of loss and absence. Even as Godwin's narrator in *Fleetwood* and Smith's various poetic personae cannot leave evanescence behind even as they try to establish it, Scott's minstrels attempt to disavow the temporality of the past through its momentariness or childishness. Yet unlike Smith and Godwin, Scott was consider by his own contemporaries as an author who was cleansing the Augean stables of sentimental fiction, in which revolutionary ideology and sympathy were bound together in a universalizing political aesthetic designed to trump national allegiances, and renewing a sense of masculinist health to poetry and novels.[4]

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[2] Andrew Lincoln, "Walter Scott and the Birth of the Nation," *Romanticism: The Journal of Romantic Culture and Criticism* (2002; 8 (1)).

[3] Scott's staging of the complexities of the imagination is strikingly similar to Smith, and this parallel can also be found in a great deal of critical literature. Nostalgia for a lost past in Smith is the both the inspiration and didactic lesson of both Smith and Scott.

[4] In the chapter on Scott in *The Perversity of Poetry*, Dino Franco Felluga's chapter on Scott's role as a

Indeed, Scott's appeal as a poet who unmasked the deceptions of poetry, or a novelist who exposed and domesticated the disillusionment fostered by a belief in fiction, can be found in some of his earliest readers. In an 1828 essay entitled "History," Thomas Macaulay discusses the value of "imaginary history" that seems, in many regards, to posit a solid, figurative body (i.e., history) that Godwin's various accounts of the imaginary and history complicate or dismiss.[5] Macaulay's account of an imaginative history as counterpoint to historical novels fed into the posthumous evaluations of Scott's poetic or fictional work as explicitly historical. In an enthusiastic survey of the Magnum Opus edition of the Waverley novels published in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1832, Thomas Lister praised Scott and his contributions, but went on to sum up the novelist's importance in the fact that he had given shape to the historiographical models for the next generation:

> Combining materials drawn from scattered sources, Scott's novels have given us pictures of past days, which what is commonly called History had neglected to afford. We now *feel* more fully that dates and names, -nay, even the articles of a treaty, or the issue of a battle, although desirable pieces of knowledge, are yet trivial, compared with the importance and utility of being able to penetrate below that surface on which float the great events and stately pageants of the time. …

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healthy alternative to the tropological and discursive illnesses of the English nation in the post-Revolutionary period.

[5] Thomas Macauley, "History," in *Essays, Historical and Literary* (London: Ward, Lock, and Co., 1972), 71-91. Godwin's essay, "Of History and Romance," has been widely read and analyzed by contemporary Romantic critics as indicative of Godwin's embrace of a principle of contingency and the plurality of interpretations open to historical events. In this essay, Godwin states that the discourses of history and romance do not supplement each other, but compete against each other in seeking to define the past. See Jon Klancher, "Godwin and the Republican Romance: Genre, Politics, and Contingency in Cultural History."

> Great changes in the conditions and opinions of a people will silently and gradually take place, unmarked by any signal event; whilst events the most striking, and apparently important, will glitter and vanish like bubbles in the sun, and leave no visible trace of their effect. … At present we have only extremes. We have the stately political history and the gossiping memoir. … The public now desire to see these requisites well blended; and to this growing desire we conceive no slight impulse has been given by the works of the author of Waverley. [6]

In Lister's reading, Scott is able to "penetrate below that surface" of historical events to discover the feelings of those who participated in them, and then allow the reader to participate in or experience history through an immediate identification with its characters. Godwin's new (diseased, political) man of unfeeling feeling becomes, in this transaction, Scott's solid man of history, a redeemed Burkean figure who feels, rather than knows, the veracity of his own and his nation's past.

It is only at the end of the boom of interest in historical fiction that we find a denunciation of this method. Alessandro Manzoni, in his essay "On Historical Fiction," deems it to be a dead genre.[7] According to Manzoni, it is all too easy to spin imaginative reconstructions of the past; indeed, Manzoni's evaluation of the historical novel paves the way for history's own gesture towards factual objectivity at the expense of imaginative fiction. For Manzoni, history takes from the poetic and historical fiction the power of the imagination and accords it to version of events that always *displaces* the imaginative. In

[6]Thomas Lister, "The Waverley Novels," *Edinburgh Review* 55 (April 1832), 77-8.

a sense, it is a return to Humean indifference, but as a form of indifference that is situated upon the exclusion of that which would threaten its objectivity. It is this form of history, as a record of the past that gains power from its own representations, which has become the dominant form of history and the devaluation of historical fiction after Manzoni. As Manzoni saw it, and in a way that remarkably resembles the limitations of Godwin's approaches to writing history, the historical novel was chronically problematic because readers do not know in the end what attitude is required of them and are left vacillating between the two poles, with only disquieting doubts about the boundaries of the real and the invented left as remainders of the experience. Manzoni could see no solution to the problem: if writers were somehow to distinguish those statements which are claimed as true from those which are invented, the readers' uncertainty as to when they should adopt what sort of belief would be resolved, but only at the unacceptable cost of destroying the unity of the work as a whole. Thus, as in Godwin's separation of history from fiction, the two genres can accommodate each other, but only at the cost of their viability as narrative forms.

Manzoni's attack against historical fiction stood until another post-revolutionary author, Georg Lukács wrote his study of the genre, *The Historical Novel*, in 1937.[8] The first chapter of the book argues strongly for Scott's innovation, locating it in the era around the French Revolution. According to Lukács, the path to the French Revolution was paved by the study of history during the eighteenth-century: "the often superb

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[7] Alessandro Manzoni, *On the Historical Novel* (1850), trans. Sandra Bermann (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

[8] Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981).

historical construction, with its discovery of numerous new facts and connections, serves to demonstrate the necessity for transforming the 'unreasonable' society of feudal absolutism; and the lessons of history provide the principles with those help a 'reasonable' society, a 'reasonable state may be created" (17). For the ideological defenders of progress, such as the Godwin of the 1790s, the revolution of 1688 presented itself as the ideal of perfectibility: "the fact that England had fought out its bourgeois revolution in the seventeenth century and had from then on experienced a peaceful, upward development, lasting over centuries, on the basis of the Revolution's achievements, showed England to be the practical, model example for the new style of historical interpretation" (31). Lukács considers Scott as a writer who stands against this version of historical development. Instead, Lukács suggests that Scott perceives the nature of English development as consisting of a continuous series of class struggles and revolutions. For Scott, history is an endless "chain" of individual and social crises of the deepest kind. It should come as no surprise that Lukács evokes the concept of the "chain of … crises" (57) as this version of post-Enlightenment history draws on the Lockean notion of a "chain of associations" that we already encountered in Godwin's Fleetwood as the problematic process by which identity is established. Moving from an individual history that must piece together the story of development or regression to the progress of history, Lukács argues that the immanent demise of one group, such as the Scottish clan, results from and contributes to this endless cycle of revolutions: "the inability of the clans to defend their common interests is … an inevitable result of the basis of clan life" (57). According to Lukács, then, this chain of crises cannot be broken, as Scott's "*historical*

necessity … is of the most severe, implacable kind" (58, my emphasis). Tapping again into the language of Godwin's critical, philosophical language which rebukes the concept of ideological necessity as developed in the *Enquiry*, Lukács gives to Scott the character of a modern revolutionary.

In considering Scott's Marxist revolutionary credentials, however, we ought to pay strict attention to the way that Godwin constructs his own materialist vision of history writing in "Of History and Romance:"

> Laying aside the generalities of historical abstraction, we must mark the operation of *human passions*; must observe the empire of motives whether groveling or elevated; and must note the influence that one human being exercises over another, and the ascendancy of the daring and wise over the vulgar multitude. It is thus, and thus only, that we shall be enabled to add, to the knowledge of the past, a sagacity that can penetrate into the depths of futurity. We shall not only understand those events as they arise which are no better than old incidents under new names, but shall judge truly of such conjectures and combinations, their sources and effects, as, though they have never yet occurred, are within the capacities of our nature. (363)

For Godwin, history ought to be seen as the fragmented, isolated experiences concentrated in "human passion" as well as their hold over individuals in the "empire of motives." Recalling Lister's reading of Scott in which history is a surface that must be penetrated in order to discover the feelings of individual actors and Godwin's dismissal

of an Enlightenment, Humean vision of history as "abstraction" brings us closer to an estimation of the value of passion and feeling to the discourse of history.

