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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English

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Hazardous Experiments: The Elusive Prefaces of
William Godwin, Mary Hays, William Wordsworth, and Percy Bysshe Shelley

by

Jeffrey W. Miles

Graduate Program in English

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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**Hazardous Experiments: The Elusive Prefaces of
William Godwin, Mary Hays, William Wordsworth,
and Percy Bysshe Shelley**

is accepted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Date _____

Chair of the Thesis Examination Board

—ABSTRACT—

This study analyzes the prefaces of four Romantic-period writers: William Godwin, Mary Hays, William Wordsworth, and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Historically, the preface can be traced back to the *insinuatio* of classical rhetoric, the purpose of which is to evade audience hostility for writers presenting a bad case. Given the repressive political and cultural atmosphere of the Romantic period, writers like Godwin, Hays, Wordsworth, and Shelley, idealists who seek to disseminate radical ideas in an era of state censorship, must devise a strategy to convey their messages without attracting attention to their subversiveness. Thus, all four writers continually preface their works with ‘elusive’ prefaces, a strategy through which they seek to downplay or elide their radical subject-matter.

Chapter One analyzes William Godwin’s prefaces to *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* as a prototype of the elusive preface, through which the urgency and force of his prefatory rhetoric contrasts with the message of gradualism he seeks to convey in the treatise. His novel *Caleb Williams*, whose first edition preface was suppressed by the publisher for its seditious content, incorporates its preface as an extradiegetic layer of the novel, a technique that Mary Hays will also incorporate in her *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, a novel that deploys its elusive preface to placate a middle-class reading audience and to address simultaneously a Dissenting public sphere. Tracing the evolution of Hays’ prefatory author-figure from her early pamphlet *Cursory Remarks on an Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship: Inscribed to Gilbert Wakefield* to her last novel, *The Victim of Prejudice*, Chapter Two demonstrates how Hays’ rhetorical subterfuge allows her to assert her right to philosophy while ostensibly adhering to conventional poses of femininity.

Prose writers like Godwin and Hays seek to convey their idealistic messages to a generally prosaic reading public, making their prefatory *insinuatio* especially significant. But poets like Wordsworth and Shelley face an especially difficult task in establishing themselves as socially relevant in an age during which poetry is becoming an outmoded form of discourse. Thus, Chapter Three demonstrates how Wordsworth in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads* becomes increasingly absorbed with the task of establishing the poet’s professional autonomy as he argues for his poetry’s power to rouse a degraded nation from its moral and cultural lethargy. Throughout the four editions of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth continues to expand his preface and his poetic persona. By the time of his 1815 *Poems*, he has abandoned the mass audience he once sought to enlighten, instead appealing to a future generation of readers whom he calls upon to vindicate him. Shelley also faces audience hostility, and his attempts to convey his radical beliefs are thwarted by a public sphere whose *ad hominem* attacks against him hinder his ability to achieve his goals. Chapter Four chronicles Shelley’s immersion in romantic irony, through which his prefaces are characterized by a disjunction between his idealism and his dissociation from his given actuality.

Keywords: (1) Godwin, William 1756-1836. Criticism and Interpretation. (2) Hays, Mary 1759 or 60-1843. Criticism and Interpretation. (3) Wordsworth, William 1770-1850. Criticism and Interpretation. (4) Shelley, Percy Bysshe 1792-1822. Criticism and Interpretation. (5) Literary Form.

—ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS—

First, I wish to thank my advisors Tilottama Rajan and Joel Faflak for their unflagging support. At every stage throughout the process, from proposal to field study to chapter revisions to the final draft, they generously contributed to the development of the thesis in very significant ways. Even in the midst of difficult and challenging times, they continually kept me focused with their positivity and meticulous attention to the nuances of my argument. Their integrity and high intellectual standards have profoundly affected me in personal ways that go well beyond the boundaries of professional duty.

I also wish to thank Fanshawe College for supporting me financially during the final three years of my Ph.D. Thanks to the college's financial support, I was able to finish the thesis without the additional pressures of incurring excess debt. I thank my colleagues in the School of Language and Liberal Studies at Fanshawe for their collegiality, good humour, and intellectual engagement.

For always believing in me and persevering with me throughout this lengthy process, I thank my parents and first teachers, Tony and Nancy, who have ardently encouraged me throughout my educational career, and to them I owe a debt of gratitude that I can never repay. My children, Gabriel and Heidi, were babies in the infancy of this thesis, and now they are beautifully flowering children. I also wish to acknowledge Amy and Jason Winders, Andrew Vivona, Jayne and Steve Simon, Drew White, Harry Gorman, Roger Leavens, and Fraser Nixon.

Finally, and mostly, I thank Ann, whose brightness and lightness inspire me every day. This is for you.

—ABBREVIATIONS—

- EY*: Wordsworth, William. *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years, 1787-1805*. 2nd Edition. Vol. 1. Ed. Ernest De Selincourt. Rev. Chester L. Shaver. Oxford: Clarendon, 1967. Print.
- LB*: Wordsworth, William. *Lyrical Ballads, and other Poems, 1797-1800*. Ed. James Butler and Karen Green. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992. Print.
- MHI*: Hays, Mary. *The Idea of Bing Free: A Mary Hays Reader*. Ed. Gina Luria Walker. Peterborough: Broadview, 2006. Print.
- MY*: Wordsworth, William. *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years: Part II, 1812-1820*. 2nd Edition. Ed. Ernest de Selincourt. Rev. Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill. Oxford: Clarendon, 1970. Print.
- PJ*: Godwin, William. *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. Ed. Mark Philp. Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin. Vol. 3 (1st edition). London: William Pickering, 1993. Print.
- PJV*: Godwin, William. *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. Ed. Mark Philp. Political And Philosophical Writings of William Godwin. Vol. 4 (Variants). London: William Pickering, 1993. Print.
- PBSL*: Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. 2 Vols. Ed. Frederick L. Jones. Oxford: Clarendon, 1964. Print.
- PS*: Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *The Poems of Shelley*. Vol 2. Ed. Kelvin Everest and Geoffrey Matthews. New York: Pearson, 2000. Print.

- PW*: Wordsworth, William. *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*. Vol. 1. Ed. W.J.B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1974. Print.
- SP*: Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Selected Poetry and Prose*. Ed. Kenneth Neill Cameron. New York: Rinehart, 1953. Print.
- SPP*: Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*. Ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat. New York: Norton, 2002. Print.
- UH*: White, Newman Ivey, ed. *The Unextinguished Hearth: Shelley and his Contemporary Critics*. New York: Octagon Books, 1966. Print.
- WCH*: Woof, Robert, ed. *Wordsworth: The Critical Heritage*. Vol. 1 1793-1820. London and New York: Routledge, 2001. Print.
- WLC*: Wordsworth, William. *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism*. Ed. W. J. B. Owen. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974. Print.
- WPS*: Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *The Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Ed. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck. 10 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927. Print.

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—INTRODUCTION—

“A Preface is written to a public; a thing I cannot help looking on as an Enemy, and which I cannot address without feelings of hostility” (129).

— John Keats To John Hamilton Reynolds, 9 April 1818

But Does a Preface Exist?

Keats’s remarks, the result of considerable anxiety over his preface to *Endymion*, embody many of the key aspects of preface writing in the Romantic period. The feelings of hostility towards his “Enemy”—the “public”—are typical of many of the period’s writers, whose unease about presenting their texts to the public is overdetermined by a complex nexus of institutional, ideological, and demographic factors. Keats’s remarks also perpetuate a facet of the Romantic poet myth, classifying him as a sensitive plant who loathes deigning to present his works to the public, a sentiment revealed elsewhere in his letter to Reynolds: “among Multitudes of Men—I have no feel of stooping, I hate the idea of humility to them” (129). And the fact that Keats cathects this anxiety onto the preface reveals its significance as a mediating device, the site within which the ‘author’ steps out to plead his or her case with the reader in an effort to influence interpretation. The liminality of *Endymion*’s preface, foregrounded by the stark juxtaposition between the preface’s prosaic terseness and the poem’s lavish versification, embodies the paradoxes of the prefatory figure constructed by Keats. The preface is separate from the poem, yet inextricably linked to it: having encountered the ‘Keats’ of the preface, the reader identifies the ‘I’ of the poem with the hesitant prefatory figure, who has admitted to “a feeling of regret” for publishing a poem

characterized by its “great inexperience, immaturity, and every error denoting a feverish attempt” (11).

Paradoxically, however, the very presence of *Endymion*'s preface undermines Keats's desire to construct the figure of a chameleon poet within its space. The original, unpublished, preface expresses Keats's disdain for prefaces generally: the work of an individual is so insignificant that a preface “seems a sort of impertinent bow to strangers who care nothing about it” (13). The function of a preface, according to Keats, is to “catch an idea of an Author's modesty, and non opinion of himself” (13). Ironically, then, Keats crafts two versions of a preface whose purpose is self-negation, to present a version of himself characterized, negatively, by his “non opinion.” As if to recognize the rhetorical potential of *prosopopoeia*, etymologically defined by Paul de Man as the “giving and taking away of faces” (“Autobiography” 76), Keats gives himself a face through his prefatory persona while simultaneously de-facing himself through repeated reference to the poet's lack of identity. Revealed through Keats's elaborate prefatory attempts to posit his (non) identity are the factors that generate his anxiety about publishing. Keats's anxieties about the imminent likelihood of hostile critical reception necessitating the preface are exposed by repeated references to critical reception in the unpublished preface (“In case of a London drizzle or a scotch Mist,” an anticipation of negative reviews from the *Quarterly* or the *Edinburgh Review*) and in the published preface (“This is not written with the least atom of purpose to forestall criticisms of course,” Keats disingenuously writes). And the final lines of the published preface—“I hope I have not in too late a day touched the beautiful mythology of Greece, and dulled its brightness” (11)—not only evince Keats's uncertainty about attempting to compose a poem in the epic mode, but also encapsulate a more general

reticence about belatedly publishing poetry in a prosaic age, a concern symptomatic of his stubborn compulsion to introduce a poem with a prose preface.

Keats's suspicion of prefaces, however, is very much in keeping with a more general critical tendency of questioning the preface's necessity, validity, or even its desirability. Jacques Derrida's "Outwork," the self-critical preface to his *Dissemination*, is perhaps the seminal poststructuralist analysis of prefaces; in its pages, Derrida exposes the paradoxical nature of the preface. Throughout his rigorous analysis of Hegel's preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Derrida continually interrogates the textual status of prefaces. "But does a preface exist?" (*Dissemination* 8), asks Derrida, in the context of an argument that repeatedly negates the very existence of prefaces as always having been written "in view of their own self-effacement" (7). Throughout his "Outwork," Derrida describes prefaces as, variously, "an empty husk, a piece of formal refuse, a moment of dryness or loquacity" (8), a "residue of writing" (8), "the site of . . . gossip small talk" (9), "neither useful or even possible" (9), and the "excrement of philosophical essentiality" (10). With his skepticism about the use-value of prefaces, Derrida follows Hegel, who, in his preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, chides prefaces for their irrelevance, accusing them of being "superfluous . . . even inappropriate and misleading" (qtd. in Derrida, *Dissemination* 10). The philosophical concept, which should be capable of presenting itself, finds itself expounded by an external form of discourse that objectifies what should have been spontaneously produced by its own workings. Derrida asks: "isn't the preface both negated and internalized in the presentation of philosophy by itself, in the self-production and self-determination of the concept?" (11). The irony, of course, is that both Hegel's and Derrida's criticisms of prefaces—like Keats's original preface to *Endymion*—are contained within prefaces, thus implicitly negating the content of their arguments through their association

with an allegedly redundant and superfluous form. Even more ironic is the fact that Hegel's preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which expresses Hegel's contempt for prefaces, has become a sort of general introduction to Hegel's philosophical system,¹ embodying the prefatory logic described by Charles Eliot in his introduction to *Prefaces and Prologues to Famous Books* (1910): "each of them [the selected prefaces] has a value and significance independent now of the work which it originally introduced" (3). In this sense, prefaces certainly *do* exist, especially if they are capable of taking on a life of their own, extricated from the texts upon which their very existence has been predicated.²

Integral to Derrida's analysis are the paradoxes inherent within the preface's form, particularly its spatial and temporal violations. The preface "recreates the intention-to-say after the fact" (7), and although spatially and temporally detached from the work it presents, the preface nonetheless pretends to be part of it. The question of whether the preface exists inside or outside the work preoccupies Derrida in his "Outwork," and it also informs Gerard Genette's concept of the paratext. As defined by Genette, paratexts are "those liminal devices and conventions both within the book (peritext) and outside it (epitext), that

¹ Hugh Pyper points out this irony, noting that Walter Kaufmann's *Hegel: Texts and Commentary* includes the *Phenomenology of Spirit*'s preface as a stand-alone text with commentary and epigraphs from Rudolf Haym and Hermann Glockner claiming that "whoever understands this preface has mastered Hegel's philosophy" (74). Thus, the *Phenomenology* becomes an "appendix to the self-sufficient preface" (74). Derrida's tongue-in-cheek claim in *Dissemination* that "the preface is everywhere; it is bigger than the book" (42) is realized in this instance. One could also classify Wordsworth's preface to *Lyrical Ballads* as such an instance, in which the preface is "everywhere," taking on a life of its own, subsuming not only the individual poems and the book to which it is affixed, but even in some cases subsuming the entire Romantic period for those who pinpoint the *Ballads*' publication as an origin of British Romanticism.

² Kierkegaard, in his 1844 book *Prefaces*, takes the preface to its *ad absurdum* limit, writing a book of prefaces that, although labeled as prefaces, do not actually introduce anything. In his preface to *Prefaces*, Kierkegaard writes, "In relation to a book a prologue [preface] is a triviality, and yet by means of a more careful comparison of prologues, would not one gain an opportunity for observation at a bargain price! . . . Yet no one thinks about what might be gained if one or another *litteratus* could be trained only to read prologues, but to do it so thoroughly that he would begin with the earliest times and advance through all the centuries until our own day" (3). Kierkegaard's remarks playfully contradict Hegel's worry, expressed in his preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, that a reader who relies on reviews, introductory paragraphs, and prefaces for an understanding of a text, takes an intellectual journey "in his dressing-gown" (40) in contrast to the serious reader who, in search of "spiritual elation in the eternal, the sacred, the infinite, moves along the highway of truth in the robes of the high priests" (40).

mediate the book to the reader,” framing elements such as “titles and subtitles, pseudonyms, forewords, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, intertitles, notes, epilogues, and afterwords” (xviii). In essence, paratexts are what make a text into a book, the means through which a writer presents his or her text to the public. Paratexts surround and extend a book in order to present it, “in the usual sense of the verb, but also in its strongest sense: to *make present*, to ensure the text’s presence in the world, its ‘reception’ and consumption in the form . . . of a book” (1). Characterized by Genette as a site of “transaction” (2) between reader and text, paratexts contain within themselves the very contradictions elaborated by Derrida. In his preliminary definition of the concept of paratextuality, Genette cites J. Hillis Miller’s gloss on the prefix ‘para-’, teasing out the array of paradoxes associated with its “ambiguous meaning” (1): “‘Para’ is a double antithetical prefix signifying at once proximity and distance, similarity and difference, interiority and exteriority . . . something simultaneously this side of a boundary line, threshold or margin, and also beyond it” (qtd. in Genette, 1). Crucial, therefore, to theoretical discussions of paratexts is this problematical notion of the preface’s location in relation to the text it introduces. But as I hope to demonstrate throughout this study, the spatio-temporal indeterminacy of the preface’s textual status is precisely what generates its peculiar effects. My readings are predicated on the hypothesis that prefaces, because of their liminality, inscribe the occasional, particular exigencies of their texts’ historical moment ‘inside’ the text even in situations when the texts seek to detach themselves from their own historicity, through a narrative method I outline in Chapter One. Keats’s preface to *Endymion*, for instance, recontextualizes the poem as a rather belated attempt at composing a poem in the style of a Greek epic, by a poet well aware of its defects and of the probability of negative reception. Without the preface, this subtext would be completely absent, as would the insertion of the nervous poet-figure into the space of the

poem; despite its paucity relative to the poem it introduces, the preface radically alters one's reading of the poem.

Within this context of the preface's paradoxical interiority and exteriority, I will briefly distinguish prefaces from two other common 'front-matter' paratexts: the introduction and the prologue. For the purposes of this study, I designate any body of text separated from the main text and marked as a preface or advertisement³ as a preface (although in one case, Mary Hays's preface to her *Cursory Remarks*, the preface is not marked as such, but it does function exactly like a preface as I will demonstrate in Chapter Two). The fundamental distinction between prefaces, on the one hand, and introductions and prologues on the other, stems from what William Harmon and Hugh Holman identify as the preface's defining characteristic: the preface is a "statement at the beginning of a book or article—and separate from it" (406). The separateness of the preface distinguishes it from the prologue and introduction, as the latter two tend to be less ambiguously incorporated into the texts they introduce. Introductions, for instance, differ from prefaces because an introduction, unlike the more liminal preface, is linked to the text it introduces as a systematic preview of the text's structure.⁴ Prologues, similarly, also differ from prefaces

³ Paul Magnuson's gloss on the advertisement emphasizes its connection with elusive prefaces as a rhetorical reaction to a hostile publishing climate: "Advertisement is a trope of public mediation, an advertising toward the subject but at the same time an averting (from its medieval French origins in *avertissement*), a turning away. The OED thus lists one historical meaning of advertisement as a warning or admonition. For example, the Advertisement to *Lyrical Ballads* warns a reader against expecting traditional poetry. The word *advertisement* thus alerts a reader, not only to the public location of the themes, but also a certain evasiveness in the poem itself—a turning away at the same time—an evasiveness required by the political pressures of the day. The advertising and averting announce its rhetoric" (55). I will return to this notion of the advertisement in Chapter Three, linking the term's economic denotations with Magnuson's emphasis on the evasiveness of the *avertissement*.

⁴ A concise, modern distinction between introduction and preface is provided by Marjorie Skillin and Robert Malcolm Gay: "A preface or foreword deals with the genesis, purpose, limitations, and scope of the book and may include acknowledgments of indebtedness; an introduction deals with the subject of the book, supplementing and introducing the text and indicating a point of view to be adopted by the reader. The introduction usually forms a part of the text [and the text numbering system]; the preface does not" (46). Following a similar scheme, Derrida distinguishes the two terms: "The introduction [Einleitung] has a more systematic, less historical, less circumstantial link with the logic of the book. It is *unique*; it deals with general

through their connection with the play they introduce. In ancient drama, the prologue denotes everything that happens before the entrance of the chorus; its function, according to Genette, is not to make a presentation, but to “provide an exposition in the dramatic sense of the word – most often . . . in the form of a scene in dialogue, but sometimes . . . in the form of a character’s monologue” (166). Prefaces to dramatic works certainly do exist—in the Romantic period, for instance, Baillie’s *Plays on the Passions* are prefaced by a lengthy “Introductory Discourse”; Shelley’s dramas *Hellas*, *The Cenci*, and *Prometheus Unbound* are all prefaced, as is Byron’s *Cain*. But what distinguishes prefaces from prologues is the fact that prefaces, unlike prologues, are not part of the play’s action. Rather, they are part of a play’s published edition, appearing as an author’s discussion before the text of the play. In this sense, the preface to a drama functions somewhat differently from a preface to a poem or a novel, as the novelistic and poetic prefaces can more easily be incorporated within their narrative structure as a distinct narrative level, whereas the preface to a drama is sealed off from its dramatic exposition. This distinction, however, only applies to a drama that is being performed; a prefaced drama being read functions exactly like any other type of prefaced text.

Of course, the practice of preface writing did not begin with the romantic period.⁵

The act of prefacing is, in various guises, as old as classical rhetoric itself: the preface can be

and essential architectonic problems; it presents the general concept in its division and in its self-differentiation. The Prefaces, on the other hand, are multiplied from edition to edition and take into account a more empirical historicity; they obey an occasional necessity” (*Dissemination* 14).

⁵ There is no comprehensive, definitive history of preface-writing. Genette traces the prefatory function (as distinct from its presentation, in book form, as demarcated from the text it introduces) as far back as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, as their opening lines invoke the muse, announce the subject, and establish the narrative starting point (164). In several of Livy’s *Roman History* books (59 BC – AD 17)—introduced by remarks traditionally called the *prae-fatio* (identified by Genette as the origin of the term preface)—he introduces himself, justifies the importance of his work, and lays out his method, commenting on his work in the first person, a “stance that would become characteristic of the modern preface” (165). See also Totosy de Zepetnek (5-21) for a related discussion of the history of preface-writing. Collections of prefaces include Gray’s *The Book of*

traced to the *exorde* of Classical Greek and Roman rhetoric,⁶ which include some “characteristically prefatorial” commonplaces, including “the difficulty of the subject, the statement of purpose, and the approach the speaker will take” (Genette 164). According to Genette, most of the “themes and techniques of the preface are in place as of the mid-sixteenth century” and the “subsequent variations do not reflect a true evolution but rather a set of varying choices within a repertory that is much more stable than one would believe *a priori*” (*Paratexts* 163). Given the significance of Wordsworth’s Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* to a Romantic-period poetics, and the undeniable popularity of prefaces in the period’s poetic, philosophical, novelistic, and dramatic productions, one would assume, as Scott Simpkins does, that there was an unprecedented “proliferation of textual supplements used by the English Romantic poets” (17). But if there was a “proliferation” of prefaces throughout the Romantic period, it has not been documented as no evidence yet exists to support such a claim, and I make no attempt at a comprehensive, statistical comparison of the era’s prefatory productions relative to, say, those of the eighteenth century and the Victorian period. Suffice it to say, however, that prefaces were certainly prevalent in the eighteenth century; in this sense, the Romantics inherited a textual tradition practiced by many of their most prominent predecessors. Individual poems, collections of poems, novels, journals, philosophical treatises, pamphlets, and dramas were all prefaced throughout the eighteenth

Prefaces, Wheatley’s *The Dedication of Books to Patrons and Friends* (1887), Lyle’s *Praise From Famous Men* (1977), and Grierson and Watson’s *The Personal Note* (1946).