We can see, in retrospect, the overarching path of Scott's fortunes as a writer worthy of serious academic study. From Macaulay's embrace of Scott's "imaginative history," to Manzoni's dialectical opposition of history and fiction and rejection of historical fiction, Lukács' embrace of Scott's Marxist populism in representing the totality of history in a post-revolutionary vein, and to Anderson's view of postcolonial literature as imagining a community that has no history of its own outside the narratives it circulates, Scott's "anti-Romanticism" is drawn increasingly closer to the theories of some notion of gradual reform and the importance of individual experience and feeling as found in both Smith and Godwin. To consider a more skeptical Scott requires addressing Godwin and his construction of a (post-)revolutionary or "new" man of feeling as someone pathologically obsessed with events from past. A common literary touchstone for both is Mackenzie's popular novel, *The Man of Feeling* (1771), and its ambiguous portrait of a sentimental man who does not fit within an emerging capitalistic world. While the final volume of *Fleetwood* is a clear re-writing of *Othello*, Godwin's narrator also interweaves whole passages from Mackenzie and transposes them, with important and ironic alterations, into his own life story. Godwin here aligns the idea of the decomposed manuscript with age and moral decrepitude, turning the past into a series of errors that cannot be overcome or even *read*, much like a ruined text that is full of unbridgeable gaps and blanks; his fascination with the text and with Harley in the *Man of Feeling* as an exemplar of moral goodness and feeling is translated into the finitude of

human life as a text that is always decomposing and recomposing, and as such perpetually open to (re)interpretation and re-writing.[9] The epistemological and moral complexities of Godwin's fiction were precisely the kinds of texts that Scott wished to rebuke through his use of a young, proto-*Bildungsroman* hero in *Waverley*, who seems to be moved by historical forces into, rather than out of, the domestic and social worlds. Scott thus seems to stand in dialectic opposition to Godwin by containing the epistemological and moral crises that destroy the psychic fabric of Fleetwood's self-determined identity within the safety of a past that only has symbolic value for the present.[10] While Godwin crafts texts that maintain an interpretive and critical force only by failing to establish a coherent alternative to institutional force, Scott turns his texts

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[9] Two of the major influences for Godwin and Scott in this regard are Mackenzie and Edmund Burke. Reading Mackenzie through Godwin and Scott produces fascinating insights into the way that authors from the eighteenth-century sentimental tradition were taken up for very different political purposes. In an excellent essay on *The Man of Feeling*, Maureen Harkin produces a portrait of Mackenzie that strikingly resembles Godwin. According to Harkin, Mackenzie found sentimental novels to be inadequate forms of social critique because they were also productive of a certain kind of pleasurable feeling of remorse that would be familiar to both Adam Smith and Diderot: "*The Man of Feeling* does not resolve simply into a failed strategy for constructing appropriate social models; its representations of distress produce an evident pleasure as well as an impulse to social critique. The novel's tendency to indulge at length in what it acknowledges is futile opposition, tears and complaints, indicates that these sympathetic tableaux are a source of aesthetic pleasure rather than of ethical practice, an association central in Smith's reservations about the social usefulness of sympathy" (336). From this perspective, Godwin's *Fleetwood* is very much in the spirit of Mackenzie's novel in that both are concerned with representing the limits of feeling from both the subjective and objective perspective: one must *feel* the inadequacy of feeling in a sympathetic mode. It is a critical commonplace that Scott shunned the complex, inner psychological portraits that Godwin built into his fiction; yet, as I shall argue, Scott's turn to the transmission of history as that which determines identity rather than the paradoxical coils of a passionate Godwinian rationalism merely provides the illusion of shifting the burden of feeling's hold over individuals. Burke, another ambiguous figure who was alternately revered and dismissed by the Romantics and their contemporaries, provided a schema for wedding feeling to history. Mike Goode, in "The Man of Feeling History: The Erotics of Historicism in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*," argues that Burke, "by remaking the well known late-eighteenth-century figure of the Man of Feeling—a sentimental and sexual type—as a civic-minded Man of History, … set the central terms in which a subsequent generation of British thinkers would debate the legitimacy of different kinds of historical writing and the nature of historical competence" (851). It would not be beyond the realm of possibility to consider that both Godwin and Scott rejected this remaking of the man of feeling as an historical agent and social representative of progressive change.

[10] Ian Duncan argues persuasively that *Waverley* constructs and legitimates a retreat from an active role in history to its passive, commercial consumption by the bourgeois reader. See Duncan, *Modern Romance*

into alternately objective and passionate transmitters of the past through narratives that idealize the repeatable nature of the past and that are able to historicize the pathological destabilization of fact by romance evidenced in Godwinian history and romance. Unlike the powerful cultural institutions that speak as a ventriloquist through individuals and leave hidden, undetectable scars in Godwin's texts, history is allowed to speak triumphantly through its agents in Scott.

If there is a more fundamental struggle between Godwin and Scott regarding the nature of narrative, then, it takes place over the definition of the space outside the narrative and its potential disengagement or disinterest in the tale, whether historical, fictional or a hybrid of the two, being told. In many ways, both Godwin and Scott operate within an elegiac mode regarding the possibly idyllic nature of the past, and this distinction regarding the space outside of narrative determines the makeup of a great deal of nineteenth century literature, between literary realism, things as they *are*, and the popular literature of Scott's historical fiction as an escape from the present, or things as they *used to be*. In Lukács' rejection of the "bourgeois realism" of Balzac and Flaubert in both *The Historical Novel* and *Theory of the Novel* appears an endorsement of Scott's brand of progressive historicism, an embrace of the health and "bitters" of a Marxist populism founded in an apologia for Scott as the Shakespeare or Swift for the proletariat, that nevertheless indirectly acknowledges the presence of Godwin's revolutionary idealism as a danger that must always be sympathetically addressed and rejected.

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and Transformations of the Novel: The Gothic, Scott, Dickens.

While it may be abundantly clear that Scott, the noted antiquarian, was concerned with the fate of literary genres from the past and their ability to communicate the sentiments of the present, Scott has not generally been considered as being within the same aesthetic horizons as Smith and Godwin. I would like to suggest that Smith, Godwin and Scott are all reacting to a similar problem regarding the past and its affective presence in ways that are distinctly different than the transcendental forms of recollection, whether individual or collective, as are found in Wordsworth's more "Romantic" conception of memory. For Smith and Godwin, the question may be formulated as the following: how do we know that our feelings are truly our own? Smith's poetic personae know their feelings through memorial traces that cannot be eradicated but only transmitted to others through sympathetic channels. Wedding her personal biography to this poetic project, Smith demonstrates the emotional involvement of the real with the fictional in a way that radically destabilizes the boundary between the two. This question leads, in Godwin's moral philosophy, to deeper ethical problems: how ought we to mediate a retrieval of the haunting, living presence of the past in all its recollected immediacy? I have already suggested that the "new" man of feeling was not, for Godwin, a renewed or morally upright vision of the sentimental hero, but a mocking, ironic vision of the man of feeling as a political enabler and a ventriloquist of sympathy who would give rise to the disillusioned anti-heroes of the French *mal de siècle*. Yet for Smith and Godwin, the traditional consolations or self-forgetful distraction that literature seems to promise to its readers in identifying with authors, whether in elegiac poetry or sentimental fiction, were displaced or interrupted by history. Fictional Gothic fears and

terrors, in other words, had become real The invocation of the "new" in Smith and Godwin, illustrative of a kind of Gothic haunting of the present and transmission of fictional fear to real emotions, is very much a concern in Romantic literature of the time. Forgetting in Romanticism can be defined, in this sense, as a kind of alternative form of memory that ceaselessly attempts to record the passage of that which eludes consciousness, a trace of what will later be defined as evidence of trauma or shock, and a crisis to which recollection constantly responds.[11] Predating Freud and Walter Benjamin, Smith and Godwin consider forgetting as a form of inscription that is fraught with authorial insecurity about the interpretive value of texts and that is consumed with fears about the dispersal of identity through the distribution of texts among an anonymous readership.[12] Read through Hume's consideration of the limits of human knowledge, Smith and Godwin turn texts into the containers of memories that cannot be opened quite the same way again, and that consequently that the subject inside out, exposing it to its own death and memorial limitations within the atemporal, eternal time of the recollected

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[11] Jon Klancher also suggests as much in his reading of Godwin's revolutionary romances: "Godwin's reflex was a moment of writing that undid the earlier moments of a reflexive argument by responding to the kind of contingency that is always material, unimaginable, unheard-of – that is, one's own place and act in the moment of comprehending history" (165).

[12] As I have already indicated in the introduction, many attempts have been made to link together the psychological portraits or 'cases' found in Godwin's fiction with Freud's later work. See Joel Falflak, "Speaking of Godwin's *Caleb Williams*: The Talking Cure and the Psychopathology of Enlightenment." For Falflak, the Enlightenment produces as a side-effect of its progressive search for knowledge a dangerous "passion to know" that devolves into psychological sites of unconscious resistance: "Sustaining this state's economy of knowledge in the (*Caleb Williams*), however, is a primal scene of psychoanalysis, governed by *an ungovernable passion to know* and thus to possess the other that leaves subjects perpetually unsatisfied. In the end, Godwin's novel ends up reading political injustice not as the antithesis of political justice but as its unconscious resistance to psychoanalysis" (114, my emphasis). It is possible to resist analyzing a subject who offers a discourse whose sole basis for existence is confession? As I attempted to argue in my own "analysis," Godwin's *Fleetwood* gives shape to this question rather than its answer.

memory.[13] Scott rejects this special kind of poetically or fictionally conceived container of traumatic memories that is not opened by the subject, allowing him or her to dispassionately examine its contents of past events, but that opens the subject to its own fragile existence.[14]

Rather than giving credence to the ways in which the past can confront and become the obsessive focus of the present, Scott's works provide access to a more

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[13] Both Smith and Godwin seem to augur Baudelaire's use of memory containers in his poetry as sites of resistance against a radically changing world. See Elissa Marder's chapter on Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin, "Women Tell Time: Traumatic and Addictive Temporality in *Les Fleurs du mal*," in *Dead Time: Temporal Disorders in the Wake of Modernity*.

[14] As Felluga has noted, Scott embraced a rhetoric of health in his texts: "Scott managed to turn the rhetoric nervous sensibility and disease completely around, claiming for himself and for his metrical romances a rhetoric of manly and invigorating health" (33). This healthfulness is built upon a rejection of traumatic events, such as the French Revolution and an emerging industrial world, that Scott and his reviewers felt had driven readers to *ennui*, exasperation, "idleness and effeminacy" (33). Referencing Coleridge's formulation of a "suspension of disbelief" as a necessary precursor for engaging in the illusory works of fiction and poetry, Felluga considers Scott's texts and the readers of his texts to employ a fetish-logic regarding the epistemological status of fiction; Felluga states that these readers would say to themselves, "I know very well that what I am reading is not true in *stricto sensu* but, nonetheless, I believe it to be 'true'" (45). The rhetoric of health emerges also in the historicizing hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and his attempts, against poststructuralist and deconstructionist critics who are seen to strip texts of any access to meaning, to maintain a form of truth within aesthetic experience or consciousness that accrues or even changes over time. In particular, Gadamer's discussion of the "memento" in *Truth and Method* (1960) is emblematic of this healthful response to "theory:" "A memento has value as a memento only for someone who already – i.e., still – recalls the past. Mementos lose their value when the past of which they remind one no longer has any meaning. Furthermore, someone who not only uses mementos to remind him but makes a cult of them and lives in the past as if it were the present has a disturbed relation to reality" (146). Gadamer's rejection of the memento is based on his perception of it as a purely signifying structure: like a cheap souvenir from a trip that one gradually forgets, a memento has no intrinsic value and only has meaning in referring to a past; in a delusive sense, it "keeps the past present for us" (146). Against the memento stands the Coleridgean *symbol*, which is more picture than sign: "a symbol manifests the presence of something that really is present." In healthfully rejecting the memento, Gadamer rejects de Manian or Derridean é*criture* and the logic of the fetish as absent from truth and "disturbed." In keeping with Scott's notorious ambiguity, one might say that objects may be both mementos and symbols in Scott's historical fiction and verse romances; indeed, Scott's narratives work to create symbols of the past from dangerous mementos by stripping from them their intrinsic violence and delusiveness. For Scott, the way in which mementos are stripped of their delusive violence is through a very distinct form of *reading*. Gadamer and Scott may agree on the fundamental and *healthy* necessity of this kind of work: for Gadamer, "written texts present the real hermeneutic task. Writing is self-alienation. *Overcoming it*, *reading the text*, is thus the highest task of understanding" (392, my emphasis). While it would take too long to address it here, it is clear that de Man's effort to expose the very concept of time itself as a memento (or, as a purely signifying structure without synthesis that repeats a "past" without meaningful relation to a present) in "The Rhetoric of Temporality" stands against Gadamer. Yet both gesture towards the difficulty and consequent necessity

pleasing past that remains past through the reaffirming experience of *nostalgia*. While Cairns and Lincoln build their cases for Scott's imagined nations through and against Anderson's imagined communities, most recent criticism regarding Scott's poetry has to do with the way in which Scott constructs his books and poems as forms of media that give the past a more problematic life in the present. I will argue here that Scott had a similar skepticism regarding the technological medium of the book and its ability to reproduce national or cultural memories. The importance of the concept of *media* for this work can be discovered in the value associated with forms of technology as forms of mediation that have come to dominate modern aesthetic experience. In contemporary Scott criticism, we might adduce a difference between two different kinds of media: forms of media are either technologies that store the raw data of memories in vast impersonal archives that threaten the very possibility of mediation itself or they provide glimpses into a past through amplified memories that no longer can be felt.

While critics have discussed Scott's concept of the book, recent work has attempted to understand Scott's employment of the book as a nascent form of media. In "Understanding Media in 1805: Audiovisual Hallucination in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*," Celeste Langan argues that Scott produces the origin of blank verse as a "blank and silent screen" upon which different poetic genres produce sound effects and almost hallucinatory visions that are difficult to retrospectively understand in our own more highly integrated audiovisual world.[15] For Langan, "the fully residual status of sound," or the silent reading of poetry in 1805, "is constitutive of the poetry of print

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of "reading."

culture" (62). Scott's *Lay* "suggests how blank verse--invented to translate the "dead letters" of Latin poetry into vernacular language--comes to define a literary vernacular that signals, evokes, or mediates, rather than records, the aural component of poetry. We fully understand the point of Scott's nostalgic evocation of an oral poetic tradition, in other words, only in recognizing how the print medium turns all verse into a blank and silent screen" (63). Langan invokes Samuel Weber's notion of the *mediauratic*, indicative of Scott's poetic technique of putting past forms of poetry to use in a poem that is merely their silent vehicle.[16] According to Weber, the mediauratic is constituted by "auratic flashes and shadows that are not just produced and reproduced by the media but which are themselves the media, since they come to pass in places that are literally inter-mediary, in the interstices of a process of reproduction and of recording … that is above all a mass movement of collection and dispersion" (106). In other words, the minstrel of Scott's *Lay* is a kind of mechanistic poetic recorder ("I say the tale as 'twas said to me") who plays back the poem that he has heard before with a passion that is neither fully his own nor those represented within the poem.