⁶ See also Dunn, who situates his study of Renaissance preface-writing within the context of classical rhetoric, noting that its influences “account for the specific shape of not only early modern prefatory writing but modern ideas of authorship and rhetorical practice” (1) and Schell, who characterizes the Romantic preface as a version of the classical exordium.

century—not in all cases of course, but frequently enough to make prefaces a commonplace.⁷

As a strategy for mediating⁸ a text to its reading public, a preface necessarily entangles itself in the exigencies of the historical moment of its publication. Because they “obey an occasional necessity” and account for an “empirical historicity” (Derrida, *Dissemination* 14), prefaces provide an especially rich index of the intellectual climate within

⁷ Berkeley, for instance, prefaces his 1710 *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* with a challenge to readers “tainted with Scepticism, or want[ing] a Demonstration of GOD” (43) to “impartially Examine” the treatise’s conclusions to perceive the “Truth.” Even journals could be prefaced: Richard Steele begins Volume 4 of *The Tatler* with a preface that defends his journal against allegations of bias, combined with a brief moral diatribe against the “Gamesters” and “Duellists” who threaten the earnest English gentleman (346). Pope prefaces his *Iliad* with an elaborated gardening metaphor that roots the “wild Paradise” of Homer’s work in a relatively primitive Greek society, contrasted with a more cultivated “judicious and methodical” contemporary English poetic that parallels the development of a more refined social order, along with an extended discussion of Greek to English translation. Pope also prefaces his 1717 collected edition *The Works* with a preface denouncing malicious critics, defending himself against *ad hominem* attacks, and considering the relation of contemporary to ancient poets. His *Essay on Man* contains a prefatory “Design” and *An Epistle to Dr. Abuthnot* also contains an Advertisement that again responds to *ad hominem* attacks against him. Swift’s 1732 *The Beasts Confession* contains a preface and an advertisement. The first printed edition of Dryden’s drama *An Evening’s Love* was prefaced with a discussion of genre; his poem *Religio Laici Or A Laymans Faith* was also prefaced, as was his *Fables Ancient and Modern: Translated into Verse, from Homer, Ovid, Boccace and Chaucer: with Original Poems*, which ruminated on the translator’s task while presenting an extended critical comparison of Homer, Ovid, Chaucer, and Boccaccio. Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature* contains a brief preface informing the reader that “my design in the present work is sufficiently explain’d in the introduction” (i) and pointing out that “the approbation of the public I consider as the greatest reward of my labours” (i). Not only was Samuel Johnson’s preface to the *Plays of William Shakespeare* a landmark in Shakespeare criticism, but the first edition of his *Lives of the Poets* was entitled *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the Works of the English Poets*. Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English Language* also contained a lengthy preface that elaborates his method and delineates the book’s faults. Many influential novels were prefaced as well. The first edition of Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto*, for example, contains a fictional preface that claims the novel is the translation of a found artifact from sixteenth-century Italy, depicting events from, the translator conjectures, between 1095 and 1243. Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* is prefaced, as is Richardson’s *Clarissa*, and Defoe’s *Moll Flanders*. Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, characterized by its paratextual playfulness, begins with a “Memoir of the Author” and inserts “The Author’s Preface” midway through chapter sixty-four. This is, of course, not a comprehensive index of eighteenth-century prefaces, but it does demonstrate that prefaces were frequently used by writers of various genres. See also Jon Rowland, who analyzes some instances of the period’s prefaces in Swift and Marvell.

⁸ Frederick Jameson defines mediation, in the Marxist sense of the word, as the relation between levels and the adapting of findings from one level to another, or “the establishment of relationships between . . . the formal analysis of a work of art and its social ground, or between the internal dynamics of the political state and its economic base” (39). The analysis of mediations “aims to demonstrate what is not evident in the appearance of things, but rather in their underlying reality” (39). In this sense, my analysis of prefaces as mediating texts does consider the “underlying reality” revealed through prefatory nervousness, the uncovering of “social ground” otherwise buried or obscured without the mediating presence of the preface. My theoretical approach in this study could be labeled as formalist, in the sense that I seek to distinguish genera and species of introductory material; and broadly deconstructive, in the sense that I explore prefaces’ unsettling and unsettled relation to their texts.

which individual works are published. In this sense, even despite their formal similarities, what necessarily distinguishes prefaces of one historical period from another is how they bear the imprint of their historicity.⁹ Indeed, as Catherine Herrington-Perry remarks, the discrepancies between Romantic prefaces and earlier prefaces are “differences . . . of degree, not kind” (18).¹⁰ In other words, Romantic prefaces are overdetermined by historical forces endemic to the moment of their texts’ publications, forces absorbed into the mediating space of the preface and whose presence—latent or manifest—subtly alters how readers approach the texts. In keeping with Derrida’s emphasis on the “empirical historicity” of prefaces, I investigate how prefaces reveal their own historicity as a subtext¹¹ otherwise absent from non-prefaced works. Thus, my concern in this study is not with how the *form* of the preface changes in the romantic period—because, fundamentally, it does not—but rather how selected writers use a particular rhetorical strategy in their prefaces to negotiate their texts’ entry into a public sphere characterized, broadly, by three over-arching factors especially

⁹ Catherine Herrington-Perry notes that “The Romantic era preface did not diverge significantly from that handed down to it. Because of the period’s emphasis on individuality, for example, we might expect its prefaces to have been the first to focus on the development of the self. But this is not, strictly speaking, true. Using an author’s ethos to mediate a speech (or text) was a classical tradition, and filtering a text through a (conventionally defined) author was common long before the nineteenth century” (11). Herrington-Perry’s dissertation is, to date, the only full-length study of Romantic-period prefaces. In many ways, my study complements hers, as I am also interested in how the period’s writers rhetorically construct their prefaces to mediate their texts and I also use her observations about the historical consistency of prefatory form as a starting-point. But in addition to dealing with different authors and different texts, my study focuses more specifically on how the period’s prefaces incorporate details of their historical moments into the space of the text.

¹⁰ Examples of this difference of degree include intensified anxiety about originality, defensiveness about plagiarism, along with excessive and unnecessary clarifications of meaning (Herrington-Perry 18).

¹¹ My use of the term “subtext” here is informed by Tilottama Rajan’s definition. She defines the subtext as “a subversive and repressed text which is not consistent with the explicit text, in relation to which it stands as the subconscious to the conscious . . . the author is not wholly in control of his subtext” (*Dark Interpreter* 21). The subtext revealed through the uneasy and often contradictory relation between preface and main work demonstrates how prefaces betray an overdetermined historicity frequently at odds with the semantic intention of the prefaced work, the preface functioning as a shadowy manifestation of the period’s political unconscious.

significant for writers of the period. All three factors can be grouped under the rubric of a pervasive “anxiety of audience” (Bennett, *Keats* 41) afflicting the period’s writers, an anxiety symptomatic of any combination of these factors. One factor is the uncertainty confronting authors publishing their works in a rapidly expanding print marketplace with a fragmenting readership, policed by a highly critical anonymous reviewing system. A second factor is the always-looming threat of prosecution that characterized much of the Romantic period. The first- and second-generation Romantics alike risked sedition charges for subversive publication, a reflection of the era’s perpetual political turmoil. A third factor is the belatedness of writers seeking to reach a mass readership in a culture that has become, by the turn of the century, fundamentally prosaic.¹²

***Insinuatio* and the Elusive Preface**

As noted above, one can trace the preface’s roots back to the exordium of classical rhetoric. The first of six sections of an oratory, the exordium “brings the mind of the auditor into a proper condition to receive the rest of the speech” (Cicero 41). Like the preface, one of the exordium’s primary functions is to establish the speaker’s *ethos* for purposes of establishing credibility. Roman rhetoricians such as Cicero, building on

¹² I use the term “prosaic” in two senses. First, I incorporate the socio-linguistic aspect of the prosaic age from Hegel, who, in his *Aesthetics*, characterizes the nineteenth century as an “age of prose,” in which the language of poetry becomes increasingly artificial and incapable of “hitting the truth” (I: 1006). In this sense, the social function of the poet becomes increasingly vexed in the context of a linguistic disjunction between the discursive modes of poetry and prose, a difficulty I elaborate in Chapter Four. Secondly, I use the term in the more general sense of a culture that is fundamentally utilitarian and pragmatic, or in the words of an OED definition, “unromantic, dull, flat, unexciting, commonplace, mundane.” Goethe, in his 1817 essay “Geistesepochen” (translated as “Stages of Man’s Mind”) classifies his turn-of-the-century culture as “prosaic,” the final and lowest stage of a declining historical cycle, descending from the poetic to the theological to the philosophical to the prosaic. Characterized by its “dissolution into the ordinary” (204), Goethe’s prosaic age, “stimulated by events in the world, retrogresses and abandons the guidance of the intellect” (204). In a prosaic age, then, even prose writers like Godwin and Hays, who seek to mediate an idealistic project to a prosaic world, face considerable difficulty in disseminating their messages.

Aristotle,¹³ subdivided the *exordium* into two possible schemes: the *principium* and the *insinuatio*.¹⁴ The *principium* serves as a straightforward introduction to a speech that presents a non-controversial case, in which the auditors are “not completely hostile” (Cicero 43), a situation requiring no rhetorical chicanery. The *insinuatio*, however, becomes necessary in situations where the speaker anticipates hostility from his audience; as a result, he must resort to “dissimulation and indirection” (43) in order to insinuate his message into the auditor’s mind. The principal reason for the *insinuatio* is “if there is something scandalous in the case” (47). The concept of the *insinuatio* becomes especially relevant in the rhetorical situations of the four writers analyzed in this study: William Godwin, Mary Hays, William Wordsworth, and Percy Bysshe Shelley. All four writers, through the act of publishing texts antithetical to the prevailing hegemonic norms of their historical moments, are implicitly presenting a “bad” case. Aware that they are addressing audiences likely to be hostile to their ideas, all four writers craft their prefaces in the spirit of Cicero’s *insinuatio*. In this sense, I argue that what distinguishes the prefaces of Godwin, Hays, Wordsworth, and Shelley as distinctively ‘Romantic’—in the historical sense of a ‘Romantic’ period characterized by specific institutional and ideological discursive restrictions and interdictions—is their anxious and intensified recourse to *insinuatio*, as manifested in various ways through their prefaces.

¹³ In Book III of his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle elaborates the function of the exordium, highlighting its necessity in situations where the speaker with a “bad case” can anticipate hostility from his audience: “They, too, employ exordia who have, or appear to have, the worse case; for it is better to pause any where than on the case itself. On which account servants tell not what is asked them, but all the circumstances, and make long preambles” (254). This aspect of the exordium resembles certain types of polemical or defensive prefaces that employ such “long preambles” to deflect attention from potentially inflammatory texts.

¹⁴ Cicero identifies five kinds of cases to determine whether one should proceed with a *principium* or an *insinuatio*: honourable, difficult, mean, ambiguous, or obscure. Of these five cases, the honourable—“one wins favour . . . without any speech” (41)—requires a *principium*. The other four require *insinuatio* for a variety of reasons: they have “alienated the [audience’s sympathy]” (41), or the case is “discreditable” and “engenders . . . ill-will” (41).

To classify this type of preface, I will borrow and modify a term of Genette's: the elusive preface.¹⁵ These prefaces are "elusive" not only in the sense that they seek to elude potentially hostile readers by deflecting attention away from whatever subversive message the work may convey, but also in the sense that they often work against the grain of the texts they introduce, creating a dissonance between preface and main text that generates a degree of semantic indeterminacy.

Readings that take these prefaces seriously at a narrative level thus uncover a tension between the moral of the preface and the diverse tendencies of the texts to which they are attached. I use the terms moral and tendency as articulated in William Godwin's 1797 essay "Of Choice in Reading," a useful touchstone for discussions of the complex relation between text and reader as articulated during the turbulent Revolutionary decade of the 1790s. At stake is the question of the derivation of meaning and the hermeneutic role of the reader in interpreting the message of the text. For Godwin, understanding is not a simple matter of the reader's wandering into the text and plucking a ripe maxim for his or her own edification. Rather, what Godwin calls the "moral" of the text is open-ended, promiscuously susceptible to as many subjective interpretations as there are readers. Hence his valuable distinction between the "moral" and the "tendency" of a text: whereas the moral signifies the "ethical sentence to the illustration of which the work may most aptly be applied," the tendency denotes "the actual effect it is calculated to produce upon the reader" (109). Moreover, the tendency can be ascertained only by "experiment" and hinges on the "state of mind" of the reader. In this essay Godwin reveals a sensitivity to the inevitability of

¹⁵Although I borrow Genette's terminology here, I have modified its meaning. For Genette, the "elusive preface" denotes prefaces characterized by their "preterition," which deny that they are prefaces or, in other cases, speak of something completely irrelevant to the main text's subject matter (234-35). My use of the term links "elusive" with the *insinuatō* and the methods of dissimulation through which writers seek to evade audience hostility in all its various guises.

semantic contingency. The onus is on the reader to formulate his or her own interpretation, whether or not it harmonizes with the author's intended moral, and as such no work can be condemned for exerting a corrupting influence. Only a corrupt reader is prone to the contagion of textual vice; the virtuous reader is immune to any potential negative effects of reading. Therefore, Godwin concludes that children (and by extension readers generally) should be permitted to read whatever they wish, without the prohibition of parental interference or the sort of institutional intrusion that led to the formation of what the Catholic Church calls the *index expurgatorius*.

Godwin's use of the term "experiment" to describe the reader's role in ascertaining a text's meaning opens up a way of thinking about how prefaces function in an ideologically repressive context. For if part of the preface's *insinuatio* derives from the necessity of deflecting attention away from a text's potentially subversive nature, then the prefacing author implicitly imposes, or at least stages the imposing of, a moral on the prefaced text. The writers I have selected for analysis in this study—all of whom are chronic prefacers and all of whom recognize the rhetorical potential of what Hegel calls the "misleading" nature of prefaces—craft their prefaces in such a way as to cover themselves with a prefatory moral, while remaining aware of the potential for individual readers to formulate their own tendencies. One way of managing a text's entry in the public sphere, therefore, could be to characterize the text as an experiment, to emphasize the text's *speculative* rather than its *pragmatic* intention. One of the relevant *OED* entries for "experiment" defines the noun as "a tentative procedure . . . adopted in uncertainty whether it will answer the purpose" (OED).¹⁶

¹⁶ Definition #3 from the OED presents a similar idea: "An action or operation undertaken in order to discover something unknown, to test a hypothesis, or establish or illustrate some known truth." Again the texts' speculative nature is emphasized, along with a quasi-scientific characterization.

Such a technique will form the method of Godwin's preface to his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, which he identifies in a deleted prefatory manuscript passage as an "experiment" (PJV 4). In fact, all four writers analyzed in this study use the term experiment on at least one occasion in their prefaces when referring to their texts. Mary Hays will refer to *The Memoirs of Emma Courtney* as a "hazardous experiment" (13) in the *Memoirs*; Wordsworth uses the term to characterize the poems in the 1798 Advertisement to *Lyrical Ballads* and then in 1802's preface he refers back to the 1798 Ballads as an "experiment," in both cases talking about the 'linguistic' experiment of appropriating the "real language of men" (LB 65); and Shelley calls *Laon and Cythna* an "experiment on the temper of the public mind" (PS 32). The repeated use of the term emphasizes how these writers pay lip service to the idea of a determining prefatory moral. In many cases the very ideas of a moral, a fixed morality, and a predetermined reading are implicitly put under erasure by prefaces that announce their texts' experimental nature. The prefaces analyzed in this study are defensively polemical for a variety of reasons, but one common denominator is that Godwin, Hays, Wordsworth, and Shelley face considerable public hostility with the publication of their works, not to mention the always-looming threat of censorship, sedition charges, or critical ridicule. Thus experiment can become a convenient way of covering oneself by presenting the text as purely speculative, eliding the possibility that the text's readers will actually be motivated to act according to the principles contained within the book, a way of subverting the logic of state censorship that plagued the period's writers. As experiments, these texts assert the logic of Kant's distinction between the "public" and "private" use of one's reason, in which citizens reserve the "public" right to criticize

government and religious practices in a speculative and scholarly way, even though they must otherwise follow their orders in a professional capacity.¹⁷

Context: Anxieties of Reception

Coleridge, in an 1810 essay from *The Friend*, tackles the issue of print censorship in the early nineteenth century, exhorting, “Shame fall on that man, who . . . would render the Press ineffectual” (53). In the spirit of Godwin’s “Of Choice in Reading,” Coleridge questions the logic of print censorship, pointing out the unlikelihood of any direct connection between reading and violent upheaval. One must balance, according to Coleridge, the “incomparably greater mischief of the overt-acts, supposing them actually occasioned by the libel (as for instance, the subversion of government and property, if the principles of Thomas Paine had been realized, or if an attempt had been made to realize them, by the many thousands of his readers)” and the “very great improbability that such effects will be produced by such writings” (54). In other words, *acts* of violence and sedition

¹⁷ In his 1784 essay “What is Enlightenment?” Kant distinguishes between the private and public use of one’s reason. The “*public use* of a man’s reason must be free at all times, and this alone can bring enlightenment among men” (137). Kant equates the public use of reason with scholarship and the scholar’s relation to his reading public, in contrast to private reason, which he equates with “a civic post or office” (137). In many instances, for the sake of the greater good, civic functionaries should not exercise their right to free speech through argument, but rather should remain “passive” (137). However, argument and criticism should be permitted in a purely speculative context. For instance, a military officer should never question the orders given to him by a superior; however, that same officer reserves the right to question publicly the actions of the military. Similarly, one must pay one’s taxes regardless of whether one agrees with the practice; however, as a scholar, one is free to utter “publicly his thoughts against the undesirability or even the injustice of such taxes” (137). This forms the basis of Kant’s argument in his 1798 *Conflict of the Faculties*, in which Kant distinguishes between the “higher” faculties—law, theology, and medicine—and the “lower” faculty of philosophy. The higher faculties “interest the government itself” (26), and as such correspond to the “private” use of reason because students in the higher faculties will be trained for government posts. The lower faculty, however, “uses its own judgment about what it teaches” (27) and, in the best interests of promoting enlightenment, should be “independent of the government’s command . . . free to evaluate everything” (29). Without this right to free thought, “the truth would not come to light” (29). Kant’s ideas here result from his own experiences with censorship. After the 1786 death of Frederick the Great, who permitted scholarly freedom of expression, his successor Frederick William II implemented strict state-controlled censorship measures that greatly hindered intellectual speculation, especially in the domain of religious inquiry. Kant outlines this situation in his preface to the *Conflict of the Faculties*.

are deserving of punishment, but *texts* should not be repressed due to the false logic of a cause-and-effect relationship between act and text. Using Godwin's terminology, one could rephrase Coleridge's argument as stating that a text cannot be prosecuted based solely on its moral. Coleridge's essay, written after more than fifteen years of state repression, reflects on the pervasive atmosphere of fear that characterizes the print marketplace of the Romantic period. Indeed, closely linked with the history of the Romantic period is the incessant intrusion of the state in the print marketplace, in the form of sustained political censorship, from the 1790s through the 1820s. To emphasize the persistent role of direct and indirect, official and unofficial forces of textual repression that compel writers to take their prefaces seriously as a means of avoiding persecution, I will provide a brief historical sketch to foreground the hazardousness of the long Romantic period's publishing climate.

Among European nations, Britain stood alone as a bastion of the right to free speech from the late-seventeenth century to the late-eighteenth century, having repealed the press licensing act in 1695. But this relative freedom gave way to increasingly restrictive measures enacted through a series of government proclamations calculated to quell the tide of a radical print network, whose rapid expansion in the early 1790s was generated by a nascent mass political public with access to new discursive forms and channels of communication. For the first time in history, a mass reading-public became a serious political force. All orders of society had access to books, newspapers, and pamphlets: circulating libraries ensured that books were available to those who could not otherwise afford to buy them, and the political events of the day were discussed in reading clubs and in the nation's coffee-houses and pubs. Even the illiterate could be informed through listening to texts read aloud in these informal

settings.¹⁸ But it was precisely the ubiquity of this print culture that worried the state, especially the fact that the ‘dark masses’ could be influenced by what they read. Thus, when Thomas Paine’s *Rights Of Man* was published in 1791, and again in a second edition in 1792, selling an unprecedented 200,000 copies in a cheap sixpenny edition (A. Booth 109), authorities took notice precisely because it targeted a lower-class readership. Characterized by its clear, simple prose, the *Rights of Man*, a book that supported the French Revolution and denounced the idea of hereditary rule, proved itself capable of attracting a mass readership. But its publication did not happen in a vacuum: the 1790s saw the emergence of a significant radical print culture, with a proliferation of radical writers, publishers, booksellers, and periodicals. In this “threshold of mass political literacy” (A. Booth 110), radical newspapers such as the *Manchester Herald*, *Cambridge Intelligencer* and *Sheffield Register* were founded, alongside inexpensive radical periodicals such as *Politics for the People* and *Pig’s Meat*. In addition, the London Corresponding Society was formed in 1792 to campaign for working-class suffrage.

Alarmed by this rapidly coalescing radical press, the British government soon took action. Jon Klancher argues that the periodical can be “a space for imagining social formations still inchoate, and a means to give them shape” (24), although one could expand this argument to incorporate other forms of writing that, in addition to the periodical, contribute to social formation. Clearly, this is the position taken by the British government in their haste to repress the publication of all types of radical literature, as they recognized the discursive potential for envisioning radically new forms of social and political organization. Thus, in May of 1792, the first royal proclamation against seditious literature was enacted. According to its stricture, the proclamation targeted “divers wicked and

¹⁸ Michael Sanderson estimates that literacy rates were about 40 percent among the plebian class, and the figure was much higher for the class of artisans and tradesmen (9-16).

sedition writings . . . printed, published and industriously dispersed, tending to excite tumult and disorder, by endeavouring to raise groundless jealousies in the minds of our faithful and loving subjects” (qtd. in A. Booth 110). With this proclamation, and the enactment of a second royal proclamation in December of 1792, emerged the loyalist movement, the beginning of an *ad hoc* anti-radical campaign mobilized by the propertied class. The loyalists, although not officially sanctioned by the government, nonetheless took it upon themselves to censor all publications—pamphlets, books, newspapers, periodicals—for potentially seditious ideas.

As the British government grew increasingly anxious about a French invasion, strict measures continued and new legislation was introduced. The Treasonable Practices Bill of 1795 extended the definition of treason to those who “maliciously and advisedly by writing, printing, preaching, or other speaking, express, publish, utter or declare, any words or sentences to excite or stir up the people to hatred or contempt of the person of his Majesty, his heirs or successors, or the government and constitution of this realm” (qtd. in A. Booth 114). And the decade ended with the “most draconian legislation in the eighteenth century” (Feather 62-3), the Corresponding Societies Act of 1799, which banned all corresponding societies and imposed an arduous registration scheme for all publishers and printers. Furthermore, in 1797, the government crafted another method to control print circulation: the increase of the Stamp Tax. The purpose of this increase was to limit publications “printed in very great numbers and at a very small price” that would “excite hatred and contempt of the government” (Cranfield 107). Beginning with an increase from twopence to threepence-halfpenny, the tax was frequently raised to increase the price of newspapers, keeping them out of reach of the lower classes. By 1815, the tax had reached fourpence, which raised the price of newspapers by double what they would otherwise have cost

(Goldstein 131). And in 1819, the tax was extended to widen the variety of publications covered by its definition. Thus, not only were newspapers heavily taxed, but the price of pamphlets was inflated as well.