Pushed to a limit, Scott's last minstrel no longer represents a human individual with an actual voice recalling his own history, but a kind of transcription machine that repeats what it has never really "heard." Installed within the overarching frame narrative, is this the model of the author that Scott wishes to construct, a ventriloquized amplifier of the tale that was told to him or her, someone who passively participates in the continuation of a past that has no (or no longer has) real meaning for him or her outside

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[15] Celeste Langan, "Understanding Media in 1805: Audiovisual Hallucination in The Lay of the Last Minstrel," *Studies in Romanticism* (Spring 2001; 40 (1)).

of its passionate re-telling? Or, is the author as "last" minstrel as he no longer has a fit audience for his work and merely (re)performs for an audience in search of the aura of nostalgic remembrance? For Scott, the author performs both functions.

While Scott's minstrel is the repository of feudal tales that are in the process of being forgotten, then, from a more skeptical perspective, the minstrel is a model of authorship that takes up and stores tales whose nostalgic aura is diminishing. Felluga discusses the notion of the Benjaminian aura in relation to Scott, but the notion that the aura is fundamentally reductive to a form of nostalgia should be viewed with skepticism. Weber states, in discussing Benjamin's conception of the film camera, "the recording apparatus, whether visual or auditory, 'takes up' everything but never looks back, never returns the glance. Instead, what it does is to arrest and separate and reproduce the 'here-and-now' again and again in a proliferating series of images which go here and there. The 'time' of reproducibility is that of this 'posthumously shocked,' immobilized, dispersed, recollected and finally forgotten moment" (100). Promising to grant sympathetic access to a past through his voice, a perfect recording that mimics the iterability of the book, the minstrel of the *Lay* augurs a Heideggerian technology that makes of everything raw material for its processes. In Benjaminian terms, as elucidated by Weber, the minstrel who perfectly recounts the past for *any* audience, an audience fundamentally anonymous, is already representative of the sense that "aura thrives in its decline." In other words, forms of human communication, found in "authentic," face-to-face meaningful dialogue, are valued most highly in a society in which these forms of

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[16] Samuel Weber, *Mass mediauras: Form, Technics, Media* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

communication are vanishing, even as the technological reproducibility of communication contributes to and indeed sustains this vanishing that never quite fades away. For Langan, the illusion of intimate communication is found in the homogenous world of print culture.

As the title of Langan's article suggest, her vision of silent reading and the "fully residual status of sound" in Scott's poetry owes a great deal to Frederic Kittler's deconstruction of modern forms of technology.[17] For Langan and Kittler, the past and its aesthetic categories are transformed through "discourse networks." Modern media are recording and "storage mechanisms" that place the past into an undifferentiated archive. Kittler suggests that the digitization of data "will erase the very concept of medium" and reduce "sound and image … to surface effects, known to consumers as interface. Sense and the senses turn into eyewash" (1-2). To cite examples: we have already seen how Charlotte Smith's melancholic verse has become a kind of "eyewash" for many critics, and who find that the relentless melancholy of her poetry generates an illegibility, or, a feeling of readerly anesthesia: according to Jerome McGann, we have simply forgotten how to read these poems. We have also seen, in *Fleetwood*, the play between different tropes and narrative elements of sentimental novels, reinforcing a perception that the narrative "voice" of Fleetwood works to turn these archived gestures to well-known sentimental passages into *figures* into which Fleetwood may endlessly reconstruct authentic feelings through a Nietzschean "active forgetting." Fleetwood no longer uses the discourse of sentiment to express his sympathetic feelings for mankind, but, in an

[17] See Frederic Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

inversion, uses his misanthropic failure to feel the suffering of others into a permanent locus of self-analysis that substitutes for the absence of feeling.

While Langan privileges the archival nature of Scott's poems, the work of Peter Manning, Jonathan Crary, Jay Clayton, and Margaret Russett suggest that the technological media analyzed by Kittler are limited to the *visual field*.[18] Responding to Langan, Peter Manning argues that, in Scott's day, "the aural component of poetry, whatever the genre or verse form, remained significant." He continues, saying that the innovation of silently reading allowed poetry to be "freed to develop the sound quality of the verse itself. It is not that the readers gain access to the mediated, narratively evoked scene of the poem so much as they gain access to the immediate music of the text itself. Freed from the exigency of communication, sound patterns become ever more intricate and various. The medium does not become invisible, but ever more prominent, a Jakobsonian intensification that proceeds from the chants of Wordsworth or Coleridge toward the virtuoso effects of Tennyson and Swinburne, Browning and Hopkins." Margaret Russett argues that Coleridge's attempt to find a legal basis for original, poetic "voice" is counterbalanced by his debt to Scott, who retroactively gives a sense of authority to *Christabel* in the *Lay*: "Coleridge's debt to Scott consists in the deferred action that locates voice in transmission rather than expressive origin." More than a loss of Coleridge's authentic voice in repetition, Scott confers authority on what came before

[18] Peter Manning, "The birthday of typography": A Response to Celeste Langan', *Studies in Romanticism*, 40 (2001), 71-83; Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998); Jay Clayton, Dickens in Cyberspace: *The Afterlife of the Nineteenth Century in Postmodern Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003; Margaret Russett, "Meter, Identity, Voice: Untranslating *Christabel*," *SEL:Studies in English Literat*ure 1500-1900, 43.4, (2003) 773-797.

by displacing and repeating it. The very act of reading, then, confers authority on the text that one is in the process of reading because the reader is in thrall to the text's "glamourous" power. Jay Clayton, discussing the "voice in the machine" of audio technology, argues "the history of telegraph confounds (Kittler's) assumptions by showing that information, which even in the nineteenth-century could be decoded optically or acoustically, had profoundly different impacts, depending on how it was apprehended. The choice of interface for the telegraph had effects on the body, which influenced both the meaning of the message. If visual data processing seemed to reinforce the growing abstraction of modern life, acoustic processing produced odd sensations that ran counter to normative trends" (39). In sum, Clayton agrees with Crary, stating that a "failure to consider the difference between acoustics and optics in communication networks as distorted much contemporary thinking about media" (40).

***The Lay of the Last Minstrel* and the Book of Memory**

The "lay" of the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* creates a distinction between the past and the present on the level of nationalism through an evocation of a border world, a feudal time in which allegiances are formed according to clan and loyalty, rather than any general interests in an imaginary community. According to Andrew Lincoln, in Scott's description of William Deloraine, the knight who will fetch the magic book for the Lady of Branksome to avenge her husband's death, the characteristic that is most valued in him is his local knowledge of the countryside:

> A stark moss-trooping Scott was he,
> As e'er couch'd Border lance by knee;

> Through Solway sands, through Tarras moss,
> Blindfold, he knew the paths to cross;
> By wily turns, by desperate bounds,
> Had baffled Percy's best blood-hounds;
> In Eske or Liddell, fords were none,
> But he would ride them, one by one;
> Alike to him was time or tide,
> December's snow, or July's pride;
> Alike to him was tide or time,
> Moonless midnight, or matin prime;
> Steady of heart, and stout of hand,
> As ever drove prey from Cumberland;
> Five times outlawed had be been,
> By England's King, and Scotland's Queen[19] (I, ii, 215-30)

For the Lady, Deloraine is valuable because he understands the physical geography of the country. The Minstrel describes him as “steady” as well in that the passage of time is all “alike” to him, privileging the fact that he inhabits the world around him through a dense network of intimate knowledge of the land and local allegiances. Like the other knights in the poem, there isn’t really an ideal of the Scottish nation even when the English begin arriving at the border, as they come together through their accustomed manner that reflects Deloraine’s own structures of loyalty and friendship: “Young Gilbert, let our beacon blaze, / Our kin, and clan, and friends to raise. (III, xxvii,17-8).” Like the first authorial footnote to the poem, which evokes a complicated genealogy from the present back to the past through kings, noted at a point in which we are told of the death of a king, interestingly enough, the poem connects the nobility and heroism of the feudal past with the modern present of the book and the naturalized position of the Minstrel’s songs

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[19] Walter Scott, “The Lay of the Last Minstrel,” in *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1995).

through a local understanding of the nation as a community of individual relationships that transcends general interests of a civic nature.