Later in the Romantic period, restrictive measures continued, especially in the years 1817-1820 following the French Revolutionary wars. During 1817-20, at least 175 publications were charged with sedition and blasphemous libel (Wickwar 315). Among those convicted of the charge was printer Richard Carlile, who was sentenced to three years in prison for publishing Paine's *Rights of Man*. In 1817, *Habeas Corpus* was suspended and parliament passed the Seditious Meetings Act to give magistrates greater control of censorship over the radical press (Goldstein 129). And in 1819, political ferment peaked with the notorious Peterloo massacre, in which a rally for parliamentary reform was attacked by cavalry, who killed eleven protestors and injured hundreds more. This massacre "precipitated the final political struggle between the government and the press . . . the mood of the radical press became one of boiling anger" (Thomas 161). Thus, in 1819 the government went even further by passing the Blasphemous and Seditious Libels Act, which gave magistrates even greater powers to search for seditious literature and established transportation as a penalty for second offences. Finally, after years of increasingly violent unrest, the Reform Act of 1832 was passed, doubling the number of enfranchised voters, and redistributing constituencies to allow greater representation for industrial towns (Pugh 49), setting the stage for the gradual enfranchisement of the middle class.

This brief sketch of the period's hostile publishing climate demonstrates the precarious *milieu* into which Romantic writers entered. Godwin, Hays, Wordsworth, and Shelley—all of whom sought to disseminate radical ideas—thus experienced a significant "anxiety of reception," a term used by Lucy Newlyn to account for writers frustrated by their

failed attempts to connect with a mass audience, or their inability to find an audience for their work. Genette claims that one of the primary functions of the preface is to identify the author's choice of a public. But in order to make this choice, the author must have some idea about who his audience is: "guiding the reader also, and first of all, means situating him, and thus determining who he is" (212). Jon Klancher's claim that the Romantics were "radically uncertain of their readers" (3) underscores one of the primary motivating factors for the period's prefatory writing. Klancher claims that "no single, unified 'reading public' could be addressed" in the Romantic period (3). In this "inchoate cultural moment," Klancher identifies four "strategically critical audiences" formed during the period: "a newly self-conscious middle-class public, a nascent mass audience, a polemical radical readership, and the special institutional audience—what Coleridge called the clerisy—that assumed its first shape in this contentious time" (4). As the principal site of interface between sender and interlocutor, inside and outside, private and public sphere, the preface is an index of the problematic relation between author and audience. The author's attempt to situate himself in an inchoate public sphere during this time of dizzying flux results in what Herrington-Perry identifies as a significant source of the Romantic preface-writer's anxiety: that he is not the ultimate determinant of the meaning or value of his text (18). A number of factors contribute to the formation of this crisis of subjectivity, stemming, on the one hand, from the author's bewilderment at having to confront a mass readership and, on the other, from the paranoia resulting from the constant threat of hostile reviewers.

Andrew Bennett identifies a sense of "dislocation, alienation and disillusionment" (*Romantic* 44) that afflicted writers like Wordsworth and Coleridge, poets whose poems sold poorly, and whose inability to connect with a mass audience resulted in a reversal of their youthful desire to democratize reading. Both writers, by the 1810s, had spurned the

readership they had unsuccessfully courted: Coleridge derided the “promiscuous” reading public and turned his attention instead to the quasi-professional “clerisy,” while Wordsworth devised his imaginary audience of the future, constructing himself out of the Romantic period for a proto-Victorian audience. Although Godwin reached a mass audience in the early 1790s, he and Hays were forced to reach toward a more restricted radical readership, the democratic equivalent of the clerisy. In his preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley vaguely and optimistically identifies his readership as “the more select classes of poetical readers” (SPP 209). He also claims, in a January 1822 letter to John Gisborne, that “Prometheus was never intended for more than 5 or 6 persons” (PBSL 2: 388). Moreover, in his advertisement to *Epipsychidion*, he distinguishes the “certain class of readers” for whom the poem will be “sufficiently intelligible” from the “certain other class” to whom “it must ever remain incomprehensible, from a defect of a common organ of perception for the ideas of which it treats” (SPP 392). Even Godwin, who achieved popular success with the 1793 publication of *Political Justice* and the 1794 publication of *Caleb Williams*, fretted over the audience who consumed that novel. In the preface to the 1832 second edition of *Fleetwood*, Godwin retrospectively recalls the process of writing and publishing *Caleb Williams*, lamenting that he feared he had “written a book to amuse boys and girls in their vacant hours, a story to be hastily gobbled up by them, swallowed in a pusillanimous and unanimated mood, without chewing and digestion” (12). In the late-eighteenth century Godwin achieved a degree of literary success Wordsworth and Coleridge could only dream about, yet his anxiety about the reception of *Caleb Williams* reveals not only an uncertainty about who his audience might be, but an actively hostile suspicion that the novel was being indiscriminately consumed by the same promiscuous reading-public condemned by Coleridge.

Whoever the writers discussed in this study may have imagined as their ideal or real audience—contemporary or posthumous, passive consumers or active receptors—there is one segment of the period’s readership whose presence could not be ignored or underestimated: the critics. The rise of the professional literary critic engendered a significant and unprecedented change in the configuration of the early-nineteenth century literary field. Equally as threatening as the mass, faceless audience, was the anonymous reviewer whose barbs could doom both work and author to oblivion or ridicule. The importance of the periodical as arbiter of literary taste cannot be underestimated: at the height of their success (circa 1814), the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* magazines circulated in excess of 13,000 copies each; in addition, by Francis Jeffrey’s estimate, an average of at least three people read each copy, making the total number of readers several times the actual circulation (Erickson 7). The periodicals, according to Lee Erickson, were “giant machines” (88) that “made everyone who wrote subject to them because of their financial and critical power” (91). Clifford Siskin claims that “writing was professionalized only when it came to be accompanied by the alternative forms of institutional self-control which we know collectively as *criticism*” (160). Reviewers like Jeffrey, Croker, Lockhart and Hazlitt became the period’s agents of consecration and legitimation, and every publishing author was forced to endure the critical gauntlet of evaluation and criticism played out in the pages of the periodicals. Coleridge’s 1815 poem “Contemporary Critics” seethes with the bitterness of a writer disgusted by the hostile treatment of writers at the hands of these “cut-throat bandits in the paths of fame”:¹⁹

¹⁹ This view of criticism as a degraded form of abuse against original writers is in keeping with sentiments expressed a century earlier in Pope’s “Essay on Criticism,” in which he contrasts the critics of Ancient Greece—“The gen’rous Critick *fann’d* the Poet’s Fire, / And taught the World, with Reason to Admire” (100-1)—with contemporary British critics, “Monsters” (554) who, with their “Darts engage / Here point your

No private grudge they need, no personal spite;
The *viva sectio* is its own delight!
All enmity, all envy, they disclaim,
Disinterested thieves of our good name:
Cool, sober murderers of their neighbour's fame. (*Biographia* 109)

Among the reactions to the anxiety of critical reception were, in Newlyn's words, "intricate and occluded devices for pre-empting misinterpretation" (x). The devices suggested by Newlyn are often paratextual—the preface, above all, is the paratextual form most commonly employed for the purpose of guiding interpretation and directly addressing (or confronting) readers. My analysis of the "intricate and occluded" prefaces of the Romantic period begins with William Godwin's 1793 *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, a text whose preface epitomizes the spirit of the elusive preface. A substantial philosophical treatise that would likely evade censorship because of the complexity of its subject matter and a prohibitively expensive pricetag, *Political Justice* nonetheless subverts its own immunity because of a preface that directly engages and provokes the forces of state repression. Indeed, in the very act of emphasizing gradualism as a revolutionary principle, Godwin puts the concept of gradualism under erasure as the urgency and force of his prefatory rhetoric unsettle the precepts of slow, non-violent ideological change argued for throughout his treatise. The spirit of dissimulation attributed to *Political Justice's* preface by Godwin's friend William Nicholson—one of the hallmarks of Cicero's *insinuatio*—thus pervades the preface's rhetoric, a strategy that Godwin will employ again in 1795 for the second edition of his novel *Caleb Williams* when he writes a preface that announces the suppression of the first edition's preface. The inclusion of the second edition's preface adds an additional narrative

Thunder, and exhaust your rage" (554-55). See also Chapter Four, where I discuss Matthew Arnold's concept of epochs of concentration and expansion in the context of Shelley's opinion of contemporary criticism.

layer to the novel, positing the extradiegetic ‘Godwin’ as a real-life victim of the same institutional forces of repression that plague the novel’s title-character, while foregrounding issues of reception in a mass print marketplace that preoccupy the novel’s third volume. But the 1795 preface will eventually be superseded by Mary Shelley’s preface for its 1831 reissue as part of Colburn and Bentley’s Standard Novels series. Mary Shelley’s preface, in addition to Godwin’s 1832 preface to *Fleetwood*, in which he recalls the composition process of *Caleb Williams*, ostensibly seeks to downplay the novel’s radically political tendency for a proto-Victorian audience. But as instances of the elusive preface, Godwin’s and Mary Shelley’s prefaces perform a surreptitious rhetorical maneuver. What appears as a tamed-down narrative of Godwin and his novel reveals itself as a cover for rehabilitating the reputation of a philosopher whose radical ideas had alienated him from the British public since the late-1790s.

The reception anxiety experienced by Godwin in the 1790s results primarily from a clash between his radical attacks on governmental institutions and the reaction of a British government anxious about revolutionary potential in the aftermath of the French Revolution. But Godwin, an educated male intellectual, did not need to worry about establishing his authorial credibility, unlike his contemporary Mary Hays. For Hays, a woman writer seeking literary entry first into the Dissenting public sphere, and then into the middle-class public sphere, establishing her discursive authority becomes a precondition for disseminating the feminist message of her 1790s publications. Thus, Chapter Two investigates how Hays’s 1790s prefaces become the site of a rhetorical subterfuge through which she crafts a protean series of self-figurations designed to mediate her work to the public, a pattern she establishes in her first publication, *Cursory Remarks on an Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship: Inscribed to Gilbert Wakefield* (1792). Writing

under the pseudonym Eusebia, Hays creates a prefatory figure whose genuflections to feminine decorum obscure what is otherwise a bold assertion of her “right to philosophy” (Derrida, *Ethics* 13) to a male-dominated Dissenting audience. The preface to her next publication, 1793’s *Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous*, retains the basic structure of its predecessor but asserts Hays’s discursive authority much more strongly through repeated allusions to Mary Wollstonecraft, whose editing suggestions and professional mentorship provided a catalyst for Hays’s authorial self-presentation. Thus, by the time she publishes her novel *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* in 1796, the source of Hays’s reception anxiety shifts from concerns about her authority to uneasiness about public reaction to her protagonist’s unrestrained passion. Hays compensates for this anxiety by writing an elusive preface that depicts Emma as a negative example, a rhetorical pattern that paratextually pervades the novel, from the preface to the framing letters to the footnotes, through which the moralizing voice of the preface continually intervenes to disapprove of Emma’s conduct in an attempt to contain the novel’s radical tendency. For her final two 1790s publications, the anonymous *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Woman* (1798) and *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799), Hays reacts to a changed intellectual climate within which feminist ideals are treated with hostility and suspicion. As such, she again deploys rhetorical subterfuge in her prefaces to mediate her texts: in the *Appeal*’s preface she distances herself from the disgraced Wollstonecraft and reverts to the self-deprecating tone of the *Cursory Remarks*; and in the *Victim*’s elusive preface, she posits a ‘red herring’ moral intended to obscure the comprehensiveness of her attack on patriarchal society.

Chapter Three turns to the prefaces of William Wordsworth, which are elusive in the same way as Godwin’s and Hays’s, but with an additional degree of historically-determined reception anxiety. For the revolutionary energies associated with the novels and polemics of

the 1790s become, at the turn of the century, redirected and marginalized within a poetry that is becoming increasingly outmoded in the age of prose that will be later theorized by writers such as Thomas Love Peacock and Hegel. Whereas the prefaces of Godwin and Hays submit to censorship by imposing a moral in their prefaces, a sort of ‘writing in code’ necessitated by the political environment of the 1790s that genuflects to authority while allowing the texts themselves to develop their tendencies, Wordsworth faces the additional challenge of asserting the social relevance of the Poet. Thus, like Hays in her preface to *Letters and Essays*, Wordsworth negotiates mediation through professionalization, although in the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*’ second edition his concern is with constructing the professional category of the Poet rather than consolidating a gendered form of discursive authority. The 1798, 1800, and 1802 versions of the *Lyrical Ballads*’ preface thus chart the anxious development of a prefatory poet-figure whose increasingly elaborate depiction obscures the hard realities of his historical moment, especially his status as a commodity-producer in an industrial age and the belatedness of his vocation. As a result of the prefaces’ monological intensity, the poems, intended as dialogic instances of a variety of ‘rustic’ speakers, risk being subsumed by the prefatory voice. Ultimately, however, Wordsworth will realize the dialogic potential of his poetry through a hybridization of linguistic consciousnesses achieved through the juxtaposition of his prefatory voice with the characters in the poems.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, whose publishing career began around the time of Wordsworth’s 1815 *Poems*, also finds himself plagued by reception anxieties. But while Wordsworth’s attempts at professionalizing the poet reflect his desire to capitulate to the public sphere through mediation, Shelley instead stages this capitulation in his prefaces ironically, in ways both within and beyond his control. Shelley’s prefaces, as I argue in

Chapter Four, absorb themselves in a particular type of Romantic irony characterized by a self-negating form of parabasis. The shifting array of self-figurations deployed by Shelley in his prefaces, elusively defensive in their attempts to evade the hostility of a public sphere intolerant of his ideals, become increasingly symptomatic of Shelley's disconnection from his given actuality. As revealed through the prefaces to *Alastor, Laon and Cythna, Epipsychidion*, and *Adonais*, Shelley repeatedly pushes the boundaries of the *insinuatio*, through which parabasis ultimately becomes subject to intense linguistic skepticism. But Shelley's use of *insinuatio* also reflects his desire to assert his right to "literature" (Derrida, *On the Name* 28) as the right to say anything in public, in the sense that he puts his radical political ideals into play while simultaneously evading responsibility for them through the workings of romantic irony. Finally, at the end of the chapter, I return full-circle to Mary Shelley, whose prefaces to Shelley's *Posthumous Poems* and *Poetical Works* perform the same rehabilitative function as her 1831 preface to Godwin's *Caleb Williams*: she figures a kinder, gentler Shelley whose radical and polemical energies are subdued to create a proto-Victorian version of the poet, characterized more by his lyric sensitivity than his political and religious polemicism.

—ONE—

WILLIAM GODWIN: THE POLITICS OF THE PREFACE

“The Spirit of the Age was never more fully shown than in its treatment of this writer—its love of paradox and change, its dastard submission to prejudice and to the fashion of the day. Five and twenty years ago he was in the very zenith of a sultry and unwholesome popularity . . . now he has sunk below the horizon.”

—William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age* (1825)

Throughout his long and varied literary career, Godwin was a prolific preface-writer: nearly all of his published works are prefaced with introductions ranging from the verbose (the preface to *The Genius of Christianity Unveiled* runs sixteen pages, followed by yet another preface, the “Preface to Essay I,” which fills an additional seven pages) to the pithy (the preface to *Deloraine* consists of a mere six terse sentences). The sheer volume of Godwinian prefaces is substantial and complex enough to warrant a full-length study of its own, but rather than providing a comprehensive overview, this chapter will focus in-depth on the several prefaces engendered by the publication of his two most topical works: the philosophical treatise *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* and the novel *Caleb Williams*, texts that span not only the duration of Godwin’s mature authorial career, but which also roughly cover the historically-defined period of British Romanticism. I have selected these two texts because their prefaces embody the spirit of the elusive preface, in the sense that the prefaces mediate texts whose radical subject matter requires the *insinuatio* of a prefatory intervention. Furthermore, both texts are ‘multiprefatory’ as they were published, and prefaced, in multiple editions within Godwin’s lifetime, thus providing a glimpse into how the prefaces

adapt to the changing conditions of different historical moments of publication. An analysis of these texts in their historical and narratological contexts will reveal how prefaces function as the site in which extra-textual historico-political anxieties impinge upon the structure of the primary narrative, fundamentally altering (often unintentionally) the work's textual gist.

First, I analyze the 1793 preface to the first edition of *Political Justice*, an elusive preface that cuts against the gradualist grain of the text it introduces by unconsciously depicting itself in the same terms as those 'incendiary' radical publications from which it seeks to distance itself. This tension between violent upheaval and gradualism also informs the content of the 1796 second edition's preface and the revisions made to the treatise. I then turn to the preface to the 1796 second edition of Godwin's novel *Caleb Williams*, the inclusion of which significantly affects the reader's experience of the text through its insertion of a polemical prefatory epinarrative at the highest narrative level. In the final section, I return to *Caleb Williams*, specifically its 1831 reissue as part of Colburn and Bentley's Standard Novels series, to analyze how these new paratexts—Mary Shelley's 1831 "Introduction" to *Caleb Williams* and Godwin's 1832 preface to *Fleetwood*, in which Godwin reflects on *Caleb Williams*' composition process—ostensibly pacify the novel's radical energy by reinscribing it within an institutionalized system of reified authorship, but whose elusiveness also reallocates these energies to a proto-Victorian readership.

Political Justice's Radical Gradualism

In the context of the mid-1790s historical moment during which *Political Justice* was published, Godwin's ideas about choice in reading assume an especially urgent significance. For in the midst of this repressive intellectual climate, the publication of such a subversive work would not go unnoticed by government agents and censors. Godwin's belief in the

value of free and uncensored reading was certainly not shared by government forces seeking to shut down any instances of radical discourse. Realizing the precariousness of his situation, Godwin thus crafts a preface intended to mediate his work to the public sphere, a preface ostensibly espousing a ‘moral’ calculated to depict *Political Justice* as a purely speculative work that emphasizes gradualism, not violent revolution, as the means by which its ideals will be realized. But *Political Justice* has always been more of a process than a product, constantly interrogating and revising its own claims, and its preface reveals itself as a simultaneously overdetermined and indeterminate part of this process. Therefore, in the process of claiming what it disclaims, the preface mirrors the logic of the text it introduces, whose latent uncertainties about the efficacy of gradualism are manifested in the preface’s urgent rhetoric. That the preface unsettles one of the treatise’s main philosophical principles points to the indeterminacy of *Political Justice*’s message, while highlighting the ambivalence of Godwin’s commitment to gradualism in a political climate where, to avoid sedition charges, he cannot advocate violent revolution. Indeed, what makes *Political Justice*’s preface such an interesting case of the elusive preface is that Godwin’s *insinuatio* opens up a gap between the preface and the main text that exposes the aporias inherent in gradualism. The subtext revealed through this tension between preface and treatise is more a manifestation of the period’s political unconscious than a conscious attempt on Godwin’s part to question the efficacy of gradualism.

The following excerpt from a 1793 *Critical Review* article observes how Godwin’s preface to the first edition of *Political Justice* embroils itself in contemporary debates concerning freedom of the press and the suppression of seditious literature:

In his Preface Mr. Godwin seems to express some degree of apprehension, that the freedom of his sentiments may draw upon him the resentment of the

executive government in this country.—For our own parts we cannot for a moment admit the supposition. We cannot for a moment believe that a British minister would attempt to fix shackles on the freedom of philosophical speculation, or that the nation would endure such an attempt. The only fair reason that can be urged for the prosecution of any publication is, that it is calculated to excite insurrection, and to render the mass of the people bad subjects. This reasoning can never apply to a speculative work like the present; a work in which particular men and particular measures are rarely animadverted on; a work which from its nature and bulk can never circulate among the inferior classes of society; and a work which expressly condemns violent alterations, violent measures, and the aim of which is to change the system of opinion and sentiment, rather than to effect any sudden change in government. (qtd. in Graham, *Godwin Reviewed* 63)

These remarks encapsulate the complex political milieu within which *Political Justice* makes its first appearance, emphasizing the ambiguous boundary between “speculative” literature and radical literature intended to provoke violent upheaval. I will situate my discussion of Godwin’s preface to *Political Justice* within the parameters of these observations, highlighting the extent to which it is enmeshed in the exigencies of the historical moment of its publication. Characterized by its ambivalent bait-and-switch rhetorical technique, the preface is structured by a dialectical system of tensions that play themselves out not only within the prefatory space but also cross over the threshold of the main work to disrupt the (dis)continuity of the main text’s argument. These tensions reflect Godwin’s attempt to position himself and his text in an inchoate forum of literary political discussion, and the text’s oscillations between claims of conservatism and radicalism, speculative treatise and

pragmatic pamphlet, aid to reflection and call to action, are themselves the product of deeper indeterminacies concerning the role of political writing and the political writer. This preface binds *Political Justice* to its immediate circumstances, exposing the anxieties experienced by Godwin as he anticipated its reception and its function in the context of British reaction to the French Revolution, and how he sought to obviate the book's interpellation by the agents of political repression. But the preface situates itself in an actual political context that the main work theoretically resists.

In a diary entry recorded in October of 1793, Godwin writes that he discussed this preface with his friend, the chemist and radical William Nicholson, who praised the preface for its "dissimulation" (qtd. in Philp 103). Nicholson's comment accurately reveals how in the preface Godwin at some level intentionally conceals or at least mitigates his thoughts on the potential political impact of *Political Justice*, a strategy that is ostensibly a shrewd move to prevent prosecution. But as a pre-emptive maneuver the preface is a failure, for reasons likely beyond Godwin's conscious awareness of the moral he has constructed in its pages. I would suggest an additional, deeper source for the dissimulation pinpointed by Nicholson: an indistinct conception of the function of political discourse coupled with an entrenched anxiety about the practicability and the means of political reformation. Put differently, the conflict between political ideals of gradualism and sudden, violent upheaval generates the disjunction between preface and main text. *Political Justice's* preface metatextually works through the process of Godwin's ongoing struggle to define and differentiate the elusive and self-contradictory terms of political debate that underlie the volume's assumptions. What Godwin identifies in a deleted prefatory manuscript passage as the "repetitions, redundancies and . . . contradictions" (*PJV* 5) that characterize *Political Justice* are the necessary materials of a text in flux, rooted in the shifting historical sands of a volatile epoch. The obvious

manifestation of *Political Justice's* always-evolving nature can be found in the frequent, often contradictory, revisions made by Godwin throughout his lifetime—even at the time of his death, some forty-three years after its initial publication, Godwin was still making revisions for a fourth edition.²⁰ Like Mary Hays, whose prefatory subject is continually in process as she struggles to negotiate her discursive authority, Godwin similarly engages in a perpetual revisionary process to achieve a fully developed political system.

Godwin's ceaseless quest to improve his political treatise mirrors his belief in the possibility of human perfectibility,²¹ and his classification of *Political Justice*, in a deleted prefatory manuscript passage, as an "experiment" (*PJV* 4) invokes the discourse of science to highlight the work's perpetual susceptibility to modification while simultaneously submitting science's truth claims to radical speculation. Indeed, Godwin begins his preface by classifying *Political Justice* as a "scientific" treatise; just as new scientific works must be continually published to account for new developments in the field, so too must a work of political or moral science be updated to adapt to social changes:

Few works of literature are held in greater estimation, than those which treat in a methodical and elementary way the principles of science. But the human mind in every enlightened age is progressive; and the best elementary treatises after a certain time are reduced in their value by the operation of subsequent

²⁰ *Political Justice* was published in three substantially revised versions in Godwin's lifetime, appearing in 1793, 1795, and 1797. Godwin also wrote a Prospectus for a fourth edition in 1832, but it was not published until after his death in 1842.

²¹ In Book I, Chapter VI of *Political Justice's* first edition, Godwin states the principle of human perfectibility that so crucially informs his argument: "There is no characteristic of man, which seems at present at least so eminently to distinguish him, or to be of so much importance in every branch of moral science, as his perfectibility" (*PJ* 27). Elsewhere, he outlines the "three principal causes by which the human mind is advanced towards a state of perfection; literature, or the diffusion of knowledge through the medium of discussion, whether written or oral; education, or a scheme for the early impression of right principles upon the hitherto unprejudiced mind; and political justice, or the adoption of any principle of morality and truth into the practice of a community" (14).

discoveries. Hence it has always been desired by candid enquirers that preceding works of this kind should from time to time be superseded, and that other productions including the larger views that have since offered themselves, should be substituted in their place.

It would be strange if something of this kind were not desirable in politics, after the great change that has been produced in men's minds upon this subject, and the light that has been thrown upon it by the recent discussions of America and France. (iii).

The spirit of dissimulation detected by Nicholson informs the preface's introductory paragraphs. Characterizing the treatise's contents as scientific, Godwin emphasizes the objective, clinical nature of his analysis, in the process deflecting attention away from himself as the source of the radical ideas contained within its pages. The utter lack of a first-person pronoun throughout the entire preface reinforces this sense of detached objectivity, as the figure of Godwin remains obscured by the preface's articulation of *Political Justice's* necessary function to supersede previous works of political theory. In the same way, Godwin also objectivizes his relation to the American and French revolutions; rather than subversively announcing, from the outset, his ideological affinity with recent revolutionary activities, he instead mentions the revolutions as catalysts necessitating a new scientific analysis of political organization. But perhaps the most disingenuous aspect of the preface's opening is Godwin's understated, matter-of-fact admission that "principles will occasionally be found, which it will not be just to reject without examination, merely because they are new" (iii). Again, this nod to the treatise's radical subject matter—among other bold claims, Godwin advocates the abolition of government and marriage, and postulates the possibility of earthly immortality—emphasizes once more the scientific spirit of Godwin's approach, as Godwin

cautions the reader against rejecting such ideas because “a science which may be said to be yet in its infancy” might lead to conclusions that are “in some degree uncommon” (iii). Thus, Godwin’s elusive rhetoric initially shifts the focus from the prosecutable aspects of *Political Justice*—his own agency as author, and the treatise’s potential for inciting mass uprising—to a purely scientific account of its purpose.

But in the preface, Godwin must also descend from the loftier heights of speculative philosophy that characterize the treatise to imagine its actual reception, its relative position in the contemporaneous network of political discourse. The preface, directly engaged with the conflicting forces of radicalism and conservatism raging at the peak of revolutionary fervour, captures and encapsulates the ambiguities inherent in the radical enterprise of which Godwin is about to become a major figure. It is a text that—in its original form, and in its revised and expanded second- and third- edition forms—is fraught with paradox and irony, replicating the anxieties intrinsic in Godwin’s own engagement with the public sphere and, more widely, the dilemma of the British reform writer in the mid-1790s. Thus, in the original 1793 preface to *Political Justice*’s first edition, Godwin positions the work not only in its immediate revolutionary context, but within the wider historical scope of reform writing and “progressive” literature generally. In this text, Godwin displays his faith in the rhetorical power of the preface, entrusting it to justify the necessity of this individual work while simultaneously making a case for the development of a discursive form of discourse capable of effecting political reform and contributing to the general amelioration of humanity. Writing during a unique period in British history, at the intersection of revolutionary fervour and a nascent print culture, a “watershed in the history of mass political literacy” (A. Booth 109) when public opinion seemed precariously balanced between radical and conservative extremes, reform writers like Godwin had the unprecedented opportunity to disseminate

their ideas among a mass readership. For a brief period in the 1790s, a space for the revolutionary political possibilities of literature was opened up, and writers reacted to the responsibilities of this potential in a variety of ways.²² Indeed, the primary anxiety embodied in the preface to *Political Justice* concerns the work's audience and the extent to which this treatise could possibly foment revolutionary upheaval. The spectre of violence loomed ominously in the consciousness of the British people as the violent energy unleashed by revolutionary activity began to crescendo in France, reaching its climax with the beginning of the Terror in July of 1793. Although Godwin's political philosophy adheres to the tenets of gradualism and, as Godwin makes explicit in his preface, one of the express objects of *Political Justice* is "the dissuading from all tumult and violence" (v), the very appearance of a work so violently antithetical to dominant political and religious state apparatuses at this historical moment was potentially dangerous for the author and for the state.²³ Originally published on February 14, 1793, a mere twenty-four days after the execution of Louis XVI, *Political Justice's* prefatory proclamation that "monarchy was a species of government unavoidably corrupt" (iv) was inflammatory enough to override the merely speculative

²² Specifically, it should be noted, the conditions of possibility for the composition and publication of *Political Justice* were a direct result of increased market demand for books on political topics in the wake of the Burke–Paine debate which had polarized public opinion and whetted consumer appetites for new voices in the French Revolutionary controversy. In 1791 Godwin's offer to write a book on political principles was accepted by publisher George Robinson, who financially supported Godwin with £650 for the sixteen months it took for the book's composition, taking a calculated gamble that the book would generate profits. Godwin, at this time a struggling hack writer, was fortunate to receive patronage for the composition of the work, especially in light of a note written in his private papers lamenting his inability to write a treatise on "moral science" because "a poor man can only write the books which obtain a present sale" (qtd. in Philp 73). Admitting that his choice of subject matter for *Political Justice* "was more or less determined by mercantile considerations" (73), Godwin highlights the extent to which the market, itself determined by popular interest in political affairs, creates the possibility of a work of 'pure' political theory such as *Political Justice*.

²³ Godwin makes this claim in the midst of a passage that portrays the atmosphere of general paranoia during the time of *Political Justice's* publication: "Every man, if we may believe the voice of rumour, is to be prosecuted who shall appeal to the people by the publication of any unconstitutional paper or pamphlet; and it is added, that men are to be prosecuted for any unguarded words that may be dropped in the warmth of conversation and debate. It is now to be tried whether, in addition to these alarming encroachments upon our liberty, a book is to fall under the arm of the civil power, which, beside the advantage of having for one of its express objects the dissuading from all tumult and violence, is by its very nature an appeal to men of study and reflexion" (*PJ* v).

nature of the work. It is a curious Godwinian irony that the author would publish a work so fervently advocating the dismantling of institutional structures at a time when the threat of mob violence and radical uprising was terrifyingly real, all the while distancing himself from any actual involvement with the front lines of revolutionary action.

To suggest that Godwin secretly or even consciously might have hoped that the masses would coalesce to impose political reform through the use of force would be very difficult to prove. Certainly, there is very little in *Political Justice* to support any position that even hints at the desirability of violence. A series of chapters in the “Miscellaneous Principles” section of Book IV (“Of Resistance,” “Of Revolutions,” “Of Political Associations,” “Of the Species of Reform to be Desired,” and “Of Tyrannicide”) considers at length the various modes of revolutionary action. Throughout, Godwin is conscious of the always-lurking threat of violence, a hazard he seeks to avoid at every turn. Cautioning against the “frenzy of enthusiasm,” he instead recommends the “calm, sagacious and deliberate effort of reason” (*PJ* 111) to seek the truth. Resistance to the forces of institutional repression is essential, but force through discourse, not violence, is desirable: “the resistance I am bound to employ is that of uttering the truth” (112). To achieve the sort of non-violent, intellectual revolution wished for by Godwin, the best method for changing the populace’s opinions is “argument and persuasion . . . free and unrestricted discussion . . . we must write, we must argue, we must converse” (115). But this dissemination of ideas must maintain a calm and reflective tone: Godwin highlights the importance of distinguishing between “informing the people and inflaming them,” as “indignation, resentment and fury are to be deprecated” (115). According to Godwin’s interpretation of the history of revolutions, more recent insurgencies such as those in America and France have, because of the evolution of “great principles of truth” (116)

propagated by political philosophers like Locke, Montesquieu, and Rousseau, been achieved with the use of significantly less force than, for instance, the resistance against Charles I (this was of course written before the commencement of the French Terror). Such is the power of a fully realized philosophical truth that, had these revolutions occurred in the future, they would likely have been successful without “one drop of the blood of one citizen” or even “one solitary instance of violence and confiscation” (116). Even political associations, with which Godwin was marginally associated but to which he was not committed, are condemned for their tendency to inculcate in their members a mob mentality likely to result in violent mutiny: “there is nothing more barbarous, blood-thirsty and unfeeling than the triumph of the mob” (118).²⁴

One is, however, left to wonder whether Godwin really believes that the gradual amelioration of humanity is wholly possible through the dissemination of ideas engendered by philosophical treatises such as his *Political Justice*, or whether he represses all mention of the necessity of mass uprising out of fear of arrest for sedition. He was certainly aware of the seemingly ineluctable historical connection between revolution and violence, a connection articulated by Marx one century later in his aphorism that “force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one” (*Capital* 751). Godwin briefly alludes to this

²⁴ Another, later publication goes further to condemn political associations, specifically John Thelwall and the London Corresponding Society. In Godwin’s 1795 pamphlet *Considerations on Lord Grenville’s and Mr. Pitt’s Bills, Concerning Treasonable and Seditious Practices, and Unlawful Assemblies*, he likens Thelwall to a “common wrestler” who has “been loudest in increasing the broil” by having “called for blood” (81-82). See also a 4 March 1812 letter to Shelley, in which he advises the young would-be reformer that “discussion, reading, enquiry, perpetual communication: these are my favourite methods for the improvement of mankind, but associations, organized societies, I firmly condemn. You may as well tell the adder not to sting . . . as to tell organized societies of men . . . to be innocent, to employ no violence, and calmly to await the progress of truth. I never was at a public political dinner, a scene that I have now not witnessed for many years, that I did not see how the enthusiasm was lighted up, how the flame caught from man to man, how fast the dictates of sober reason were obliterated by the gusts of passion, and how near the assembly was, like Alexander’s compotatores at Persepolis, to go forth and fire the city, or, like the auditors of Anthony’s oration over the body of Caesar, to apply a flaming brand to the mansion of each several conspirator” (qtd. in Paul 2: 204-5).

spectre of radical violence in the final chapter of the final book of *Political Justice*'s first edition, a provocative and somewhat ominous ending that denounces revolutionary violence even as it hints at its necessity. Admitting that massacre often accompanies revolution, Godwin suggests that despite its horrors, the short-term "moment of horror and distress" inflicted by mass upheaval is a mere pittance for the "ages of felicity" to follow (*PJ* 467).²⁵ Employing, like Marx, a bodily metaphor to rationalize the necessity of revolutionary force, Godwin compares the use of force to the amputation of a limb, which, despite momentary pain, leads to improved functioning of the organism (468). In this final chapter, Godwin admits, despite his repeated insistence that *Political Justice* is intended for the intellectual elite, the possibility that its precepts will "ferment in the minds of the vulgar" (466) and lead to the type of wanton aggression historically attributed to the Goths and the Vandals. Another subtle loophole appears in Godwin's explanation of the "doctrine of force in general," which states that force should only be resorted to in cases where any other means is ineffectual (111).

This is not to suggest that Godwin in any way consciously advocated the necessary evils of revolutionary violence or massacre nor that he intended *Political Justice* to incite such behaviour, but the urgency and force of the volume's prefatory rhetoric does contrast with its pacifist and gradualist precepts. The preface seems to have been written to inflame rather than to inform its readers, despite Godwin's opposite intent. In this instance the preface works against the grain of the text it is supposed to supplement, creating a friction generated by the tension between the work's gradual and radical impulses. As Mark Philp observes,

²⁵ As French revolutionary bloodshed escalated, many British radicals found themselves in the increasingly awkward position of justifying the use of force. Even Wordsworth, during his early radical phase, stressed its necessity in his unpublished 1793 *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff*: "Alas! The obstinacy & perversion of men is such that [Liberty] is too often obliged to borrow the very arms of despotism to overthrow him and in order to reign in peace must establish herself by violence" (*PW* 48).

Political Justice “neither was, nor was intended to be, intimately connected to the political events of the time. Godwin was writing philosophy; he was not, as so many of his contemporaries were, practising politics” (76). But its preface, despite itself, de-idealizes the speculative treatise, dragging it into a political arena wherein it is forced to confront the contradictions inherent within its own speculation, forced to confront its own political unconscious. To return to Godwin’s own distinction between the moral and tendency of a work, the individual reader’s *actual* interpretation of a work can rarely if ever be equated with the moral of the author’s semantic intention. *Political Justice*’s preface problematizes the moral of the text it introduces through the very act of so explicitly contextualizing itself: Godwin was well aware of the potential multiplicity of interpretations, and targeting the intellectual elite as the book’s primary audience certainly did not preclude the possibility of radical incitement on a mass scale.

“A Public That is Panic Struck”

Although in theory freedom of the press allowed all citizens to publish their views, the 1792 King’s Proclamation against seditious writings led to the policing of all works published in the succeeding years. A variety of factors determined whether a publication would be deemed seditious and therefore subject to authorial prosecution. A hazy set of criteria determined whether or not a book was seditious: books deemed to be speculative or to participate in the exchange of ideas were exempt from prosecution, but those “designed to inflame the minds of disgruntled sectors of society” (Keen 55) were punished with the full force of the law. Moreover, potentially seditious books were acceptable if they were either written in a style inaccessible to the lower class reader, if they showed evidence of having been composed over a long period of time, or if their price was expensive enough to prevent

purchase by the lower orders. According to the apocryphal tale of *Political Justice* being discussed in parliament on May 25, 1793, Pitt cited the book's prohibitive expense as grounds for not prosecuting it. Mary Shelley recalled hearing her father tell the story of the parliamentary debate, at the conclusion of which Pitt observed that "a three guinea book could never do much harm among those who had not three shillings to spare" (qtd. in Paul 1: 80).²⁶ The book's price, according to Mary, was "in strict conformity to his principles. He was an advocate for improvements brought in by the enlightened and sober-minded, but he deprecated abrupt innovations, and appeals to the passions of the multitude" (80). Responding to Pitt's classism and elitism, Mary in turn evokes a series of paradoxes and tensions that highlight Godwin's own anxious response to a mass reading public, concerns that Godwin will thematize in the latter part of *Caleb Williams*, as discussed later in this chapter.

On the other hand, those works that had obviously been written and published quickly, priced cheaply, and designed to inflame the emotions of the public were considered dangerous and subject to prosecution. Hence the anti-Jacobin *British Critic* is able to shrug off the possibility of *Political Justice's* potential revolutionary impact by gloatingly depicting the work as a non-seller:

Secure in these great pledges of obscurity, full many a copy have we seen with its title page exposed in a window with its leaves uncut, till flies and dust had defaced its open front, and many an one, perhaps, shall we see descending from the flies above to those of subterranean London, guiltless of having seduced one wavering mind, or excited even a wish to prosecute, much less to persecute, the author. (qtd. in Keen 56)

²⁶ However, as Don Locke notes, the actual price of *Political Justice* was not three guineas but £1 16s. 0d (60).

This description, however, is inaccurate: *Political Justice* did not sell nearly as well as Paine's *Rights of Man*, but it did achieve a high degree of popularity uncharacteristic of a book of such bulk. In addition to its 4,000 copies sold, the book was "everywhere the theme of popular conversation and praise"; was pirated in Ireland and Scotland; was very well received even by lower class readers; and hundreds of the purchased copies were distributed through subscriptions, lending libraries, and read aloud in public gatherings (Locke 61-62).

Godwin's preface to *Political Justice* confronts issues of censorship and readership, as it attempts to position the work in relation to its intended audience. If the philosophical principles contained within the volume are timeless and universal, the preface by contrast obeys Derrida's "occasional necessity," directly implicating itself in the tumult of its time:

The period in which the work makes its appearance is singular. The people of England have assiduously been excited to declare their loyalty, and to mark every man as obnoxious who is not ready to sign the Shibboleth of the constitution. Money is raised by voluntary subscription to defray the expence [sic] of prosecuting men who shall dare to promulgate heretical opinions, and thus to express them at once with the enmity of government and of individuals. This was an accident wholly unforeseen when the work was undertaken; and it will scarcely be supposed that such an accident could produce any alteration in the writer's designs. Every man, if we may believe the voice of rumour, is to be prosecuted who shall appeal to the people by the publication of any unconstitutional paper or pamphlet; and it is added, that men are to be prosecuted for any unguarded words that may be dropped in the warmth of conversation and debate. (v)

Godwin here captures the mood of the radical moment of January 1793, pulling no punches in his attempt to convey the general paranoia experienced by a “public that is panic struck” (v) as an anxious English government reacted with increasingly restrictive measures to the concurrent revolutionary events unfolding in France. In this preface, Godwin straddles a dangerously fine line between sedition and speculation: the preface is strikingly provocative, expressing Godwin’s anger at governmental intrusions on subjects’ liberty through censorship not only in the public sphere of printed works, but also through the panoptic surveillance of private conversation and debate. Its tone is significantly more agitated and confrontational than the reasoned and reflective cadences of the treatise itself. Overall, however, Godwin makes the case that *Political Justice* should be classified as speculative philosophy, which is perhaps why he feels sufficiently empowered to pepper his preface with such bold rhetoric. Describing *Political Justice* as “an appeal to men of study and reflexion” (v), an elite prototype of Coleridge’s clerisy, Godwin highlights his intention to target a more refined class of reader who would ideally contemplate and consider its philosophical principles, and participate in a more gradual large-scale ideological evolution to be realized in futurity. He implies that to censor such a work would be akin to “suppressing the activity of mind” or “putting an end to the disquisitions of science” (v).

The preface to *Political Justice* is an anarchist’s challenge to authority, a refusal to accede to the spies and censors determined to suppress seditious publications. Its inclusion is a gamble on Godwin’s part because it unnecessarily implicates the text in the fray that it could have transcended by dint of its status as speculative philosophy. Even as it makes the case for its own speculative status, however, the preface does align itself with the very incendiary literature from which it attempts to distance itself, emphasizing that the treatise was hastily published before its completion because “it seemed as if no contemptible part of

the utility of the work depended upon its early appearance” (iv). As a result, the composition and the printing of the work was rushed out of a desire to “reconcile a certain degree of dispatch with the necessary deliberation” and the printing was therefore commenced “long before the composition was finished” (iv). Because of the hasty publication of the first edition, Godwin lacked the opportunity to fully incubate his ideas, which is why the second and third editions contain numerous revisions. But the paradox is clear: there is no reason why the composition of a purely speculative work of philosophy would need to be rushed, unless it was intended to make an immediate impact. Political pamphlets, newspapers, and journals are characterized by their urgency and hasty publication because their purpose is the immediate engagement of topical issues; philosophical treatises, on the other hand, are generally not subject to the same occasional exigencies.

Yet even as the preface involves itself in the discourse of contemporary revolutionary debate, it does simultaneously evince a paradoxical desire to dissociate itself from local referentiality. In an earlier manuscript draft of the preface, Godwin had originally acknowledged known radicals Thomas Holcroft and William Nicholson (*PJV* 4). Their exclusion from the published version suggests that Godwin, whether out of fear of prosecution-via-association or out of a decision to universalize rather than localize the preface, chose to omit references to fellow radicals.²⁷ Unlike the prefaces to, for example, Burke’s 1790 *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and Paine’s 1791 *Rights of Man*, Godwin prefatorally wades into the revolution debate while maintaining a degree of ironic detachment, achieved especially through his disarming use of a third-person prefatory voice.

²⁷ However, in the second edition’s preface, Godwin does add a sentence referring to the recent prosecution of Daniel Crichton, a tallow-chandler tried in January 1793 for treason: “The first conviction of this kind, which the author was far from imagining to be so near, was of a journeyman tallow-chandler, January 8, 1793, who, being shown the regalia at the Tower, was proved to have vented a coarse expression against royalty to the person that exhibited them” (*PJV* 6).

Referring to himself as “the author,” Godwin constructs a shadowy prefatory persona in keeping with the preface’s tendency to circumvent fixed systems of value or meaning. And unlike Burke and Paine, whose prefaces address actual persons—Burke’s is written as an epistle to the “gentleman in Paris” (1) who erroneously assumes Burke supports the French revolution, while Paine’s is dedicated to George Washington and makes constant reference to Burke and the “flagrant misrepresentations” (3) of the *Reflections*—Godwin eschews such local references, instead positioning his book in the broader scheme of political writers like Swift, Holbach, Rousseau, and Helvétius.²⁸

For the 1796 publication of the revised *Political Justice*, Godwin added a second preface, a text which so frustrated Wordsworth that he apparently lost all interest in reading the second edition despite his initial excitement about it. As Wordsworth indicates in a March 1796 letter to William Matthews, “I expect to find the work much improved. I cannot say that I have been encouraged in this hope by the perusal of the second preface, which is all I have yet looked into. Such a piece of barbarous writing I have not often seen. It contains scarce one sentence decently written” (*EY* 170). This critique of the preface’s style is more likely a displaced ideological critique, as by 1796 Wordsworth had become disenchanted with Godwin and with political radicalism generally, and there is nothing in the style of the preface to warrant such a vitriolic attack. Wordsworth’s reaction is symptomatic of Philp’s point that the second edition preface is a “a piece of pure obfuscation” and “prevarication” (121) based on its tendency to avoid clear statements about the motives for

²⁸ Godwin’s account of *Political Justice*’s evolution, briefly delineated in the preface, emphasizes his allegiance to British and European political philosophy, rather than to local radical activists and journalists: “The sentiments it contains are by no means the suggestions of a sudden effervescence of fancy. Political enquiry had long held a foremost place in the writer’s attention. . . . He owed this conviction [that monarchy is unavoidably corrupt] to the political writings of Swift and to a perusal of the Latin historians. Nearly at the same time he derived great additional instruction from reading the most considerable French writers upon the nature of man in the following order, *Système de la Nature*, Rousseau, and Helvétius” (iv).