This timeless character of Deloraine and the interlaced loyalties of his feudal world, seen here in counterdistinction to the two nations of England and Scotland, are transported forward, through the poem, to the Minstrel who, in the modern world, inhabits and defines the safe distance between the present and the past. The presence of the Minstrel, according to Scott, is necessary because he acts as a intermediary in a literary sense: "the Poem was put into the mouth of an ancient Minstrel, the last of the race, who, as he is *supposed* to have survived the Revolution, *might have* caught somewhat of the refinement of modern poetry, without losing the simplicity of his original model." He is a *literary* border character, which befits his ultimate residence at the wall of Newark tower, where, like a book, in fact, he endlessly repeats his tale: "shelter'd *wanderers*, by the blaze, / Oft heard the tale of other days; / For much he loved to ope his door, / And give the aid he begg'd before. So pass'd the winter's day;" (VI, xxxii). Initially, then, the Minstrel will give "the aide he begg'd before" to other wanderers; this act of charity can also be seen as a metaphor of the local loyalties that the Minstrel has for others *like him*, who, for whatever reason, do not fit into the world they inhabit and reenacting in summary fashion the world of the poem. Yet later in this description, the Minstrel is seen to sing his song to "the rapt *traveler* (who) would stay, / forgetful of the closing day" (VI, xxxii), moving towards the end of he poem itself, in which the older Minstrels sing: "So sweet was Harold's piteous lay, / Scarce mark'd the guests the darken'd hall" (VI, xxiv, 1-2). Here, the "rapt traveler" is distinct from the

wanderer, in that the traveler is going somewhere and is delayed, literally caught in rapture, by the tale. Finally, the Minstrel sings to "*noble* youths, (who for) the strain to hear, / Forsook the hunting of the deer" (VI, xxxii). Here, the poem has come full circle, in that these noble youths imagine themselves as Deloraine, not hunting deer in a park, but out on the border, driving "prey from Cumberland." The imagined communion with the past through the projection of the listener into a timeless character in the poem is no longer seen as a part of a necessary charity, as with the wanderers, nor as a pleasant delay, as with the travelers, but as a substitution of luxury goods, hunting in a park or listening to a tale, conferring on the latest listener a sense of imagined loyalty with the characters of the past.

Before proceeding along this line, we ought also to recall that the Minstrel is also the first *listener* in the poem: in an important aside during the description of Melrose Abbey, where Deloraine has been sent to retrieve the sorcerer Michael Scott's magic book, the Minstrel states, "I cannot tell how the truth may be; / I say the tale as 'twas said to me." Scott marks the Minstrel, here and elsewhere, as a border figure, one who inhabits both worlds; even though Scott locates the tale "in the mouth" of the Minstrel, with Scott acting as ventriloquist, the description of the Minstrel's necessity is hedged with uncertainty in order to shelter an unambiguous transfer from Scott to the Minstrel. The Minstrel is a singer of songs to a specific, historical audience, and Scott is a writer who creates both textual and goblin pages. We will return to the reason as to why Scott may have distanced himself slightly from the Minstrel, but it is important to note here that the Minstrel is already encoded as a border character himself, one who is caught

between the past and the present, and, as we shall see, is precisely like a reader who has a hard time seeing both together.

Who is this Minstrel? According to Jane Millgate, Scott had very particular ideas as to how the Minstrel should appear, as the original book was to contain illustrations of him: in a letter, Scott states, "the Minstrel should wear over his dress what we call a *Maud* or Low Country plaid. It is a long piece of cloth about a yard wide wrapd loosely round the waist like a scarf and from thence brought across the breast and thrown over the left shoulder where it hangs loose something like a Spanish Cloak. It is not of Tartan but of the natural color of the wool with a very small black check which gives it a grayish look."[20] In this picture, one can imagine the Minstrel as something of a Gothic figure, wearing "something like a Spanish Cloak" with "a grayish look," yet locating this character as a Low Country Scot.

Why would Scott give the Minstrel this Gothic attire? Perhaps it was meant to demonstrate how the Minstrel is an almost supernatural figure, who grows young in the telling of the tale that possesses him and begins to appear different to his female listeners; it may also mark him as a transmitter of the past that cannot be wholly trusted. In the famous beginning to the sixth canto, we can see that the idea of loyalty and feudal allegiance is transferred from people to a more ambiguous notion of "the land," one that is made of "Land of brown heath and shaggy wood, /Land of the mountain and the flood, /Land of my sires!"

Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,

[20] Jane Millgate, "Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel*: The History of a Book," *European Romantic Review* 13 (2002), 227.

> Who never to himself hath said,
> This is my own, my native land!
> Whose heart hath ne'er within him burn'd,
> As home his footsteps he hath turn'd,
> From wandering on a foreign strand!
> If such there breathe, go, mark him well;
> For him no Minstrel raptures swell;
> High though his titles, proud his name,
> Boundless his wealth as wish can claim;
> Despite those titles, power, and pelf,
> The wretch, concentred all in self,
> Living, shall forfeit fair renown,
> And, doubly dying, shall go down
> To the vile dust, from whence he sprung,
> Unwept, unhonor'd, and unsung.
>
> O Caledonia! stern and wild,
> Meet nurse for a poetic child!
> Land of brown heath and shaggy wood,
> Land of the mountain and the flood,
> Land of my sires! what mortal hand
> Can e'er untie the filial band,
> That knits me to thy rugged strand!
> Still as I view each well-known scene,
> Think what is now, and what hath been,
> Seems as, to me, of all bereft,
> Sole friends thy woods and streams were left;
> And thus I love them better still,
> Even in extremity of ill.
> By Yarrow's stream still let me stray,
> Though none should guide my feeble way;
> Still feel the breeze down Ettrick break,
> Although it chill my wither'd cheek:
> Still lay my head by Teviot Stone,
> Though there, forgotten and alone,
> The Bard may draw his parting groan. (VI, i, 1-35)

The neutral, descriptive location of the Minstrel's home is quite different than the land of Deloraine, which is explicitly tied to specific locations. The kinds of boundaries erected within Deloraine's world, which cross given borders in order to establish local limits of

knowledge, is lost to the Minstrel, who gives signs and indications of not being of Deloraine's world, but of the more modern world. The place-name of "Caledonia" does not act to center the world of the Minstrel in any real, present-day location, but it does exhibit the Minstrel's difficulty in imagining a home, a "land of my sires," in the past. While it is linked symbolically with the attempt to shift the poem away from a Celtic, British past, it is also linked with the Roman origin of the word, which names the land through reference to a single tribe rather than groups of tribes, as well as subjection to an imperial rule. The double-vision of the "well-known scene," viewed in the past and the present and to see things that aren't there, gives a visionary quality to the Minstrel, yet the imaginary location of the scene is stressed through the uneasy rhyme of the scene with "what *hath* been."