Godwin's extensive revisions—specifically, its waffling on the issue of whether Godwin felt compelled to revise out of response to “external pressures” or out of a desire to assuage self-doubt about the validity of his theories. Ironically, Wordsworth misses in Godwin's second edition preface an attempt to offset revolutionary fervor with a sense of gradualism that in fact speaks precisely to Wordsworth's own dissatisfaction with Godwin's early radicalism, even if Wordsworth's own gradualism is—as I will demonstrate in Chapter Three—less overtly political than Godwin's. Most of the second edition's preface is devoted to a rather long-winded apology for the sheer quantity of revisions; it even goes so far as to apologize to the “purchasers of the former edition” (*PJV* 7) who might feel put upon to purchase the second edition. However, at this phase in the publication history of *Political Justice*, two years after its original publication, the political and the personal have for Godwin become intertwined to the point that it becomes impossible to unravel their separate threads. The “external pressures” to which Godwin may have been responding—for instance, the increasing resistance of conservatives or the still-looming threat of prosecution—have always already been absorbed into Godwin's philosophical system and constitute an integral part of his theoretical process. In other words, the “obfuscation” identified by Philp is the result of Godwin's struggle to work through his own entanglement with the public sphere, and the second edition preface manifests the strains of the text's involvement with the forces of historicity with which it must contend.

The final paragraph of the second edition's preface revisits questions of prosecution and the political function of *Political Justice*, which have now taken on a different role in the aftermath of revolutionary Terror, and in the context of Godwin's revised attention to the issue of violence and revolution:

The Enquiry concerning Political Justice has been treated by some persons as of a seditious and inflammatory nature. This is probably an aspersion. If the political principles in favour of which it is written have no solid foundation, they will probably be attended with no more than a temporary fashion; and the present work is little calculated to answer a temporary purpose. If on the contrary they be founded in immutable truth . . . they will one day gain the ascendancy. In that case the tendency of such a disquisition, will be to smooth the gradation, and to prepare the enlightened to sympathise with the just claims of the oppressed and the humble. No man can more fervently deprecate scenes of commotion and tumult than the author of this book; no man would more anxiously avoid the lending his assistance in the most distant manner to animosity and bloodshed; but he persuades himself that, whatever may be the events with which the present crisis of human history shall be distinguished, the effect of his writings . . . will be found favourable to the increase and preservation of a general kindness and benevolence. (*PJV* 7-8)

Godwin again reiterates, this time in less ambiguous terms, his opposition to violent revolution and his belief in a gradualist scheme of reform. The revisions for the second edition include more forceful indictments of revolutionary violence: for instance, the amputated limb analogy is deleted, and the radical who resorts to violence is characterized as “the enemy, and not the benefactor of his contemporaries” (*PJ* 126). As *Political Justice* has evolved, Godwin appears to have more clearly defined his stance on the issue of force. But this is not to suggest, as does Brailsford, that the treatise has been “toned down” by “growing caution” (68) or, as Woodcock claims, that Godwin “tended to bend before the

blast” (121) of conservative backlash. In Godwin’s prefatory words, “the spirit and great outlines of the work . . . remain untouched” (*PJV* 7), and many of the text’s fundamental and most incendiary principles—especially its condemnation of monarchy and systems of government generally—remain intact. Rather, the revisions are the necessary result of the work’s progressive nature and reflect Godwin’s continuous involvement with and sensitivity to historical events. But both the second and first edition prefaces conclude with perhaps the most important Godwinian notion: the importance of a work’s tendency and Godwin’s sincere hope that *Political Justice* will contribute to the gradual evolution towards human perfection. In the first edition’s preface, Godwin entreats the reader to “look with indifference upon the false fire of the moment, and to foresee the calm period of reason which will succeed” (*PJ* v), making the ultimate case for the speculative nature of *Political Justice* by highlighting the ephemerality of the historical moment and situating the text in the distant horizon of a more enlightened future age. Godwin’s appeal to the future reader keeps the text open for continued speculation, in much the same way that the figure of Augustus Harley, Jr. symbolizes the future reader in Hays’s *Memoirs*, as I will discuss in Chapter Two. For the modern reader, the preface no longer poses a threat to order; rather, it portrays, in concise and evocative terms, the perilousness of the political atmosphere in which *Political Justice* first made its appearance.

Caleb Williams: The Return of the Repressed Preface

Like *Political Justice*, *Caleb Williams* is a perpetual work-in-process, having been published in five separate editions during Godwin’s lifetime, between its initial 1794 publication and its 1831 publication as the second in the series of Colburn and Bentley’s Standard Novels. Godwin made over 1,200 changes to the text, ranging from the minutiae

of grammatical and stylistic corrections to major structural and episodic modifications. *Caleb Williams* is also, like *Political Justice*, a multi-prefaced work: the 1796 second edition contains two prefaces (the original, suppressed 1794 preface along with an additional, new preface), the 1831 reissue contains Mary Shelley's prefatory "Memoirs of William Godwin," and the 1832 reissue of Godwin's third novel *Fleetwood* includes a preface in which Godwin retrospectively chronicles the composition of *Caleb Williams*. This last preface, although not originally a part of *Caleb Williams*, has become so intertwined with the text about which it speaks that it is commonly included in modern editions of the novel and has, I would argue, become one of the novel's several prefaces, albeit at a slight narrative remove. These four prefaces are the result of a process of accretion through which the novel has acquired additional paratexts, resulting in fundamental changes in how the text is transmitted to successive generations of readers. Like stamps on a passport, each paratext documents the novel's progression through time, each instance bearing the imprint of its historical moment. The processive nature of *Caleb Williams*'s prefaces plays out in a different register the ongoing restlessness of *Political Justice*'s prefaces in their attempt to deal with political and social context. Whereas *Political Justice* mediates between realpolitik and the idealism of a philosophy whose speculation works against this idealism, the prefaces to *Caleb Williams* perform the additional work of mediating between fiction and reality. This section will consider the narratological function of the preface, exploring how the original preface to *Caleb Williams* augments the reader's experience of the novel through its ability to incorporate extradiegetically the 'real life' political anxieties of its historical moment into the fictional realm of the novel. In addition to presenting a reading of *Caleb Williams* that considers the preface as a distinct narrative level, I will also demonstrate precisely how prefaces, because of their liminality, straddle the interior and exterior boundaries of a text.

The 1794 preface to the first edition of *Caleb Williams* did not appear in the prefatory pages of the novel, as it was allegedly suppressed by the publisher for fear of sedition charges. Originally published in May of 1794, at a time when the threat of prosecution for treasonable activities was peaking, *Caleb Williams*, like its philosophical predecessor, was a risky publication.²⁹ According to this preface, because of the “alarms of booksellers” it was “withdrawn” (1) from the volume. This claim is not unreasonable, nor are the fears of the booksellers unwarranted: not only were authors culpable for the products of their pens, but publishers and booksellers were also commonly implicated in the sedition charges.³⁰ Like the preface to *Political Justice*, the original preface to *Caleb Williams* grounds the text in the historical moment of its publication and contextualizes its theoretical project within an explicitly delineated account of contemporary political debate. The ongoing struggle between radicals and conservatives is concisely depicted: “while one party pleads for reformation and change, the other extols in the warmest terms the existing constitution of society” (1). Captured in this terse statement are the over one hundred books published between 1790 and 1794 on the subject of British political reformation in response to the French revolution; but Burke’s *Reflections* figures most prominently in this allusion, being the most famous contemporary text of praise for the English constitution. Also alluded to in this sentence, via its association with Burke and its significance to the novel in the form of another paratext (the novel’s original title), is the text to which Burke’s *Reflections* is a

²⁹ Although the Treasonable Practices Act would not be passed until half a year later (in 1795), *Habeas Corpus* had been suspended, resulting in a repressive intellectual climate.

³⁰ A disturbing precedent had already been set for the persecution of printers and booksellers in the wake of Paine’s 1792 *in absentia* sedition conviction for *The Rights of Man*. For example, Matthew Falkner and Samuel Birch, proprietors of the radical newspaper *Manchester Herald*, were accused of selling Paine’s pamphlet along with other seditious literature in 1793; rather than face prosecution they fled to America. Radical newspaper proprietor Richard Phillips was also accused and found guilty in April 1793: he served an eighteen-month sentence. Similarly, Paternoster Row bookseller H.D. Symonds was convicted and sentenced to four years’ imprisonment; James Ridgeway, pamphlet-shop proprietor, was given a similar sentence (Goodwin 271-73; Smith 62).

response: Richard Price's Old Jewry Sermon of November 4th, 1789, implores each man to "think of all things as they are, and not suffer any partial affections to blind his understanding" (8) in his quest for political freedom. *Things as They Are*, the title under which Godwin originally published the novel, aligns the text with the revolutionary import of Price's ideas, and, by extension, opposes it to a conservative Burkean response.

In the context of its relation to *Political Justice*'s preface, however, two important observations can be made. The first concerns Godwin's return to the question of 'speculative' literature, which as previously stated was one condition for a text's exemption from sedition charges. In *Caleb Williams*' preface, Godwin bluntly states that the novel is "no refined and abstract speculation; it is a study and delineation of things passing in the moral world" (1). Booksellers would no doubt have been alarmed by this confrontational claim that the novel has gone beyond the merely speculative nature of *Political Justice*. This transition from the theoretical to the actual contains the perceived possibility that a text dealing with 'things' rather than 'ideas' is more likely to incite mass uprising, at least according to the logic of the period's agents of censorship. But this claim does shed light on Godwin's perception of novels: in the preface he refers to the novel as a "vehicle" (1), suggesting that the primary function of this literary form is to convey political ideas in a practical way, a point that I will take up later in this section. Second, Godwin in the preface subverts another of the conditions of sedition charges, that of audience. Whereas in the preface to *Political Justice* Godwin claims that he writes for "men of study and reflection" (v), in his preface to *Caleb Williams* he addresses the novel-reading bulk of the British population, those whom "books of philosophy and science are never likely to reach" (1). This substantial broadening of Godwin's reading public would inevitably result in a more wide-scale dissemination of his subversive political ideas, posing a significant threat to the stability

of public order. Therefore, based on Godwin's bold defiance of the Treasonable Practices Act, explicitly declared in the first edition's preface, one can understand why his publisher and booksellers would demand that this hazardous preface be suppressed.

The withholding of the preface raises an important question: why is the preface suppressed, and the novel itself allowed to be published? The original preface to *Caleb Williams* is quite brief, and, when compared to the subject matter of the novel, seems relatively innocuous. A mere ten sentences of introductory discourse prefacing a three-volume novel hardly seems threatening, yet the fact that it was singled out as dangerous speaks volumes about the perceived rhetorical force of the preface. The preface is capable of creating the conditions of its reception; or, in Philippe Lejeune's words, the preface is that "fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text" (qtd. in Genette 2). Lejeune's remark emphasizes the curious rhetorical power of the preface, a power that Godwin's publisher and booksellers knew all too well. The set of assumptions underlying this conception of the preface can be understood through an exploration of the preface's textual status in the context of its relation to the main text. Any prefaced work is a framed narrative, and in the case of a novel like *Caleb Williams*, which already consists of embedded narratives within the main work proper, the inclusion of the prefaces creates an additional narrative layer, problematizing the novel's narrative scheme. John Matthews observes that the frame is a "function which enables a relation between differentiated realms (the reader and author, the world and the artwork, reality and imagination)" (26). The contrast between preface and narrative gives the preface the illusion of reality, as though the frame is that which mediates between real world and fictional world. Godwin's preface to *Caleb Williams* functions as a buffer zone, within which the author speaks candidly about the work, and the preface seems to exist more in the 'real' world than in the fictional world of

the novel. Within the space of the preface, the illusion exists that the author himself is stepping forth to speak ‘in the flesh’ as it were: a fraudulent assumption, of course, as the preface-writing author is also the writer of the narrative. In this case, the figure of ‘Godwin,’ radical author of *Political Justice*—and any of his signature’s Jacobin, anarchist, or atheistic associations—has been excised from the novel; the only remaining trace is his name on the title-page. The suppression of the preface therefore symbolically enacts the erasure of Godwin the public figure. Paradoxically, having been deemed an extraneous narrative layer—an “empty husk” (*Dissemination* 9), as Derrida would have it—the preface is effaced.

But this attempt by publishers to repress the preface to the first edition merely results in its eventual return, for it resurfaces from the depths of the political unconscious to appear in the prefatory space of the 1796 second edition. Moreover, affixed to the original preface is an additional preface, informing the reader of the original preface’s omission. The second edition of *Caleb Williams*, then, is framed by an epinarrative, through which Godwin contextualizes and—by dint of making present the original preface’s enforced absence—gives additional weight to the novel’s revolutionary potential. At this phase in its paratextual accretion, the novel has, sixteen months after its initial publication, been considerably altered by the addition of the two prefaces. Where no preface previously existed, readers of the second edition are confronted with a terse account of Godwin’s ultimately successful struggle to print the original preface. Not only does the inclusion of the new preface(s) make explicit the novel’s potentially seditious nature—creating an aura of danger at the novel’s outset—but, more importantly, the prefatory resurrection of Godwin reinforces his authority as a Jacobin writer who, having taken the risk of publishing the novel under his own name, has emerged to take control of the narrative. Godwin, who, like Caleb, has been

pursued and prevented from relating the truth, triumphantly returns to his rightful position in the outermost narrative layer.

In his editor's introduction to *Caleb Williams*, David McCracken interrogates the authenticity of the second edition preface, posing some important questions about the relation between the preface and the novel, and about its extra-textual engagement with historical events. The crux of McCracken's enquiry concerns the rationale for the preface's eventual publication. "Why print the preface at all," McCracken asks, "when its contents were still inflammatory and it had by no means an obvious connection with the novel itself?" (xii). McCracken suggests a number of possibilities for Godwin's decision to include the preface: Godwin might have intended to exaggerate the novel's importance by suggesting that it was subject to persecution; or, a "deluded" Godwin, adhering to his own authorial intention rather than the novel's finished product, might have believed that the preface is a true description of the novel, "against all evidence to the contrary in the novel itself" (xii). Eventually settling on the probability that Godwin's remarks in the preface were sincere, and that it does accurately describe what the novel achieves on one level at least, McCracken points out the preface has "misled many readers into thinking that Godwin was conscious of no essential difference between the rhetorical effect of a treatise and that of a novel" (xii). I would suggest, contrary to McCracken, that what is important is not what the preface rightly or wrongly *says* about the novel, but how it becomes absorbed into the structure of the narrative and participates in the novel's thematization of political issues, a point I will take up shortly in my analysis of the preface as a framing device. I would also modify McCracken's claim that the contents of the preface were still inflammatory by the time of their 1796 publication. The space that had opened up for the actual revolutionary power of literature had already closed by the time of the publication of *Caleb Williams*' second edition.

Even as the preface embodies Godwin's daring defiance of the forces of textual repression, its inclusion in the second edition also reflects a shift in the historical conditions for radical literature. The sentiments expressed in the preface's second part hint that the heyday of revolutionary possibility may have subsided: Godwin writes, in the past tense, that "terror *was* the order of the day" (2; italics mine), suggesting that things have, to some extent at least, calmed down by October of 1795, the date of the second preface's composition. Godwin pinpoints the end of the "terror" as coterminous with the acquittal of members of the Corresponding and Constitutional Societies, including Godwin's friends Thomas Holcroft, John Horne Tooke, and John Thelwall, who were accused of high treason and whose release was partly believed to have been aided by Godwin's anonymous October 21, 1794 *Morning Chronicle* article, "Cursory Strictures on the Charge Delivered by Lord Chief Justice Eyre." In the preface to *Caleb Williams*, Godwin broadly alludes to these events, claiming that the publication of the novel's first edition occurred "in the same month in which the sanguinary plot broke out against the liberties of Englishmen, which was happily terminated by the acquittal of its first intended victims, in the close of that year" (2). The acquittal of the Jacobin writers coincides with the return of the prefatory Godwin, and the tide of public opinion upon which radical writers rode had subsided in the aftermath of the French terror as many English radicals reconsidered the efficacy of revolution.

One perceives a tension, however, generated by the contrast between the historical specificity of the preface and the ahistorical vagueness of the novel, which is reminiscent of a similar contrast between the localized preface to *Political Justice* and the treatise's attempt to posit universal 'truths' also intended to be transhistorically disseminated. The action of the novel seems to exist somewhere outside of the sphere of any recognizable historical period. Rudolf Storch claims that the novel has "no place in the society of 18th century England,

but belongs to the shadowy world of dreams” (198) while A.D. Harvey notes that it is “curiously detached from recognizable time and place” and “contains no hint of the precise period at which the action is supposed to have occurred” (237). Early in the novel, the year of the action is signified by a gap in the text, as when Caleb recalls that “in the summer of the year Mr. Falkland visited his estate in our country after an absence of several months” (5). The temporal placing of the novel is made intentionally vague by Godwin, evincing his desire to construct the narrative as an ahistorical political allegory. A rare clue to the text’s historical situation is discerned by Karl Simms, who takes the novel’s reference to the Black Act as indicating that the action must take place sometime between 1723, when the act was passed, and 1827, when it was repealed. Nonetheless, Simms reads the lacuna-in-lieu-of-an-actual-date as a reminder that in order for the text’s original title, “Things as They Are,” to hold true, the text must exist in a “time continuum which is always already the present” (360). But with the addition of the prefaces, the novel’s action is localized, the events presumably taking place sometime around the date of “May 12, 1794,” the date of the first preface, or “October 29, 1795,” the date of the second. Moreover, the date of the first preface is the same date on which Pitt’s government suspended *habeas corpus* and had twelve of the most prominent British radicals arrested for treason. Whether or not the preface was written on the date claimed or whether Godwin fabricated the date for rhetorical purposes is beside the point: as the novel stands, it is permanently affixed to a specific day in history, a day of especial importance to those connected with the English Jacobin movement.

The Preface as Narrative Frame

Apart from its function of anchoring the text to its historical moment of publication, it remains to be determined how the 1796 prefaces participate in the narrative of the main

text they introduce. To return to Derrida's seminal question—"Does a Preface exist?"—a preface that merely situates itself outside of the narrative's limits while having very little to do with the text itself could not, in the final analysis, make a very convincing case for its own relevance. But because of their ability to exploit the dialogic nature of novelistic discourse, prefaces can perform a number of textual maneuvers. The 1795 preface to *Caleb Williams* does, despite its brevity, participate in the narrative that it introduces. I would go so far as to suggest that, once published, this preface becomes an integral part of the novel, comprising one of its narrative layers and significantly contributing to its overall effect on the reader. In his narratological analysis of *Caleb Williams*, Kenneth Graham identifies four "narrative moments" that structure the novel (*Politics* 84-96). I would modify Graham's claim by adding the preface as a narrative moment—the first narrative moment, no less—because of its spatial positioning at the head of the text and its ability to straddle both extratextual and intratextual boundaries. What characterizes this preface *intratextually* is its thematic relation to the main text. The preface is a thematic microcosm of the novel, representing in miniature many of the major themes that will be developed more fully in the novel itself. Godwin's 1795 preface functions like Friedrich Schlegel's ideal preface, that which "must be at once the square root and the square of its book" (144). Specifically, the preface dovetails with the novel via its thematization of issues related to justice, especially through its concern with trials, judgment, imprisonment, and tyranny. And given the narrative's formal tendency to present incidents that mirror or replicate other incidents within the novel, it is not surprising that the preface too should participate in these scenes of narrative reduplication.

One such mise-en-abyme³¹ narrative moment concerns the incident in which Falkland, intensely scrutinized by Caleb, serves as justice of the peace for a murder trial. As Caleb observes, murder is the “master key that wakes distemper in the mind of Mr. Falkland” (126) and he watches Falkland for signs of his guilt. The nature of the murder trial exactly parallels Falkland’s own entanglement with Tyrrel: the accused was, like Falkland, an “ingenuous and benevolent” (127) man who had been hounded by a Tyrrel-like tyrant. The accused peasant, unable to bear the animosity of his enemy, murdered him in a fit of passion in an incident that Godwin explicitly notes “suggested a sufficient resemblance” to Falkland’s suspected murder of Tyrrel, an analogous confrontation played out by “a human brute persisting in a course of hostility to a man of benevolent character, and suddenly and terribly cut off in the midst of his career” (129). Falkland finds himself unable to bear the ordeal of a testimony that too closely mirrors his own guilty secret, so he discharges the accused peasant. Caleb, having witnessed Falkland’s extreme agitation, determines that Falkland must have been the murderer of Tyrrel. Taking a page from *Hamlet’s* play-within-a-play, Godwin recasts the scene as a trial-within-a-trial in which a guilty character is forced to observe the representation of his own crimes under the surveillance of a suspicious character.

³¹ My use of this slippery term appropriates and overlaps two of the experimental definitions offered by Lucien Dällenbach. One is Dällenbach’s rejected possibility that, like a painting which contains a mirror reflecting images from ‘outside’ of the painting (ie. Velasquez’s *Las Meniñas* or Van Eyck’s *Arnolfini Marriage*), the preface brings into the novel “items that (fictively) are outside it,” fulfilling the role of “making the external intrude upon the internal” (12). Although technically inaccurate, this definition does provide an apt analogy for prefatory function generally. But more to the point is the narrative-specific definition of mise-en-abyme as containing a secondary narrative which reflects the primary one insofar as “the process of retroaction requires an analogy between the situation of the character and that of the narrator, in other words between the thematic content of the main story and that of the story contained within it . . . a twinning of activities related to a similar object” (18). Generally, the preface tells the primary narrative of Godwin’s struggle to relate the truth of his narrative, just as Caleb in the secondary narrative seeks to do the same. But within Caleb’s narrative are other instances of variations on the concept, such as the peasant murder trial discussed above.

As a narrative level, prefaces can capitalize upon their ability to participate in—or at least to create the illusion of participating in—both the inside and the outside of the prefaced text. Godwin’s prefatory statement that the “spirit and character of the government intrudes itself into every rank of society” (1) is the crux of the preface’s thematic explication. Having made this assertion in the preface, Godwin simultaneously enacts it. Occupying a peculiar and privileged spatio-temporal position within the text, the preface is what Genette calls an “undefined zone” (2) on the nebulous border between the text’s inside and outside. What characterizes this undefined zone in a fictional work is the lack of clear definition between the perceived reality of the preface and what can only be at best the verisimilitude of the narrative. This metaphysical “spirit” of governmental intrusion materializes itself in the preface in a more tangible and realistic way than it possibly could in the body of the narrative because of the perception that the preface exists on a higher narrative level, closer to ‘real life.’ The preface, whether true or not, is capable of a higher level of realism than the narrative, and the prefatory addendum’s claim that the original preface has been suppressed augments the idea of government’s panoptic ability to intervene in its subjects’ affairs. The governmental intrusion about which the preface speaks makes itself present as an actual event: as performed in the preface, ‘government’ has actually encroached on the space of the novel itself. Of course, Godwin’s critique of institutional intrusion is central both to his argument in *Political Justice* and to the action of the plot of *Caleb Williams*. In *Political Justice*, he makes the very similar claim that government “insinuates itself into our personal dispositions, and insensibly communicates its own spirit to our private transactions” (*PJ* 8). Just as the “spirit” of government infiltrates the private sphere of interpersonal relations, so too does it violate the fictional space of the novel through its seepage into the space of the preface. And the formal reduplication of narrative instances of

such repression, which work their way down the hierarchy of narrative levels from the preface to Caleb's own story to his narration of other similarly themed stories—such as the Emily Melville and the Hawkins sub-plots—reflects a parallel hierarchical replication of power imbalances mimetically refracted in the narrative's structure. Thus, after having endured the sham trial in which he is wrongfully convicted of robbing Falkland, Caleb, identifying himself with the also wrongly convicted Hawkinses, alleges that Falkland “exhibited, upon a contracted scale indeed, but in which the truth of delineation was faithfully sustained, a copy of what monarchs are, who reckon among the instruments of their power prisons of state” (177). The same power imbalance that, on a grand scale, characterizes the absolute power of the monarch in relation to his subjects perpetuates itself in miniature in the daily lives of landlords and tenants, masters and servants, men and women.

The plot of *Caleb Williams* is propelled by a series of incidents that substantiate the effects of this pervasive spirit of government on individual subjects. The primary target of Godwin's ideological critique is the British legal system, the force through which government exhibits its control over its subjects. The novel's second and third volumes chronicle Caleb's increasingly desperate attempts to evade the law, but no matter where he runs he is unable to escape its pervasive gaze. Thwarted in his efforts to relate the truth of his tale to his contemporaries, Caleb has no other choice but to pen his memoirs guided by a “faint idea that posterity may by their means be induced to render me a justice which my contemporaries refuse” (3). P.N. Furbank's oft-cited reading of the novel as a political allegory, a “symbolic picture of Godwin himself in the act of writing *Political Justice*” (215) in which Caleb represents Godwin, Falkland symbolizes the *ancien regime*, and the opening of the trunk is the writing of *Political Justice*, hints at the possibility of a reading of *Caleb Williams*

that takes seriously the narrative function of the preface. Because of the preface's emphasis on government control and the suppression of writing, and because its narrative casts the figure of Godwin as a seeker of truth fighting against the forces of reactionary paranoia, one can easily make the connection between the persecuted Caleb and the persecuted Godwin. Caleb's plea to posterity becomes even more poignant when considered in the context of what happened to Godwin's reputation by the end of the eighteenth century: as British society became increasingly intolerant to revolutionary ideas, Godwin, in his own words, "was attacked from every side, and in a style which defied all moderation and decency." As the "chief (or shall I say its most voluminous?) English adherent" of the "new philosophy" (*Thoughts* 310-11), Godwin became the prime target of anti-Jacobin backlash, and his name fell into such obscurity that the young Percy Bysshe Shelley was shocked in 1812 to learn that Godwin was in fact still alive.³² So Caleb's appeal to posterity also suggests Godwin's, who might have suspected that his notoriety would escalate to the point that successive generations of readers would need to be called upon to vindicate him. But if not for the preface, a reading that highlights the similarities between Caleb's and Godwin's respective plights would need to rely exclusively on extra-textual evidence to support its claims. The preface inserts the figure of Godwin into the structure of the narrative and emplots the historical facts surrounding the composition and publication of the novel into its frame. Sir Leslie Stephen's remark that "the reader, unassisted by the preface, would scarcely perceive this doctrine [of government intrusion] between the lines" (140) suggests the likelihood of an unperceptive reader, but it does underscore the importance of the preface in making explicit

³² See Shelley's first letter to Godwin, from Jan. 13, 1812: "I have been accustomed to consider him [Godwin] as a luminary too dazzling for the darkness which surrounds him . . . you will not be surprised at the inconceivable emotion with which I learned your existence and your dwelling. I had enrolled your name on the list of the honourable dead. I had felt regret that the glory of your being had passed from this earth of ours. It is not so. You still live, and I firmly believe are still planning the welfare of human kind" (*PBSL* 1: 220).

within the text itself the realities of Godwin's situation in the context of a reading of *Caleb Williams* as political allegory.

In this sense, the preface to *Caleb Williams* can be read as one of the various trials that punctuate the action of the novel. It could be called a meta-trial, speaking implicitly about the mid-1790s sedition trials and Godwin's own fringe involvement with them, while also putting both Godwin himself and his novel on trial in the court of posterity. Almost all prefaces, to some extent, are trials, especially those 'bad cases' whose *exordium* requires the author's *insinuatio*. The most common prefatory function is for the 'author' (or whoever 'speaks' the preface) to plead on his own behalf for the value and relevance of his work. The judge and jury are the work's readers; any prefacing author finds himself in a position rather like that of an accused felon, always on the defensive in his attempt to persuade the judges of the validity of his case. Thus, judgment is integral to the very nature of prefatory writing. One rhetorical technique available to the prefacing author is the appeal to *logos*; like a defendant speaking in the court of law, the prefacing author seeks to create the illusion of objectivity, of the facts speaking for themselves as it were. Hence the extradiegetic prefacer, 'Godwin,' in the preface assumes, as he does in the prefaces to *Political Justice*, a detached third-person persona whose identity is somewhat vague. Referring abstractly to "the author" (1) or the "humble novelist" (2), the preface posits a figure who is undeniably Godwinesque, yet there is no textual indication to suggest that it really is 'Godwin' speaking. Because of prefatory convention, however, the reader assumes the speaker to be Godwin. But Caleb also performs this type of equivocation; despite his avowed intent to obtain justice, he does tend to slip into confusion about the purpose of telling his tale. When detailing the particulars of his preparations for escaping from jail, Caleb becomes self-conscious of the "vice and duplicity" (194) involved in his accumulation of various gimlets,

piercers and chissels to be used for purposes of escape. He remarks that “I am writing my adventures and not my apology” (194). Self-aware of his own elusiveness, Caleb’s rhetorical strategy parallels that of Godwin’s prefatory strategy, through which his “duplicity” characterizes the spirit of his elusive preface. Indeed, this sense of duplicity will become even more pronounced in the prefaces of Mary Hays, as her rhetorical subterfuge is likewise characterized by its double-voiced structure. Although on one level Caleb’s statement is meant to exhibit Godwin’s belief that external circumstances can force an otherwise virtuous individual to engage in nefarious practices—Caleb has been reduced to committing deceitful and criminal acts in his state of desperation—it also reveals a fundamental paradox about Caleb’s perception of the means through which he seeks exoneration. To be vindicated requires the narration of an apology that, as the reader learns more than halfway through the novel, is not really an apology (which, in its etymological sense of *apologia* is a legal term denoting a speech in one’s own defense) but merely an objective chronicle of an “adventure.”³³ These types of metanarrational statements uttered by Caleb periodically throughout the novel tend to puncture the fictionality of the text by evincing a degree of self-consciousness about its own narrative process. But should Caleb’s memoirs be classified as an “apology” or an “adventure”? The same question could be asked of Godwin’s preface.

Provoking the “Mob-Monster”

A final significant intratextual connection between the preface and the narrative proper concerns the reading public and the dissemination of ideas through various literary

³³ The term ‘adventure,’ derived from its Latin root *adventurus*: about to happen, makes for an interesting parallel with the preface. To call a narrative an ‘adventure’ is a lie, because it relates events that have already happened while claiming they are about to happen; similarly, the preface speaks of a work which has already been written as though it is about to happen, while in reality it has been written after the fact.

forms. The preface's claim that the novel's critique of government is a "truth highly worthy to be communicated to persons whom books of philosophy and science are never likely to reach" (1) does, as previously stated, target a readership not addressed in *Political Justice*. But not only does Godwin here announce his intended audience: he also foreshadows the third volume's thematization of the production and reception of texts, which emphasizes how quickly certain texts (even fraudulent 'true' stories) can influence public opinion on a mass scale. At stake is the holy Godwinian grail of the discovery or dissemination of "truth." Kelvin Everest stresses the novel's negative depiction of the futility of trying to tell the truth in his observation that *Caleb Williams* is characterized by a "profound pessimism over the possibility of communicating truth in the present conditions of society" (136). The characters who inhabit the novel's fictional universe are plagued by their inability to convince others of the truth of their tales, especially in situations where their status as social inferiors pits them against superiors whose abuse of power allows them to distort, suppress, or ignore the truth. Caleb, frustrated in his repeated attempts to reveal the truth about Falkland, is himself reduced to a falsehood, stripped of all sense of self as he is forced to assume disguise after disguise to conceal his true identity: "My life was all a lie. I had a counterfeit character to support. I had counterfeit manners to assume. My gait, my gestures, my accents were all of them to be studied" (256). The primary means by which Caleb's character has been publicly ruined is through the diffusion of printed texts—pamphlets, newspaper articles, and penny dreadful novels. What emerges from the novel's third volume is a tension between Godwin's optimism about the potential of the novel to lead its readers towards the truth and his pessimism about the actuality of achieving this goal in the context of contemporary late-eighteenth-century print culture. In the preface Godwin refers to himself as a "humble novelist" (2), a self-description whose ostensible adherence to

the prefatory convention of false modesty belies a more deep-seated anxiety of reception. The third volume of *Caleb Williams* tentatively investigates how the productions of the “humble novelist” can compete in a print culture where the boundary between truth and falsehood is blurred.

The novel *Caleb Williams* is, as Godwin describes it in the preface, a “vehicle” (1) for the propagation of truth. David McCracken’s seminal article, “Godwin’s Literary Theory,” highlights Godwin’s belief in the power of the novel as a political medium, noting that it was common for late eighteenth-century writers to describe novels as vehicles, especially those with a radical aim. Despite the form’s disreputable status, Godwin argues that the novelist’s knowledge of human nature and ability to imaginatively depict things as they are makes the novel superior to history writing (although still inferior to philosophical writing).³⁴ As discussed above, the novel complements the philosophical treatise because of its ability to reach a much wider audience. Godwin’s optimism about the novel’s potential, however, is tempered by his skepticism about the public’s ability to discern the truth. The portrayal of the reading public in the novel’s third volume reflects Godwin’s ongoing struggle to define a hierarchy of readers. In addition to the “men of study and reflexion” (v) targeted in *Political Justice*, and the “persons whom books of philosophy and science are never likely to reach” (1) addressed in *Caleb Williams*, Godwin, in a letter to Coleridge, also suggests another readerly echelon: that of the “mob-monster” (qtd. in McCracken 118) utterly incapable of recognizing the truth. But these latter two categories are slippery, and Godwin’s worst fear

³⁴ See Godwin’s 1797 essay in narrative genre theory, “Of History and Romance.” In this essay, Godwin argues for the “romance” writer’s superiority over the history writer: “The historian is confined to individual incident and individual man, and must hang upon that his invention or conjecture as he can. The writer of romance collects his materials from all sources, experience, report, and the records of human affairs; then generalizes them; and finally selects, from their elements and the various combinations they afford, those instances which he is best qualified to portray, and which he judges most calculated to impress the heart and improve the faculties of his reader. In this point of view we should be apt to pronounce that romance was a nobler species of composition than history” (*Caleb Williams* 464).

that the category of “mob-monster”—an incipient version of Klancher’s mass audience—might in fact characterize all readers *but* the philosophical few manifests itself in the third volume. The third volume could be classified as an imaginative experiment in which Godwin attempts to map the cultural terrain of the reading public he hopes to influence. But during this time of flux, Godwin’s task is problematized by his gradual realization that his envisaged ideal audience might not actually exist. Garrett Sullivan has shown how cultural shifts in the period’s production, dissemination, and reception of printed texts played a role in Godwin’s portrayal of the reading public, contradicting Godwin’s stated belief in the truth-value of the novel. Observing that Godwin’s ideal scenario for the evolution of ideas begins with the discussion of ideas among the philosophical ‘gentleman’ readers before spreading to the lower orders, Sullivan characterizes *Caleb Williams* as illustrating Godwin’s coming to terms with “forms of textuality that do not contribute to a conversation between gentlemen, forms that Godwin sees as a threat not only to literary and intellectual discourse, but also to social relations” (332). However, Godwin’s adherence to an eighteenth-century model of literary reception predicated on the importance of the printed text’s ability to generate such conversation, necessary for the testing and rational teasing out of ideas, has been destabilized by the fragmentation of reading audiences. Godwin’s own experience of attachment to a like-minded literary community is threatened by the emergence of various reading publics characterized by new and disparate textual desires. Confronted with a “world of anonymous tracts and working class journals” (Sullivan 336), in addition to the many other competing forms of discourse among which *Caleb Williams* will circulate, Godwin ultimately expresses his ambivalence about the efficacy of the novel as arbiter of political reformation. The novel’s tendencies thus become a source of concern for Godwin, especially during what Jon Klancher calls the “inchoate cultural

moment” (3) of the early Romantic period, when multiple reading audiences will inevitably produce multiple tendencies.

Although the intended effect of Godwin’s novel is to portray ‘things as they are’ and to awaken in the reader a sense of the injustice and power inequity inherent in England’s political system, there is no guarantee that the novel’s readers will discern this moral. Hence Godwin’s worry, expressed in his preface to the 1832 edition of *Fleetwood*, that *Caleb Williams* had been published merely to “amuse boys and girls in their vacant hours . . . a story to be hastily gobbled up by them, swallowed in a pusillanimous and unanimated mood, without chewing and digestion” (7). Godwin’s worst-case reception scenario describes his readers as passive consumers who, oblivious to the novel’s moral, enjoy the novel merely for its entertainment value. But the depiction of the reading public in *Caleb Williams*’ third volume presents an even more serious problem for a writer whose goal is to disseminate the truth. In a world in which the common reader craves sensational literary accounts like the “histories of celebrated robbers” (259) penned by Caleb after his escape from prison—the type of reader that Wordsworth will single out in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads* as addicted to outrageous forms of stimulation—it is not the fact that readers seek out literature for its entertainment value but the reader’s susceptibility to deception that is especially problematic for Godwin. As a form of “propaganda” (McCracken 131), the novel is but one of many literary forms intended to influence public opinion, and what is disturbing about the third volume’s portrayal of these various forms is their propagation of lies. In an ominous foreshadowing of present-day corporate media manipulation, Godwin presents a scenario in which the production and dissemination of ‘information’ is controlled by the powerful. The source of the several publications calling attention to Caleb’s guilt is Falkland: he is the “absolute author” (296) who, although not necessarily directly responsible for writing the

pamphlets and handbills alerting the public about the fugitive Caleb, fabricated the story of having been robbed by his servant in the first place. Falkland's aristocratic status gives him the power, influence, and financial resources necessary to circulate texts intended to defame Caleb, but Falkland's persecution of Caleb takes on a life of its own once it becomes enmeshed in the legal system. Indeed, as Godwin claims in the preface, "it was proposed, in the invention of the following work, to comprehend, as far as the progressive nature of a single story would allow, a general review of the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism, by which man becomes the destroyer of man" (2). As depicted in the novel, the circulation of printed texts and the dialectical exchange of ideas through conversation—the ideal methods of social reformation for Godwin—are also paradoxically incipient modes of despotism as well. To this end, Joel Faflak points out that the "public sphere of Godwinian conversation, rather than producing autonomous Romantic individuals, instead interpellates subjects (in the Althusserian sense) into the social identities they cannot resist inhabiting" (104).

The first, and most suggestive, instance of the extent to which printed texts serve as proxy-agents of power occurs during Caleb's encounter with the thieves. Shortly after his escape from prison, Caleb, while hiding with the gang of robbers, is 'discovered' as a fugitive after a gang member reads a newspaper article informing the public of his escape. This scene enacts a contrast between two types of reader: the "mob-monster," represented by the two thieves who intend to turn in Caleb; and Mr. Raymond, the gang leader, who exhibits his critical acumen by refusing to believe the newspaper's account. The two thieves immediately believe what they read. As Caleb relates it, "having read for a considerable time, they looked at me, and then at the paper, and then at me again. They then went out of the room together, as if to consult without interruption upon something which that paper

suggested to them” (222) before returning to announce their intention to reap the reward money by apprehending Caleb. But Mr. Raymond weighs the accuracy of the newspaper reports against his own estimation of Caleb’s character, concluding that Caleb is “guiltless of what they lay to his charge as that I am so myself” (224). The newspaper report is especially disquieting not only because it falsely accuses Caleb of a crime he did not commit, but because it suggests that Caleb’s escape from prison is “tantamount to a confession of his guilt” (223). What emerges from this scene is a nervous delineation of the power of printed texts: the sheer rapidity of the spread of information is shocking, as is the ability of texts to so quickly penetrate even an outlaw milieu such as that inhabited by the thieves. What began as a private dispute between two men, Caleb and Falkland, has proliferated to such an extent that even the most obscure substratum of society cannot help but know about it. The printed text is shown to be a valuable weapon in the arsenal of power. Moreover, once a narrative enters the public sphere, it can take on a life of its own. Caleb wonders how Falkland can continue to pursue him in spite of everything he has already endured:

Surely he might now believe that he had sufficiently disarmed me, and might at length suffer me to be at peace. At least ought he not to be contented to leave me to my fate, the perilous and uncertain condition of an escaped felon, instead of thus whetting the animosity and vigilance of my countrymen against me? (227)

But by this point Caleb’s ruminations are ineffectual, because the damage has already been done. Caleb’s defamation becomes a self-perpetuating myth, a topical story of interest that has gone beyond the control of Falkland as it becomes public property, a text to be consumed and abused by an ingenuous reading public. Caleb himself becomes a spectator of strangers discussing the ‘Kit Williams’ legend, and finds himself filled with mixed feelings

of shock and amusement at the “variety of the falsehoods” (237) contained within the public’s version of his story. That Caleb’s story—itsself predicated on a falsehood—has spread to such remote places as the rural public-house, and is discussed by the patrons as though they know the characters involved, borders on the absurd. If there is hope for the readerly discernment of truth, it is embodied in the character of Raymond, whose judgment is not so easily swayed by what he has read. Raymond, a type of the ‘noble bandit,’ has also been spurned on account of his past transgressions. As such, he is unable to return to legitimate society: hence his identification with Caleb’s plight. But most importantly Raymond is the paradigm of an ideal reader, one who examines critically the facts before forming a judgment.

Mr. Raymond is, however, a sole example of this ideal reader, a lone glimpse of optimism in a public otherwise prone to believe what it reads without reflection. Other incidents in the third volume suggest that even intelligent and sensitive readers such as Caleb’s beloved Laura are culpable of falling prey to the designs of textual (mis)representations of Caleb’s story. The halfpenny pamphlet, the *Most Wonderful and Surprising History, And Miraculous Adventures of Caleb Williams*, supplants the handbill as Caleb’s primary print persecutor. Written by the criminal Gines, this text goes even farther than the handbill to exaggerate the severity of Caleb’s crimes. Caleb quotes the Hawker who details the scandalous contents of the pamphlet:

Here you have the most wonderful and surprising history, and miraculous adventures of Caleb Williams; you are informed how he first robbed, and then brought false accusations against his master; as also of his attempting divers times to break out of prison, till at last he effected his escape in the most wonderful and uncredible manner; as also of his travelling the kingdom

in various disguises, and the robberies he committed with a most desperate and daring gang of thieves; and of his coming up to London, where it is supposed he now lies concealed; with a true and faithful copy of the hue and cry printed and published by one of his majesty's most principal secretaries of state, offering a reward for one hundred guineas for apprehending him.

All for the price of one halfpenny. (268-69)

Again, the embellishment of Caleb's crimes creates an almost comic effect derived from its dramatic irony, as the novel's reader, unlike the pamphlet's reader, knows how far-fetched these allegations are. What is not comical, however, is how easily the public believes the details of this narrative. When Caleb appears finally to have found solace in the obscure market-town in Wales to which he absconds, it does appear for a brief time that he has finally eluded Falkland's pursuit and can live out the rest of his life in peace. But after he has established himself in the town, he finds himself spurned by the townspeople, and repulsed by Laura. Laura, figured as a paragon of virtue whose relationship with Caleb has been founded on their mutual fondness for discussion of "subjects of literature and taste" (292), would appear to be the non-criminal counterpart of Mr. Raymond, one who knows Caleb well enough not to believe the pamphlet's accusations. But Laura, like her fellow credulous townsfolk, does believe what she reads and participates in the general rebuffing of Caleb. Notwithstanding the highly implausible coincidence that Falkland turns out to be a family friend of Laura's (which could, possibly, explain her inclination to believe his word over Caleb's), her readiness to turn against Caleb is disturbing given the presumed substance of her character. After receiving the letter informing him that she wishes to see him no more, Caleb asks, "can you think of condemning a man, when you have heard only one side of his story?" (299). But Laura has already made up her mind, and refuses to let Caleb plead his

case. This incident highlights the pessimistic nature of Godwin's imagining of the reading public, as the character most likely to be sympathetic to Caleb turns out to be no more discerning than any other 'mob-monster.' If the novel's third volume is in part an imaginative experiment on the possibility of communicating truth via the printed word, its results suggest the difficulties of depending on the critical reading skills of an anonymous reading public.