If, as Langan has argued, the medium of the poem, the page, acts more in Scott's hands as a telegraphic carrier of information when the poem *becomes* the book, then the poem itself cannot advocate this change as anything less than a catastrophic fall and a loss of bearings for those caught in the change. Discussing Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, Marc Redfield makes the following commentary on Hegel's notion of the arbitrariness of the sign and the "radical anonymity" of the subject of the nation founded on the enforced recognition of an arbitrary sign as the site of excessively symbolic national origins:

> The signs of nationhood – the flags and emblems that, according to Hegel, in their sheer arbitrariness demonstrate the mind's creative power – serve the cause of misrecognition insofar as they transform a semiotic function (linguistic

> arbitrariness) into an image – an image of the nation as will, or better, of the nation as imagi-nation. The arbitrariness of the sign and the radical anonymity that marks the possibility of the sign's apprehension are thus figured as a sensuous experience and becomes sublime intuition of the nation as this flag, anthem, building, cultural monument. Sensuous tokens of lack, … these signs are in a quite precise sense the fetishes of an imagined nation.[21]

Overarching the entire poem's appeal, and underwriting Scott's risk in creating the book, then, depends upon Scott's ability to conjure up a decisive break from a feudal past while, at the same time, making it appear aesthetically desirable as a vague point of origin from which the present might come together as a nation in its wake. It is a risky slight of hand that places the present in line with the past, and the past into a printed page to be circulated, yet perhaps not in the same sense as the beacons of war blaze in the poem itself, where we "let our beacon blaze, / Our kin, and clan, and friends to raise;" rather, it offers *nostalgic* site of national consciousness to be read by others outside of particular borders, or who have different interests in reading. Margaret, one of the lovers of the marriage plot of the poem, who is dreaming on the western star and playing her lute, for "lovers love the western star," seemingly and harmlessly misreads one of the beacon fires. Yet, she looks again, and asks, "Is yon red glare the western star? / O, 'tis the beacon-blaze of war!" What is it that allows Margaret to very fortunately recognize her misrecognition? The deceptiveness of the lute and its music makes Margaret *see* differently, initially; it makes her experience a signal to rouse the nation as a reflection of

[21] Marc Redfield, *The Politics of Aesthetics: Nationalism, Gender, Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford

her own forbidden love, one that is as arbitrarily willed ("lovers love the western star") as the beacon fires themselves, which have no other origin save in unremembered tradition and mechanical repetition. Individual concern, here, and personal interest, much like the individual loyalties of the clan, must be placed beneath the threat of national war, but there is no real basis for that recognition except Margaret's strange and *willed* re-reading. Or is it the Minstrel? Again, we are unsure, as the Minstrel distances himself from authorship as much as Scott distances himself from the Minstrel.

As a highly controlled and marketed synesthesia, the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* is essential to an understanding of Keats' poetic technique, the 'negative capability' of his art and, as such, a more healthy "vulgarity" than that which was attributed to Keats by his contemporary reviewers; in this sense, Scott could be a part of a historical moment in which antiquarianism, as a kind of personal taste for antiquities, is merely *willed* into what Adorno has called "museum culture" as a complex site of national memory and the mourning of *our* past. Certainly, Keats' poems are more richly invested with objects that have a profoundly dispossessive effect on subjectivity, yet Scott anticipates this problematic through an imagined reading of the past of the nation and its (strangely) more concrete, more *present*, and therefore threatening, status than our present.

In the end, the *Lay* performs a complex interplay between the various texts within the book. Langan's insightful reading into Scott's poem resists these possibilities, and deconstructs her own argument, by stating that the book within the text is the key to a reading of the *Lay*: "though the nested narrative structure of the poem might seem to lead

University Press, 2003), 55.

us ever inward, the blank at the poem's center turns the inside out, so to speak, and suggests the relevance of another medium – the *telegraph*, not the book – as a possible structural paradigm" (66). Langan fails to realize that using the telegraph as a structural image, or, for that matter, the sublime and monumentally "nested narrative structure," are already idealized images of the book as the site of a historical change from the oral to the written, from the spoken to the printed, or, in other words, as a problematic, telegraphic model of human consciousness. Troubling figures of that transfer are found throughout the poem, and, indeed, struggle against each other: from the goblin page who has no loyalties except to his own desire to "(omit) still / no opportunity of ill," to the daughter who refuses to follow her mother's wishes, to the Minstrel himself, characters see what they *wish* to see. If the telegraph is working in this poem, then it acts as a transfer both into and out of the poem; the book moves the reader *into* the two worlds of the past through idealization and imagination while, at the same time, drawing into doubt how that synthetic ideal is effected through the material presentation of historical information, planned images, etc., in the book itself. The past of the *Lay* is already burdened with the misrecognition that subtends aesthetic self-forgetfulness through the project of desire. In this sense, Scott's expensive, tightly controlled productions are tied up with the economic possibility of feeling a deep connection with an imaginary, invisible nation.

Here, we may come full circle towards the ways that the material presentation of the text returns to a particular origin: the local knowledge and structure of loyalties that work in opposition to, yet are shown as leading towards, a more general sense of nostalgia for the nation and that mark the feudal consciousness in the poem are translated

into the book. The past becomes interiorized as *our* past because we recognize it in the present, or because we value the pleasant, imaginary dissolution it offers our gaze, and this marks a particular, if hallucinogenic, limit to the object status of the past. While the subject can still be loyal to general interests of the nation in times of strife, as the Napoleonic Wars and potential invasion provided for Scott's Scotland, the *personal* past is cordoned off and contained by the book, not as a space that is acknowledged as set apart from the general interests of the nation, but as an aesthetic substitution of that space. In this sense, Scott, Scotland and the book itself, straddle an imagined line between the past and the present, between England and France, between the old loyalties and the historically contingent *need* to be organized as a nation. Lukács's historical necessity, written into the traumatic experience of its subjects, emerges as an idea contained by history. If it is a telegraphic carrier of information *from* the past, the book also acts as a kind of relay system within which the imagination is free to work *in* the past.

So, what we might be able to say with more certainty is that these modes of reading the book always seems to come *after* the book itself; the telegraph, the relays, the imaginary, symbolic, figural, and so forth, must posit the *book* as a site of transcendental consciousness, and not mere mechanical transcribing and endless iteration. Like many of Scott's books, the *Lay* is itself already an anthology acting as a knowledgeable collection that ironically distances itself *from* itself, a recollection of different modes and genres, and of "descriptions of manners" from the past. The passionate, ideological attachment to the nation as a mode of mystical or magical possession *by* the past, as evidence of an

unbroken Burkean inheritance that speaks through and embodies the present, is transformed into a possession *of* the past. The text of the *Lay* becomes a site of seemingly benign amnesia that requires a kind of proper tuning into the past as it is broadcast.

In this chapter, I have contended that Scott's employs partial amnesia and the selective forgetting of the physical or material past in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* beneath the restoration of a "healthy" recording of history as *nostalgia* in order to "cure" the revolutionary melancholy of the late eighteenth-century, understood by Scott to have developed from a use of reason that had been tainted by a diseased imagination and the loss of historical perspective. Whether or not one agrees with the exigency of Scott's displacement of the recent, revolutionary past outside the boundaries of the nation and well-defined domestic spaces, it seems clear that Scott was himself aware of the effects of his narrative's tendencies to remove both the perceived threats of revolution or invasion and those elements of the past that he seems to value. The value of the quasi-bourgeois world that Waverley enters at the conclusion to their *Bildungsroman*-like narratives can be discovered in the losses that accrue between the intimate acquaintance that the *Lay*'s Deloraine has with a physically known space at the Anglo-Scottish border and the vaguely defined sense of allegiance to a "Caledonia" that the Minstrel feels for his "native land;" in other words, written into the modern world as Scott perceives it is both a memory of the principles that it has retained from the past, both loyalty and violence, and its necessary forgetting. Ian Duncan and Marilyn Orr have developed insightful arguments that the ideological trajectory of the Waverley novels leads towards

the legitimation of the reading practices that seek to define the novels themselves.[22] If these novels are, in the words of Ian Duncan, "consumed" (15), then Scott also seems to understand that the *consumption* of historical fiction is, like the disease, also a signal of historical decay, wasting away and waste.