The Afterlife of *Caleb Williams*

It was not, however, until the 1831 reissue of *Caleb Williams* that Godwin's novel could finally be afforded by the mass reading public he wished to influence.³⁵ Published as the second in Colburn and Bentley's Standard Novels series, the novel was issued as a single volume reissue at 6s. By 1832, the novel has been bulked up by two lengthy prefaces—Mary Shelley's 1831 "Memoirs of William Godwin," published in the reissue of *Caleb Williams*, and Godwin's own 1832 preface to *Fleetwood*, which deals exclusively with the composition and reception of *Caleb Williams*. One of the attractions of the Standard Novels was their authoritative claim as "texts finally approved by their authors," or at least they were published with new prefaces in which the author's "mature judgment" was passed upon his or her early work (Sadleir, *XIX* 95). As Colburn and Bentley boast in an 1831 advertisement for the newly launched series, the Standard Novels series present "the only genuine edition extant of the works in question (qtd. in Sadleir, "Bentley's" 51). But such a textual approach inevitably leads to problems, especially in the case of a novel like *Caleb Williams*, republished

³⁵ Most of the novel's original readers would have borrowed the book from a circulating library as only a very affluent minority could afford to purchase it. Only with the single-volume Standard Novels edition was the price within reach of the average reader (Erickson 142-43).

almost forty years after its original publication.³⁶ The recontextualizing of the novel results in a schizophrenic text, split between its original, revolutionary, 1794 context, and its proto-Victorian context. The contextual shifts, however, are not to be found in the body of the novel itself, but rather in the paratexts that mediate between the text and its public reception. One might expect that in 1832, the year of the Reform Act, Godwin would seize on the opportunity to reflect on the changes that had occurred in the three decades since he published *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams*; however, no mention is made of this topic in the prefaces to *Caleb Williams*, *St. Leon*, or *Fleetwood*, the three Godwin novels serialized in the Standard Novels series.³⁷

In addition to the numerous minor alterations to the text for the 1831 reissue, Godwin changed the title from *Things as they Are* to *Caleb Williams*, a move that downplayed the novel's original politically polemical intent in favour of presenting the novel as a

³⁶ *Caleb Williams* was not the only novel whose "Revised, Corrected, and Illustrated with Notes by the Author" version was problematic. For example, Bentley omitted the dedication to the Prince Regent from Austen's *Emma*. Whether he did so because of the Prince Regent's having fallen into disrepute or because it contrasted with the "pious" prefatory biographical sketch of Austen written by her brother for the 'Standard Novels' edition is unknown. But Bentley's omission has been followed by many Victorian and modern editors of the novel, thus eliminating a very important contextualizing paratext (Gettman 48-49).

³⁷ Although Godwin makes no mention of current political events in his 1832 paratexts, in 1832 he did pen a Prospectus for a new edition of *Political Justice*. In this prospectus, dated Oct. 9, 1832, he does allude obliquely to the Reform Act, crediting his treatise for contributing to a gradual realization of greater equality for all citizens that has led to unprecedented social reform: "The Enquiry concerning Political Justice had its day, and is by many supposed to be consigned to oblivion. In all memorable crises of human affairs there is apt to be a reaction. Men began to fear that they had gone too far; they suspected that when they sought liberty merely, they were in danger of anarchy, that war and bloodshed (modes of obtaining even a laudable end that were specially protested against in Political Justice) threatened to become general and that out of this confusion a tyranny might arise more remorseless than that under which mankind had groaned for ages . . . But the seeds had been sown too deeply; the soil of the human mind had been too effectually stirred up; and, after many memorable vicissitudes it became apparent that the cause of improvement and equality would finally triumph. Of late years in particular great strides have been taken in this respect, and it seems evident that, at least in these islands, sentiments favourable to human liberty and happiness will go forward with a tide that no power can resist. In the mean time it is certain that the Enquiry concerning Political Justice led the way in this suspicious career. The author struck the blow which shook the fabric of abuse and corruption to its basis. Other men have done well, and have manfully followed up what he began; but the claims of priority cannot reasonably be denied him" (*PJV* 422).

psychological character study.³⁸ This change of titles shows how a simple paratext—the title—can, like a preface, strongly influence one’s reading of the novel.³⁹ What is achieved in this change of titles is a shift from one pole to the other of what Ian Watt identifies as the “subjective and the objective poles of dualism” (296) that characterize a novel’s orientation. But this shift in emphasis from the outer world of things as they are to the inner world of the protagonist’s consciousness is a necessary one, overdetermined by a variety of factors, culminating in the revisioning of *Caleb Williams*’ original function. The changing paratexts tell the story of two very different historical contexts: just as the 1790s prefaces to *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams* embody the tensions and the possibilities of their historical moments, so do the prefaces of the 1830s. The primary narrative strand of this paratextual (de-)evolution portrays, at the outset, a societal shift in which the possibility of collective action spurred by the ‘political novel’ has diminished.⁴⁰ Subtle indicators point to the social conditions impinging on the space of the preface, evincing an acute paratextual sensitivity to extra-textual factors. For instance, the anonymous, third-person author-figure of the prefaces to *Political Justice* and *Things as they Are* becomes the venerable ‘William Godwin,’ memorialized by his daughter Mary in the 1831 *Caleb Williams* and given free reign to talk about himself in the 1832 preface to *Fleetwood*. Moving away from the ‘immaturity’ of his

³⁸ Gary Kelly makes this claim, arguing that the change of title represents a changed status from “tract of the times” to “prototype of the English novel’s renewed interest in individual psychology” (*English* 180).

³⁹ So much so that the two titles and the two sets of prefaces correspond with a trend in the history of the novel’s criticism to interpret the novel in binary terms as either ‘political’ or ‘psychological.’ For more on this tendency and representative works see Leaver 589-90, and Myers 591-2.

⁴⁰ One could, however, argue that this difference already exists in the novel’s two endings. The original, unpublished ending depicts, through the judge’s silencing of Caleb and his subsequent descent into madness, a failure of collective action and a radicalism defeated by the institutions it seeks to overthrow. The published ending shifts the locus of action away from the collective, focusing on the private encounter between Caleb and Falkland, yet does not renounce the possibility of revolution. For a detailed discussion of the hermeneutic implications of the novel’s two endings, see Rajan, “Reading,” 240-43.

youthful radicalism to the ‘maturity’ of sober reflection reflects the well-told life, a developmental inevitability that fits with Victorian modes of social and cultural progress. By contrast, the “humble novelist” of the 1790s has no prefatory identity apart from his functional role as purveyor of political truths and instigator of reform. The figure posited in the 1790s prefaces is no individuated or solitary Romantic author, but rather a collaborator participating in the collective enterprise of political reform.

The 1831 and 1832 prefaces have generally been interpreted by critics as indicative of Godwin’s and Mary Shelley’s desire to dissociate the now-elderly writer from his Jacobin past by glossing over *Caleb Williams*’ political dimension.⁴¹ The curious absence of any reference to the novel’s original revolutionary context is highly problematic, and whatever Shelley’s and Godwin’s motives may have been for these prefatory tactics, there is no denying their attempts to recast the novel in “aesthetic and private terms” (Clemit 211). A close analysis of these two paratexts, however, reveals two very different rhetorical strategies at work. Whereas Mary’s “Memoirs” do consciously participate in a revisionary refiguration of Godwin as a political moderate for the sake of posterity, Godwin’s preface to *Fleetwood* can be read as an ironic engagement with the discourse of the contemporary cult of

⁴¹ Gary Kelly, for example, notes that the political dimension of the novel was “quickly forgotten as the controversies of the 1790s faded into the past”—Godwin “acquiesced” in this forgetting in his 1832 preface because he “ignored the political and philosophical aspects of the novel altogether” (*English* 182). Marilyn Butler observes how Godwin emphasizes “romantic aspects” (58) of his book in 1832, the result of an increasing skepticism about the likelihood of real change in society through individual rationality. Hence Godwin has reinterpreted the novel in terms of the irrational, emphasizing a state of mind characterized by “abnormality, its heightened and creative fervour,” stressing the “strangeness of the story he has to tell—as though it were an inexplicable product of the subconscious, rather than an intelligible description of a reality which the reader might recognize in the common world of every day” (58). Pamela Clemit argues that the later prefaces reflect Godwin’s and Mary Shelley’s conservatism as they collaborate to disavow Godwin’s radical past: “the representation of the Godwinian novel involves more than a response to Bentley’s marketing strategy. At issue is the whole question of its original political content and purpose. The later Prefaces show a shift to the subjective and private concerns already seen in Mary Shelley’s revisions to the text of the 1831 *Frankenstein*. This dampening-down of earlier radical aims is equally evident in redescriptions of Caleb Williams, in which it is difficult to separate Mary Shelley’s contribution from Godwin’s. In her memoir of Godwin, issued with the 1831 *Caleb Williams*, Mary Shelley emphasized the moderation of Godwin’s early political view and glossed over the subversive qualities of his best-known novel” (212-3).

authorship. Unlike the original preface(s) to *Caleb Williams*, which functioned as the site in which political forces impinged on the fictional space of the novel through the enactment of textual repression, the later prefaces mark the intrusion of the economic through the insertion of a newly formulated reification of the ‘author.’⁴² The implications of this intrusion are numerous, and the remainder of this chapter will be devoted to an analysis not only of how these new prefaces complicate—or clarify⁴³—a reading of *Caleb Williams*, but, more broadly, of what they reveal about the institutionalization of the novel as a literary form and what they tell us about Godwin’s ‘author-function’ as formulated, and self-deconstructed, in the early 1830s.

It is important to observe how the 1796 prefaces are ‘pushed aside’ spatially in favour of Mary Shelley’s 1831 “Memoirs,” thus relegating them to a lower position in the narrative hierarchy, the highest level of which has been usurped by Mary’s text.⁴⁴ No longer does the novel begin with Godwin’s heroic account of his successful efforts to overcome the agents of political censorship. Instead, the text is prefaced by a loving tribute to Godwin

⁴² The 1830s paratexts manifest a changed cultural perspective on literature, the emergence of which Paul Keen locates at the end of the eighteenth century: a shift in focus from literature to authors, and a redefinition of politics as “a struggle for professional distinction (status of the author) rather than for national agency (revolution, government reform, the rights of man)” (8).

⁴³ Mitzi Myers, for example, suggests that the prefaces complement one another by collectively constituting a more holistic explanation of the novel’s aims. Whereas the author of the 1794 preface is the “rational philosopher” concerned with the didactic function of portraying things as they are, the *Fleetwood* preface is the product of the “conscious literary artist” realizing his imaginative vision. “The two Prefaces reveal clearly the importance Godwin ascribes to both the understanding and the imagination in the creation of *Caleb Williams*” (598).

⁴⁴ Subsequent to 1831, few modern editions of *Caleb Williams* contain Mary’s memoir. An 1856 American edition of the text, published by New York’s Harper & Brothers prints the 1831 text complete with Mary’s memoirs and the anonymous essay “Criticism on the Novels of Godwin.” But other versions omit the memoirs altogether: the 1988 Penguin Classics edition is based on the 1831 text, yet it does not print the memoirs; nor does the 2000 Broadview edition, which is also based on the 1831 text print the memoirs, nor does it include them in its extensive appendices. Both the 1988 and 2000 editions, however, do contain Godwin’s 1832 preface to *Fleetwood* as an appendix, as does the 1970 World’s Classics edition. The 1970, 1988, and 2000 editions retain the 1794 and 1795 prefaces. The 1926 edition published by Greenberg contains no original prefaces at all.

written by his daughter, casting Godwin in terms that differ significantly from the hostile ‘Godwin’ self-depicted in the prefaces of the 1796 edition. In Mary’s account, Godwin is praised for his “docility” (iii). He “was not one of those youths who . . . rebel against authority” and possessed “equanimity and imperturbableness of temper” (iv). He was characterized by “an air of mildness and contemplation yet fervour” (viii), and was “mild and benevolent of aspect, gentle and courteous of manner” (vi). This last description is particularly telling, as Shelley immediately notes that “the author himself presented a singular contrast in appearance, to the boldness of his speculations” (vi). Here we have the crux of Shelley’s memoir, which seeks to depict a very different Godwin from the one who had fallen into such public disfavour on account of his perceived earlier radicalism. In a reversal of the *ad hominem* argument, Shelley emphasizes the positive attributes of Godwin’s character to outweigh the regrettable “boldness” of his earlier political ideas. Perhaps the boldest move of Shelley’s memoir is a shrewd (mis)reading of *Caleb Williams* itself: “all that might have offended, as hard and republican in his larger work, was obliterated by the splendour and noble beauty of the character of Falkland” (vi). This is the only reference to the novel to which the memoir is affixed, and it disingenuously suggests that Godwin somehow mollifies the radical tenets of *Political Justice* through the figuration of the character of Falkland. The irony here of course rests in the fact that Falkland’s character is supposed to embody many of the critiques outlined in *Political Justice*, as his aristocratic status gives him the power to so relentlessly pursue the inferior Caleb.

Moreover, Mary’s “Memoirs” explicitly seek to exonerate Godwin from his association with other notable British radicals of the 1790s. Rightly pointing out that Godwin was “attached to moderate measures” and that he “believed that amelioration was more facile than reconstruction, and loved reformation better than destruction” (vii), Shelley

contrasts Godwin's gradualism with the more aggressive tendencies of some of his radical contemporaries. Holcroft, for instance, is condemned as "unrefined and self-educated," plagued by a "violence of temper" (vii), which hindered the advancement of the radical cause. Shelley also reminds the reader that although Godwin was neither affiliated with the Constitutional nor the London Corresponding Societies, his association with radicals like Horne Tooke, Thelwall, and Hardy meant that he would likely have been implicated if Pitt's attempts to convict them had been successful. But the societies are depicted as participating in the bastardization of Godwin's ideas by "disseminating his opinions, and holding up the equalizing principles of the French Revolution" (vii). There is nothing erroneous about Mary's depiction of the events of the 1790s, and her "Memoirs" are, to be sure, an eloquent and respectful tribute to her father. But their appearance in the prefatory pages of *Caleb Williams* serves to some extent to defeat the purpose of the novel's original political intent. Part of the novel's strategy for disseminating the 'truths' Godwin seeks to convey consists of its appeal to a future reader, in much the same way that Caleb's own plea for exculpation is left to posterity. Godwin's political project, however, is fossilized with the inclusion of this memoir. The novel *Caleb Williams*, along with Godwin's political goals, is presented as an event already having taken place in the past, its very pastness suggesting that its purposes have already been fulfilled (or abandoned): things as they were. The sense of urgency and alarm setting the tone for the 1796 edition no longer exists; rather, it has been mitigated by the prefatory insertion of the institutionalized author-figure, who appears as more of a museum-piece than a political threat. So by the time the 1831 reader reaches the original preface, its power to rouse has been diminished. No longer contextualized by a preface evoking the danger and struggle of the radical cause, the novel becomes detached from its

engagement with political issues and presents itself as a harmless work of imaginative fiction produced by a (reformed) former radical who has by 1831 become an institution.

But contrary to readings that emphasize Mary Shelley's role in sabotaging the political aims of *Caleb Williams*, one could also classify her preface as elusive, in the sense that it presents a version of Godwin as a proto-Victorian sage. To this end, Mary exploits the possibilities of the Standard Editions preface, whose critical methodology is predicated on the 'well-told life' as a framework for contextualizing the author's productions. In this sense, the figure of the mature Godwin who subsumes the novel in 1831 makes him palatable for a proto-Victorian audience. The novel's contents, of course, remain intact; thus, the preface functions as a sort of smokescreen, concealing the novel's radical energy. The aftermaths of Godwin's politics—the return of a repressed politics that can never be effectively repressed—cannot be erased from the novel despite any prefatory attempts to do so. One could argue that the de-politicization of Godwin is in effect a re-politicization of him to different effect, a re-politicization that Godwin might very well resist by maintaining his cathexis with Political Justice and thus with 1790s' radicalism. Therefore, the very domestication of Godwin, who has been turned into an "author" or "character" in Mary's and his own prefaces, is a strongly ideological ploy. Mary Hays also deploys this prefatory strategy in her 1799 preface to *The Victim of Prejudice*, and Mary Shelley presents a similarly toned-down portrayal of Percy Bysshe Shelley in her 1824 preface to his *Posthumous Poems* and will continue the work in her 1839 preface to *Poetical Works of P. B. Shelley*, as I demonstrate in Chapters Two and Four.

***Fleetwood* and the Author-Function**

Mary's intention is to resuscitate her father's reputation for the sake of posterity, but what is revealed by the inclusion of her memoir in the 1831 edition of *Caleb Williams*, and the inclusion of Godwin's new preface to the 1832 edition of *Fleetwood*, is a particular formulation of what Foucault has called the 'author-function.' Foucault conceives the author-function as a socially constructed, historically variable convention of attributing written texts to an originating author. Not merely a simple case of automatically ascribing a given text to its creator, the author-function is "tied to the legal and institutional systems that circumscribe, determine and articulate the realm of discourses" (124). Moreover, Foucault locates the emergence of the modern conception of the 'author' at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, a time when strict laws about copyright and ownership developed.⁴⁵ The coming into being of the modern notion of the 'author' marks, according to Foucault, a "privileged moment of *individualization* in the history of ideas" (125). The extent to which the prefaces of the 1830s contribute to an individualization of Godwin-the-author cannot be overlooked: collectively, they constitute an instance of the 'man-and-his-work' criticism characterized by the modern concept of authorship.

But what the specific case of the Standard Novels' editorial practice of including authorial memoirs, biographies, etc. makes especially clear is the economic manifestation of the newly evolved author-function. The function of these author-centric paratexts is, first and foremost, a marketing tactic, the intention of which is to replicate the success of Walter Scott's own paratextual strategy of prefacing his "Author's Edition" of the *Waverley Novels* with a General Preface containing a sketch of his biography and literary development.

⁴⁵ "It was at the moment when a system of ownership and strict copyright rules (toward the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century) that the transgressive properties always intrinsic to the act of writing became the forceful imperative of literature" (Foucault 125).

Colburn and Bentley's Standard Novels series was originally influenced by Cadell's highly successful reissue series of Scott's *Waverley* novels, which began in June of 1829. This series, the genesis of the cheap fiction reprint, reissued Scott's novels in a small, two-volume format for 5s each; therefore, the novels, which originally cost a prohibitive 31s 6d, were within the reach of the average reader (Erickson 146-50). The mass production of cheap fiction and the lengthy paratextual intrusion of the 'author' speaking about himself (in professional terms) emerge simultaneously at a historical moment in which the commodification of the novel attains new levels of profitability for publishers. Godwin himself, in the preface to the 1831 Standard Novels reissue of *St. Leon*, comments on the changed public perception of authorship. Observing a shift in focus from the work itself to the author's character and method of composition, Godwin states that

One of my most valued friends (Mr. Northcote) has often told me, that the public may sometimes be interested in the perusal of a book, but that they never give themselves any trouble about the author. He therefore kindly advised me on no occasion to say any thing in print about myself. The present race of readers seem scarcely disposed to verify this maxim. They are understood to be desirous to learn something of the peculiarities, the "life, character, and behaviour" of an author, before they consign him to the gulph of oblivion, and are willing to learn from his own testimony what train of thoughts induced him to adopt the particular subject and plan of the work, upon the perusal of which they are engaged. (xxix)

This preface, the first composed by Godwin for the Standard Novels series, finds itself perplexed by the demands made on it by a publisher who understands the contemporary

importance of what Derrida calls the “gossipy chit-chat” (*Dissemination* 10) of the preface.⁴⁶ Explicitly alluding to Scott, whom he credits for the discovery that an author can write “twenty or thirty” (xxix) novels without losing hold of the public’s interest, Godwin thus implicates his own text in the same system of literary production now dominated by the influence of Scott’s larger-than-life author-figure.⁴⁷ Godwin also alludes to the institutionalization of the novel as a legitimate literary form and the novelist as a respected literary figure: in his preface, Godwin recalls that “in those days it was deemed a most daring thought to attempt to write a novel, with the hope that it might hereafter rank among the classics of a language” (xxix). Initially, Godwin appears bemused by this new author-centric approach to novel reading. He admits to being “at a loss” (xxix) about how to oblige the publisher’s request for information about the genesis of *St. Leon*. For Godwin, the new preface can only be superfluous: “in the original Preface I frankly stated the sources upon which I had drawn for the idea and conduct of the work” (xxix). The absurdity of prefacing an already prefaced work is hinted at in this comment; Godwin has acquiesced merely by writing the preface, although it is quite terse and contributes very little to a deeper understanding of *St. Leon*.

If Godwin’s 1831 preface to the reissued *St. Leon* resists Bentley’s request for a glimpse into the “life, character, and behaviour” of the author, his preface to the 1832 *Fleetwood* reissue makes a more potentially serious attempt to comply with the publisher’s

⁴⁶ *St. Leon*, reissued in 1831, was the fifth installment of the Standard Novels series. *Caleb Williams*, the second installment, contained Mary Shelley’s memoirs but no contribution from Godwin.

⁴⁷ The reissued *St. Leon* preface, however, is not the only preface in which Godwin alludes to Scott’s prolific literary output: in his 1832 preface to *Deloraine*, Godwin makes a similar remark that “the Great Unknown, as he had for years been denominated, had sufficiently shown that it was not absolutely necessary for the mind of an author to lie fallow for years, between the conclusion of one work of fiction and the commencement of another. And, old as I was, and little as it might become me in other respects to put forward a comparison between myself and the writer now recently deceased, I felt an ambition to show that I upon occasion could be no less intermitted in the invention of a narrative” (5).

demands. Godwin's preface to *Fleetwood* is considerably more loquacious than the *St. Leon* advertisement, and concerns itself exclusively with the inspiration for and composition of *Caleb Williams*. As noted, critics have observed the extent to which Godwin ignores the novel's original political intention in favour of presenting a romanticized account of the novel. I would suggest, however, that there are two contrasting ways of approaching the *Fleetwood* preface that would result in radically different readings. The first method (that which has, generally speaking, been used by the critics quoted above) would assume that Godwin's preface is sincere, and that his preface is predicated on a not-so-subtly hidden agenda to impose his later, more conservative point-of-view on the novel. A second method, which I will pursue in my analysis, would involve reading the 1832 preface in an ironic mode, paying close attention to how Godwin constructs a narrative that self-consciously parodies the type of authorial preface he would have been expected to have written, achieved through his deconstruction of the author-figure. His first prefatory contribution to the Standard Novels series, the preface to *St. Leon*, is tinged with irony, revealing a self-conscious awareness of his author-figure's figural dimension.