Is this dual consumption of the romance both *within* and *of* Scott's texts a consumption, or wasting away, of their aura of authenticity as well? Or, as Weber has suggested regarding the aura, does authenticity *thrive* in its decline, and is this decline productive of nostalgia? As Langan seems to suggest, the hallucinatory play of an in-between time, the time of tuning into the past from the present within the present, takes place on a blank screen of partial amnesia in which reading is a touring and turning of the past into the present. Scott represents within his poems appeals to both an aristocratic group of readers, as in the group of listeners in the *Lay*, and to popular crowds, as in representation of the pageantry and entertainment in the feudal games in *The Lady of the Lake*. As Andrew Lincoln has suggested, Scott seems to hedge his recasting of history with an acknowledgment that his own texts may themselves become the stuff of mere entertainment and fantasy: "Scott … insists on the deceptive nature of romance imaginings, and emphasizes their *distance* from the contemporary world even as he suggests their relevance to that world" (6, my emphasis). If we keep in mind the arguments of Langan and Felluga, who both employ Benjamin's notion of the aura in a discussion of Scott's development of a poetic technology that illusively mediates an immediate apperception of sensory experience, the question of *distance* that Lincoln uses

[22] Duncan, *Modern Transformations*, 15. Also, see Orr, 729.

in a discussion of Scott's poems becomes crucial. Indeed, Benjamin states that the aura of a work of art is that which absorbs attention and, consequently, develops the notion of the individual reader or spectator: "a man who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it. He enters into this work of art the way legend tells of the Chinese painter when he viewed his finished painting" (239). [23] As Rodolphe Gasché has noted, "concentration, contemplation, absorption presuppose a single spectator, or very few, who in front of the authentic, authoritative artwork lack the power to control themselves or each other."[24]

This depiction of the individual who has fallen into the artwork that he has created calls to mind Godwin's Fleetwood, in fact, who finds it hard to discover the difference between the representations he has crafted and the reality to which they fail to fully refer. Mesmerized by the working of his imagination, Fleetwood is alternately fascinated by and repelled from the fictions he creates about his past. His use of memory to recall moments of self-forgetfulness, or moments from the past to which he must lay claim even as he tries to alienate himself from the feeling he associates with these events, establishes a distance between himself and his memories. Indeed, Fleetwood's projects his memories upon an alluring, powerful blank screen that transforms feelings of guilt into a kind of guilt-less consumption of his own past. This literal absorption of the powers of temporal distance as the powers of the imagination leaves its traces in Fleetwood's text, marked out on its surface in moments of self-forgetful usage of other texts and other

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[23] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 247.
[24] Rodolphe Gasché, "Cutting in on Distance," in *Of Minimal Things: Studies On the Notion of Relation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 97.

voices, beneath which Fleetwood absconds his past. Recollecting the frequent allusions to Milton, Fleetwood's hopes to find an appropriate audience ironically, given that the possibility of finding a sympathetic audience from among an anonymous reading public that he would in all likelihood hold in the greatest contempt, Fleetwood is perhaps doomed to be the only sympathetic reader of his confessions. Indeed, we might suppose this perspective is a sublimated version of Godwin's own feelings of betrayal and bitterness; thought of as a fall from political prominence to being a marketer of children's fiction, Godwin may also have felt more than a slight contempt for the readers of his day.

Scott's use of the aura, on the other hand, dresses this absorptive sense of individual experience with the character of heroes of the past who become unconscious victims to a society that is unaware that their consumption of entertaining fictions ultimately dooms their *real* presence. In other words, it is because we recollect forgotten pasts that they cannot return or exist as such in the present. In a passage from *The Lady of the Lake*, Roderick Dhu, the sympathetic anti-hero of Scottish nationalism and a Highland chieftain, is mortally wounded and captured by the disguised British king. In his prison cell, he asks the minstrel of his enemy to sing songs of ancient battles. The minstrel looks towards Roderick as he is playing and discovers that he has died during the singing:

> Oft had he stolen a glance, to spy
> How Roderick brooked his minstrelsy:
> At first, the Chieftain, to the chime,
> With lifted hand kept feeble time;
> That motion ceased,--yet feeling strong
> Varied his look as changed the song;
> At length, no more his deafened ear
> The minstrel melody can hear;

> His face grows sharp,--his hands are clenched'
> As if some pang his heart-strings wrenched;
> Set are his teeth, his fading eye
> Is sternly fixed on vacancy;
> Thus, motionless and moanless, drew
> His parting breath stout Roderick Dhu!--
> Old Allan-bane looked on aghast,
> While grim and still his spirit passed;
> But when he saw that life was fled,
> He poured his wailing o'er the dead. (VI, xxi, 590-607)

This remarkable passage describing the death of Roderick as the death of a hero, in many respects, describes the gradual decay of his senses and fading out of his figure for both the reader and the minstrel, Allan-bane: he loses an ability to keep time with the song, which prefaces his loss of hearing and loss of vision, to his loss of motion and speech, and, finally, to Allan-bane's Gothic witnessing the "still" passage of his spirit. While Roderick may *see* himself as a hero of old, he is absorbed by the poetic *meter*: in a moment of self-conscious reflection, Scott calls attention to his own work as a poet, overlapping Allan-bane's song with his own, such that "to the chime, / With lifted hand kept feeble time." Russett has noted in her reading of Scott's seeming indebtedness to Coleridge's *Christabel* that it is Coleridge, in fact, who owes a debt to Scott: "Coleridge's debt to Scott consists in the deferred action that locates voice in transmission rather than expressive origin. Understood in this way, the concept points as much to the empirical author's absence as to any assumption of presence—and to the reconstitution of subjectivity as a formalism that is nothing but this history of transmission" (791-2). The transmission of the minstrel's lay in the scene involving Roderick Dhu signals Roderick's allegiance to the songs of old and to the minstrel. How does this take place? Listening to

Allan-bane is represented in this sense through Roderick's ability, even on the verge of losing his life, to *keeping time*. Almost unconsciously, Scott's representation of Roderick's death-scene writes him into the noble history that absorbs his (temporal) attention. Roderick keeps time as much as time will keep him by writing him into Scott's own verse.

While the great emotional poignancy of the scene is found in the death of the hero and Allan-bane's lament, it is also found in the "*feeble* time" that Roderick manages to keep. Mortally wounded, of course, one would imagine Roderick waving his hand lightly in the air. Yet Scott also signals that Roderick is already and sadly a part of the historical time that finds it difficult to keep time with the past; Scott indicates this in the passages that describe the crowd's absent-minded enjoyment of the pageantry of the fair and the story of Robin Hood and Friar Tuck: "Now, in the Castle-park, drew out / Their checkered bands the joyous rout. / There morricers, with bell at heel / And blade in hand, their mazes wheel; / But chief, beside the butts, there stand / Bold Robin Hood and all his band,-- / Friar Tuck with quarterstaff and cowl" (5:22, 1-7). In the scene of Roderick's death, Scott demonstrates how a heroic figure is carried away by the song he hears and responds to its meter in a moment that confirms his heroic stature through his response to the song; in the pageant scene, Scott provides readerly self-confirmation by including a textual footnote that explains the origins of the festival and contest involving Robin Hood.

Scott's representation of heroic verse as employing meter as a way to confirm its continuation through self-forgetful, unconscious identification through repetition is offset

by the gesture towards an explanatory footnote for a form of popular entertainment. Scott seems to mournfully acknowledge an oscillatory, readerly rhythm, into and out of the body of the poem, that keeps time with the limits of his own strangely bifurcated textual apparatus: historical knowledge that responds to its own absence in the representation of popular entertainment in the wake of the hero's real, physical and irrecoverable demise in Scott's own "feeble time." In many respects, Godwin would agree with Scott's assessment of the "feeble time" of their era, yet they express this disaffection differently. Although Godwin confronts the political and moral apathy of his audience head-on from a dispassionate position that hides a bitter, self-accusatory misanthropy, Scott seems to disguise his own skepticism towards his audience, one that enjoys his work as popular entertainment as if it were a form of knowing the past, though his use the different frames and paratexts that accompany his tales. Scott's ambiguous disparagement of written history, in favor of the oral transmission of texts in the scene of Roderick's death, can be found in his early efforts as a translator.

In 1799, Scott translated Goethe's *Sturm und Drang* drama, *Götz von Berlichingen*, and clearly meant to indicate the *Fleetwood*-like sentimental value of the narrative by designating Goethe as "Author of 'The Sorrows of Werter'" on the title page of the first pressing. According to Kenneth Weisinger, *Götz* is about the demise of a more robust feudal era during the ascendancy of an aristocratic, courtly culture that enforces abstract, written laws.[25] The hero, Götz, decides to write his own autobiographical history in order to leave a trace of his life for a future that will be

different from his own. Weisinger states that the scene in which Götz writes own his history shows how "Götz becomes fully aware of his own historical dimension and this awareness is as debilitating as it is illuminating. … It is a supreme act of self-interpretation that Götz has begun to write his autobiography and the task is clearly uncongenial to him. The final act of the play is a long exemplification of the fact presented in the last scene of Act IV (in which he writes his history): Götz is no longer the simply, unreflecting tool of his own will. Götz tries to fit himself into a role of action in the world once again, but now victory eludes him as mysteriously as it once crowned his simple unreflective spontaneity" (227-8). Unlike Götz, Roderick is spared the debilitation of having to write his own history. Allan-bane surrounds Roderick with oral tales and songs that confirm his place in the past he wishes to inhabit. In Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, nostalgia and allegiance to the past are based, in this sense, on the fading from presence of the past as a historically *known* time and into the book as the generator and object of forgetfulness.

[25] Kenneth Weisinger, "*Götz von Berlichingen*: History Writing Itself," *German Studies Review* (May 1986; 9 (2)).

Conclusion

While writing his own history when imprisoned in his castle, the eponymous hero of Goethe's 1773 *Sturm und Drang* drama, *Götz von Berlichingen*, expresses a sentiment that seems to haunt the three writers that I have discussed in this dissertation:

> This idleness is distasteful to me, and the limits imposed on me get narrower from day to day; I wish I could sleep, or at least deceive myself into thinking that peace and quiet were something pleasant. … Alas! Writing is a busy form of idleness; it does not bring pleasure. When I write about what I have done, I get angry about the loss of time when I could still do something."[1]

For Smith, Godwin, and Scott, the connection between *writing* as a way to record the desire to forget about the present or reconfigure its meaning, and the ability to meaningfully and ethically *act* in a world that is overwhelmingly haunted by the past has been radically broken. Driven by a sense of "the loss of time" or times that are, in Hamlet's phrase, "out of joint," Smith, Godwin, and Scott attempt to find distinct ways of preserving the feeling of being forgotten through the passage of time, as well as the feelings that must be forgotten in the act of recording what we may term the "loss of time."

For Charlotte Smith, pleasing oblivion and self-forgetful poetic consolation no longer operate in a world that seems to have passed beyond the time in which such consolation would be possible. Invoking a Petrarchan spirit of paradoxical and shifting

[1] Goethe, "Götz von Berlichingen" in *Early Verse Drama and Prose Plays*, ed. Cyrus Hamlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 65.

positions between poetic subjectivity and objectivity that is replayed without conclusion and repeated over and over again in her own poems, Smith gives voice to a more radical forgetting that can only be heard in negating the very self-forgetful consolation that she seems to seek. Her turn from the deceptive, deconstructing "long mirrors" of the Mother in *The Emigrants* to the "long murmurs" that are heard in the hearts of her future readers signals both an acceptance of the death of empirical memory and experience in human mortality as the price that must be paid for a future that would escape the self-centered melancholy of the *Elegiac Sonnets*. In *Beachy Head*, the historical past becomes open to interpretations that must proceed without a sense of certainty or viable context. Considered as a reflection on the present, Smith seems to suggest that her own poems will have lost the feeling with which she has invested them; like the strange bivalves and volutes the poet discovers on the cliffs of Dover, Smith's poems will become mysterious or illegible because they are merely the fragments that have survived the loss of a past, historical "context" which no longer exists.

In his diatribe against Parliament, Godwin's Fleetwood lashes out at the spirit of conquest, irrational violence and coldly calculating commercial interests than defines his time; however, in demonstrating that Fleetwood is doomed to embody these spirits in his own domestic space and paternal estate, Godwin gestures towards a fatal sense of hopelessness for the present and provides a hope for the future that can only be glimpsed through its negation. The possibility of a progressive future for Godwin could not be clearly embraced; it was shapeless, formless, posited in an unknowable elsewhere or other time that could only be referenced negatively in the forgetting of the present. Feeling like a revolutionary who had outlived the Revolution with which he will be

forever associated, Godwin invested his later novels and works with a sense of ending that can never end enough, invoking a revolutionary consciousness that no longer had a revolution to fight.

The persistence of reason in the post-Enlightenment era delivers to feeling its fate of being subjected to close analysis. It is always within Fleetwood's discretion as a judge to adjudicate his feelings. Numerous studies have attempted to read Godwin's texts through the lens of Freud, and there is good reason to do so. To open up distance between the two, however, we might suggest that Godwin, in preceding Freud, did not carve out a space within which feelings or experiences from the past would be permanently housed; rather, to exist at all, feelings, Godwin would say, *must* have a reason because only those feelings that have been corrupted by reason can be recognized or made legible in their absence. Through an imaginary relationship with Chaucer and the experimental "Sepulchral Atlas" as a book of *impersonal* memory, Godwin models a future reading for his own works that is based on sympathetic connection and revivified feelings that are not subjected to a rational forgetfulness of feeling found in the excesses of self-analytical inquiry that define the individual. Feeling exceeds the control of the individual because feeling must always reflect on an individual who suffers torments that exceed understanding.

In the end, I hope that the authors I have studied here can be understood, as Godwin might have it, as giving shape to our own world and reminding us that our own experiences are not always our own. Sylviane Agacinski's *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia* is a book that has inspired this study, and seems to provide a fitting final note to the analyses contained herein regarding the relationship of the present to the past in our

own time.[2] For Agacinski, "each generation is called on a new to experience the test of time. But what does *to pass* mean for us if neither eternity nor history any longer gives meaning to that passage? The vertiginous effect of the worlds' irreversibility is mitigated only by the possibility of enduring, which is the fruit of repetition and reproduction" (10). It is technology, for Agacinski, that provides for the passage from the past to the present, even if it means that "our world, overpopulated by images, makes us live among crowds of phantoms and doubt the homogeneity of our times" (10). For Smith, Godwin, and Scott, the world was indeed "overpopulated by images" and made them "live among crowds of phantoms." Yet, as Agacinski remarks, in concert with Godwin, reason alone cannot distinguish the real from its hallucinated images and phantoms: "as a calculating power, reason can serve the most sinister ambitions and is no guarantee – we know only too well – against any sort of madness" (163). Given the limits of reason, Agacinski asks the following questions: "to be moved to reason, to feel and to judge, are these necessarily contradictory? Should we reason without emotion and without any passion?" (163). Rather than providing answers to these questions, I would argue that Smith, Godwin, and Scott all seem to pose these questions to us *as* urgent questions, and that they, like us, struggle to find the ability to keep feeling from being forgotten within the very forms that seem designed to preserve it.

[2] Sylviane Agacinski, *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia*, trans. Jody Gladding (New York: Columbia UP, 2003).

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