Regardless of Godwin's intent, however, it is worth noting how *Fleetwood's* preface engages with what might be called the 'ur-preface' of the paratextual genre that the Standard Novels' publishers sought to emulate: Scott's General Preface to the *Waverley Novels* series. Ostensibly, the purpose of this type of preface is to provide a deeper insight into the workings of the novel as described in Scott's misleading watch analogy: "it remains to be tried whether the public (like a child to whom a watch is shown) will, after having been saturated with looking at the outside, acquire some new interest in the object when it is opened and the internal machinery displayed to them" (101). What characterizes Scott's General Preface is an emphasis on matters pertaining to authorship, literary fame, and the

field of literary production generally. It is a text absorbed in the system of literary professionalization so effectively exploited by Scott, saturated with the worldly functions of the working writer's relationship to this structure. As the first novelist to achieve mass literary celebrity, Scott represents an authorial figure whose rise to fame could only have occurred under the exact historical conditions of the first decades of the nineteenth century. The figure of Scott in many respects symbolizes the emerging capitalist model of the author, a writer whose signature becomes an industry in itself, producing "a commodity to be sold by bulk" (Saunders 179). Saunders' depiction of Scott's "essentially commercial connexion with his audience" (180) is especially valid in the context of the publication of the *Waverley Novels* reissues, as their publication was motivated purely by financial reasons necessitated by Scott's recent bankruptcy.⁴⁸ Cadell and Scott realized the potential for unprecedented profits, and Scott, desperate to recuperate his losses and continue to live his lavish lifestyle, seized the opportunity. Written in 1829, at the height of Scott's literary fame, the General Preface is a paradigmatic formulation of a new, economically constituted, professionalized concept of authorship whose primary interest concerns the history of the author's 'rise' to fame. The 'author' is individuated, privileged, and the *Waverley* novels themselves become by-products of their creator, subordinate to the prefatorally narrated process of their conception. A significant bulk of the preface concerns Scott's reflections on the concealing of his authorial identity for the publication of the *Waverley* novels and the subsequent flood

⁴⁸ In his last years, Godwin too desired a commercial relationship with Scott: In a February 17, 1831 letter to Scott, Godwin, desperate for money and unable to find a publisher for *Lives of the Necromancers*, seeks Scott's help in persuading Cadell or any other publisher to accept the work. Despite the poignancy of Godwin's plea ("I am . . . the prodigal who so often serves to point the moral of a tale. I have spent what I had, and have nothing left . . . I have a wife: I need the little house I live in to hold my books and my literary accommodations" (qtd. in Paul 2: 310-12), Scott cannot oblige his request. Unfortunately, Scott too has suffered the same fate as Godwin: as he explains in his Feb. 24, 1831 reply to Godwin, he is bankrupt, and as such unable to engage in any "literary speculations" which would require his financial backing should the volume fail to show an immediate profit (312-13).

of public curiosity. A reading of Godwin's preface to *Fleetwood* in conjunction with Scott's General Preface reveals how closely Godwin followed the model originated by Scott.⁴⁹

In addition to the similarities noted below, the general spirit of Godwin's preface is, despite its lack of humour and Scottian glibness, very much akin to Scott's preface. But what is especially noteworthy about its relation to *Caleb Williams*' original preface is its tendency to transpose certain thematic elements from the earlier text to harmonize with this new emphasis on matters pertaining to authorship. For instance, the earlier preface's concern with judgment in the political and judicial sense, as it implicates itself in topical issues of censorship and government persecution of radical writers, along with its participation in the novel's critique of the legal and penal systems, is transformed into a preoccupation with *literary* judgment as seen in Godwin's tale of Marshal's negative response to the novel's early draft: "I doubtless felt no implicit deference for the judgment of my

⁴⁹ First, Scott playfully begins his preface by speaking in the third person, before claiming, at the end of the first paragraph, that "having introduced himself in the third person singular, he proceeds in the second paragraph to make use of the first" (86), sacrificing "modesty" to avoid the effects of "stiffness and affectation" associated with the former mode. Godwin also relates a tale of a shift from the third to the first person mode, pertaining to his composition of *Caleb Williams*. Although the novel was begun in the third person mode, Godwin soon became "dissatisfied" before assuming the first person for the purpose of "making the hero of my tale his own historian," a mode he continued to employ for the remainder of his novelistic career on account of its capacity to allow for more detailed psychological delineation of character carved out by the author's "metaphysical dissecting knife" (339). Second, Scott tells the story of having shown an early draft of *Waverley* "as far, I think, as the *seventh* chapter" (90; italics mine) to a friend whose opinion of it was "unfavourable" (90). Therefore, not wishing to sacrifice his poetic reputation, Scott put aside the work; but at any rate the novel was eventually published and the friend's judgment was "afterwards reversed on an appeal to the public" (90). But Scott had only shown the friend a portion of the first volume, before the hero had departed for Scotland, so it is no wonder that it did not receive a rave review. Godwin too recounts an early bad review of *Caleb Williams*: after giving a draft of "about *seven-tenths*" of the first volume to his secretary James Marshal, Godwin received a note two days later warning that "if I had obeyed the impulse of my own mind, I should have thrust it in the fire. If you persist, the book will infallibly prove the grave of your literary fame" (339; italics mine). Like Scott, Godwin put aside the novel, suffering "at least two days of deep anxiety." But "by dint of resolution I became invulnerable" and he proceeded to finish the novel. Third, Scott gives an account of the composition of *Waverley*, admitting that "the mode in which I conducted the story scarcely deserved the success which the romance afterwards attained. The tale of *Waverley* was put together with so little care that I cannot boast of having sketched any distinct plan of the work." On the whole, the adventures are "managed without much skill" (93). Godwin by contrast emphasizes the careful design of his novel, providing a very influential account of his technique. He presents a step-by-step description of how, working backwards from the originally conceived third volume (the method which so appealed to Poe), he constructed the novel. The intended overall effect was no less than "an entire unity of plot" combined with a "unity of spirit of interest" that would exert a "powerful hold on the reader" (337).

friendly critic” (339). Similarly, the idea of pursuit that informs not only the prefatorally-narrated pursuit of Godwin and his fellow radicals by government agents, but also drives the action of the narrative as it follows Caleb as he is relentlessly pursued by Falkland’s henchmen, is also reordered into literary terms as Godwin employs the verb to depict the aforementioned process by which he structured the novel: “Pursuing this idea, I invented first the third volume of my tale, then the second, and last of all the first” (337). And Godwin’s recollection of his original motive for writing the novel strongly contrasts with his avowed intent in the 1795 preface. Whereas, according to the novel’s original preface, Godwin sought to transmit a “truth highly worthy to be communicated” (1), in the 1832 preface his motive for writing both *Caleb Williams* and *Political Justice* is depicted in terms of his desire for literary fame: quoting Cowley, he asks, “what shall I do to be for ever known, / And make the age to come my own?” (336). What is chronicled is not Godwin’s struggle as a radical political figure, but rather his attempt to establish his authority, to situate himself within the field of literary production. When conceiving *Caleb Williams*, he admits he was concerned with “building to myself a name” (336) by producing a work of fiction containing the “stamp of originality” (338). And although having appropriated the ideas of other authors, he was confident of having a “vein of thinking that was properly my own.”

Curiously, however, in the very midst of establishing a particular authorial figure, Godwin also deconstructs the figure of the author as someone who can be totalized and grasped, by suggesting the novel we read forwards was actually constructed backwards in such a way as to disclose the structurality of its structure. Thus, the preface becomes doubly elusive: not only in the sense that Godwin, like Mary, contributes a preface that distracts the reader from remembering Godwin’s radical past, but also in the sense that the author-figure’s elusiveness is heightened through its association with this structurality. Thus the

“entire unity of plot” and the “unity of spirit of interest” (337) identified by Godwin in the preface as characterizing the effect of *Caleb Williams*’ plot discloses itself as a sort of figural illusiveness. Emerging from Godwin’s ruminations on his reverse compositional method is a recognition of the prefatory figure as figure, as a tropological structure distinct from the empirical author whose authority he seeks to consolidate in the preface. Whereas the early prefaces to *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams* eschewed an elaborated authorial figure in favour of an objective statement of facts, the later prefaces depict a Godwin whose self-figurations become an ‘experiment’ in themselves. This figural dimension of the prefatory speaker will prove to be crucial to Mary Hays, as she exploits its possibilities to craft prefatory figures designed to mediate her texts to multiple reading audiences.

—TWO—

MARY HAYS'S PREFACES OF THE 1790s: RHETORICAL
SUBTERFUGE AND THE RISE OF RADICAL FEMINISM

“The result of her hazardous experiment is calculated to operate as a *warning*, rather than as an example” (36).

— Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*

During the turbulent decade of the 1790s, another form of radical writing was developing while Godwin wrote and published *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams*. A number of women writers were also engaged in the process of theorizing the French Revolution's impact on British society. But unlike Godwin, these early feminist writers were especially concerned with the concept of gender and how the principles of equality that characterized the revolutionary spirit could be applied to liberate women from patriarchal constraints. Of the late-eighteenth-century feminists, Mary Wollstonecraft is the best known; however, her contemporary, Mary Hays, published several important works throughout the 1790s that furthered the early feminist cause. All of Hays's major works of the 1790s are elusively prefaced,⁵⁰ and in this chapter I seek to explore the connections between paratextuality,

⁵⁰ The practice of women writers prefacing their work was reasonably common in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Among Hays's most significant contemporaries, for instance, Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Men* is prefaced with a brief advertisement that polemically derides the “devious,” “questionable” and “sophistical arguments” (33) of Burke's *Reflections*, to which her treatise is a reply. Her novel *Mary: A Fiction* (1788) contains a brief Advertisement, which Mary Hays might have drawn on for her preface to *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, as I mention in my analysis of the *Memoirs*. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) is not prefaced, although it does include a polemical “Author's Introduction” that provides a “rough sketch” (112) of the treatise's methodology, and her *Wrongs of Women* contains a posthumous preface written by William Godwin, along with a fragment of the original “Author's Preface,” introduced by Godwin as “not a preface regularly drawn out by author, but merely hints for a preface, which . . . appeared to be worth preserving” (72). On the whole, Wollstonecraft's prefaces are more straightforward, briefer, and less

discursive authority,⁵¹ and the development of the early feminist movement as manifested in the prefaces to Hays's 1790s publications. Just as Godwin's preface to *Political Justice* was characterized by its spirit of "dissimulation," so too are Mary Hays's prefaces characterized by a rhetorical subterfuge that allows her to negotiate the complex demands of a woman writer seeking to disseminate potentially subversive ideas. Always acutely aware of the demands of her particular reading audiences, Hays deploys a variety of related strategies to legitimize her entry into the Dissenting public sphere, and then into the general public sphere, strategies that respond to and subtly alter the terms of debate required of a woman writer seeking to disseminate a radical feminist message.

Overdetermined by many of the same factors as those absorbed into Godwin's prefaces, Hays's prefaces must perform the additional work of overcoming gender barriers to establish a modicum of discursive authority. Thus in addition to eluding censors and mediating her work to a potentially hostile reading public, Hays finds herself compelled to use *insinuation* to justify her public literary authority, a difficult feat for a marginalized writer

rhetorically ambitious than those of Hays. Fanny Burney's 1779 second edition of the anonymously-published *Evelina* contains two prefaces: the first, entitled "To the Authors of The Monthly and Critical Reviews," pleads with the reviewers to treat her kindly: "Without name, without recommendation, and unknown alike to success and disgrace, to whom can I so properly apply for patronage, as those who publicly profess themselves Inspectors of all literary performances?" (91). The preface takes up the issue of original character development, which I will discuss in the context of the *Memoirs*' preface. Joanna Baillie's anonymously-published 1798 *A Series of Plays* is prefaced by a lengthy "Introductory Discourse" that explains the author's method of depicting strong human passions. Anna Barbauld, one of Hays's Dissenting contemporaries, published in 1810 *The British Novelists; With an Essay; and Prefaces, Biographical and Critical*, a series of British novels with attached prefaces written to contextualize the authors and the works. For a comprehensive overview of women's preface-writing in the period, see Howells. In her study of eighteenth and nineteenth-century women's prefaces, she emphasizes throughout her study the most common rhetorical tactics of women's prefaces, especially the conventionally feminine poses of humility, sympathy, and passivity used by women to establish their authority.

⁵¹ I use the term "discursive authority" in the sense defined by Susan Lanser: "the intellectual credibility, ideological validity, and aesthetic value claimed by or conferred upon a work, author, narrator, character, or textual practice" (6). It is produced "interactively . . . characterized with respect to specific receiving communities" (6). A woman writer like Hays must therefore establish her discursive authority in relation to the hegemonic norm of the dominant male social power. But "narrative authority is also constituted through (historically changing) textual strategies that even socially unauthorized writers can appropriate" (7). For Hays, especially early in her publishing career, developing her discursive authority proves to be one of the primary functions of her prefaces.

seeking to participate in a male-dominated literary sphere. To this end, the spectrum of shifting prefatory self-figurations crafted by Hays reflects the development of a subject-in-process, revealing itself as a perpetually indeterminate response to the fluctuating temper of an ideologically capricious 1790s reading public. The self-figurations deployed by Hays in her prefaces thus directly engage the exigencies of her historical moment, coalescing a complex nexus of intersecting forces comprised of audience, gender politics, discursive authority, professionalization, and censorship. In this sense, Hays's prefaces and the figures in whose voice they are 'spoken' function synecdochally as indices of Hays's always-tenuous relation to her reading audiences. Inscribed within the historically-defined narrative of the early feminist movement's brief rise and fall (roughly 1792-1797), Hays's prefaces provide a glimpse into the front lines of how she mediates her work to her reading audiences.

Throughout the 1790s, Hays develops an increasingly strong voice as a female Dissenter, yet her prefatory voice—always in process, always in dialogue with its tendencies—never settles into identity politics.

The first section begins with an analysis of Hays's 1792 debut publication *Cursory Remarks on an Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship: Inscribed to Gilbert Wakefield*. The prefatory remarks to this pseudonymously-published pamphlet, addressed to the Dissenting public sphere, establish a rhetorical pattern that Hays will exploit in all of her subsequent 1790s publications. She constructs a prefatory figure whose genuflection to accepted feminine ideals and feigned modesty provides her with a cover under which she can clandestinely sow the seeds of what will germinate, in her 1793 book *Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous*, into radical feminist critiques of female education and patriarchal oppression. Thus, in the *Letters and Essays*, as I argue in the second section, Hays shifts her rhetorical strategy to construct a figure of a Wollstonecraftian disciple who,

through excessive *argumentum ad verecundiam* allusions to Wollstonecraft, solidifies her discursive authority by attaching her authorial identity to that of her more famous mentor. The revisionary process of the *Letters and Essays*' preface, strongly influenced by Wollstonecraft's editing suggestions, marks the emergence of a 'professionalized' Hays, who becomes sufficiently emboldened to publish a subjective novelistic treatment of her philosophical ideas in the 1796 novel *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*. In the third section I analyze the rhetorical pattern of Hays's moralizing prefatory "warning" in the *Memoirs* as yet another manifestation of the *Cursory Remarks*' duplicitous structure, through which Hays attempts to assuage the public sphere by staging the imposing of a moral on her narrative to suppress the powers of her novel's passion-inciting tendencies. This rhetorical pattern permeates all levels of the narrative, but proves to be especially prominent in the novel's paratexts—preface, footnotes, and epitextual letters to Godwin, as well as the framing letters to Augustus Harley, Jr. Finally, the fourth and fifth sections—dealing with, respectively, 1798's *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain* and 1799's *The Victim of Prejudice*, analyze Hays's final two 1790s publications in the context of a restrictive political environment within which an increasingly conservative public sphere is no longer receptive to ideals of radical feminism. Thus Hays again deploys her rhetorical subterfuge to emphasize her own belatedness as a means of drawing attention away from her continued radicalism. To this end, in the *Appeal*, she reverts to a prefatory strategy similar to that enacted in the *Cursory Remarks* as an anonymous amateur; and in *The Victim of Prejudice*, she posits a 'red herring' prefatory moral calculated to obscure the comprehensiveness of her radical feminist critique.

The Face of the Feminine: *Cursory Remarks*

Hays made her publishing debut in 1792 with the pamphlet *Cursory Remarks on an Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship: Inscribed to Gilbert Wakefield*. Written as a response to former New College tutor and prominent Dissenting scholar Gilbert Wakefield, the *Cursory Remarks* presents Hays's rebuttals to his recently published *Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship*. Wakefield, a dissenting Dissenter, published his pamphlet as a rebuke against what he believed were the antiquated remnants of an Anglicanism still practiced by Dissenters whose religious practices should, he believes, have evolved more fully. Chief among his complaints is the practice of social worship, which, as Wakefield argues in his Advertisement, is "unedifying, and intolerably irrational" (iii). He deplors the "utter insignificance of ceremonial observances" (10) as a barrier to a purer spiritual communion, which should be conducted in solitude. The crux of Wakefield's argument relies on passages from the New Testament that emphasize Jesus's preference for private communion with God in times of crisis: withdrawing himself to the wilderness, climbing a mountain, or praying alone among his disciples, Jesus functions as the introspective, meditative model of an unmediated relation with God. This last example, excerpted from Luke ix. 18, of Jesus engaged in solitary prayer despite being surrounded by others, receives especial attention from Wakefield as a controlling image for his argument: "Our Lord chooses to pray ALONE, at some distance, it should seem, at the space of *a stone's throw* perhaps, from friends and favourites! This saviour of the world had no relish for *public prayer!*" (18; Wakefield's emphasis). Thus, Wakefield argues, all "ostentatious exhibitions of piety and devotion, appear not only irreconcilable to the true character of *Christianity*, but are immediately calculated to counteract it's [sic] genuine effects" (46).

In selecting Wakefield as the opponent for her publishing debut, Hays was boldly taking on a formidable opponent. Wakefield was an esteemed theologian and classical scholar: his pamphlet was targeted to an elite, classically educated, male Dissenting audience as evidenced by the numerous Greek and Latin references cited throughout the pamphlet. Seizing the chance to publish on a subject about which she was especially passionate and on which she could express herself with some authority,⁵² Hays likely predicated her decision to refute Wakefield on the basis of her own experiences with social worship. Lacking access to formal education, intellectually curious women like Hays had few opportunities to further their learning. Social worship—including formal church services and other less formal Dissenting gatherings—provided Hays with the opportunity to engage publicly with current theological issues and to participate in a Dissenting culture from which she would otherwise have been excluded. For literary entry into the Dissenting public sphere⁵³ was generally reserved for educated males—the very audience targeted in Wakefield’s *Enquiry*. Hays, doubly disadvantaged as a woman writer and as an autodidact without classical training, was self-consciously aware of her own shortcomings relative to the authoritative public persona of a scholar like Wakefield. Thus, to compensate for these shortcomings, Hays concocts two related strategies calculated to legitimize her entry into the Dissenting public sphere.

⁵² Barbara Taylor points out that in the early 1790s, religion was still the “main arena” of female public influence, especially considering most Jacobin women writers were rational Dissenters; even those who weren’t—such as Wollstonecraft and Mary Robinson—frequently mixed in Rational Dissenting circles (186).

⁵³ Daniel White identifies the Dissenting public sphere as a “discrete fragment of the bourgeois public sphere” comprised of the “extensive literary networks forged by nonconformist religious affiliations” (12). Despite having been excluded from participation in the bourgeois public sphere via the Corporation and Test Acts, and despite being barred from national university, church, military and political initiatives, the Dissenters nonetheless “exerted critical pressure from within” (67). That is to say the Dissenters nonetheless impacted the mainstream public sphere from their marginal position in society, actively engaging in public life; moreover, their legal status as nonconformists gave “added impetus to their engagement with public opinion, and their sphere of intervention was thus by necessity an intermediate space between the private realm and the state” (67).

She adopts the pseudonym Eusebia, and she disingenuously constructs a self-deprecating prefatory figure of herself.

Hays's decision to publish under the pseudonym 'Eusebia' reflects her desire to conceal her gender⁵⁴ and her lack of status in the Dissenting community. Although several women writers actively published within the Dissenting public sphere, they were generally taken less seriously than their male counterparts.⁵⁵ In this context, Hays's choice of 'Eusebia' is a riposte to Wakefield, its Greek origins a playful attempt to engage the very classicism deployed by Wakefield to limit his audience to the learned. Rhetorically, however, Hays's pseudonym reveals itself as an instance of *prosopopeia*, defined by Paul de Man as a "fiction of address" ("Autobiography" 78) performed through the "giving and taking away of faces" (76). For through the pseudonym, Hays gives herself a 'face': she constructs a figure of herself that simultaneously genuflects to the gendered expectation of a woman presenting herself with 'feminine' characteristics, while more subtly concealing the rhetorical force with which her pamphlet asserts her right to philosophy and theology.⁵⁶ The various

⁵⁴ Even though she selects a female pseudonym, Wakefield would still assume she was a man posing as a woman: see discussion below. During the time of the *Cursory Remarks*' publication, it was, and had been for at least two decades previous, quite common for men to assume a female persona to seek softer treatment from critics. For instance, a 1774 *Critical Review* article notes that "in anonymous publications, the words written by a lady are sometimes made use of to preclude the severity of criticism . . . but as Reviewers are generally churls and greybeards, this piece of finesse very seldom answers" (qtd. in Raven 155).

⁵⁵ Within the Dissenting public sphere, pseudonymous and anonymous publication was common, especially among women. Thus, even an established and respected writer like Anna Barbauld still felt compelled to publish many of her political and theological critiques anonymously or pseudonymously. Like Hays, Barbauld also responded to Wakefield's *Enquiry*; her response, *Remarks on Mr. Gilbert Wakefield's Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship* (1792) was published anonymously, as was her *Civic Sermons to the People* (1792). Furthermore, She published her *Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (1790) under the name "A Dissenter"; *Sins of Government, Sins of the Nation; or A Discourse for the Fast, Appointed on April 19, 1793* (1793) was attributed to "Bob Short." See White 68-69. See also Marlon Ross, who elaborates on the "status of double dissent" for women writers of the period: not only were women writers dissenters in the sense that, as Dissenters, they were members of a disenfranchised minority, but as "political women," they were dissenters within the Dissenting community by dint of their engagement in the male-dominated realm of political discourse (93). For further remarks on the issue of anonymous publication, see note xx.

⁵⁶ I use the term "right to philosophy" as defined by Derrida in *Ethics, Institutions, and the Right to Philosophy* as the forces that "in every cultural, linguistic, national, and religious area, can limit the right to philosophy for social,

connotations associated with 'Eusebia' texture Hays's self-figuration in ways that complicate the pamphlet's rhetoric. Classically, Eusebia was the ancient Greek embodiment of piety, loyalty, duty and filial respect. But the name also had more contemporary resonance for Dissenters: the character of the "good Eusebia" had featured prominently in William Law's well-known 1728 book *The Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. Chapter XIX of Law's book, "The spirit of a better education represented in the character of Eusebia" (246), presents a critique of contemporary female education. Law criticizes the early-eighteenth century ideology of female education, which emphasizes "a fondness for our persons, a desire for beauty, a love of dress" (247). As an educated widow embodying the ideals of piety, humility and rationality, Eusebia functions as an example of ideal female education. Indeed, Law claims that if properly educated, women could "have as great a share in the rational nature as men have; that they have as much reason to pretend to, and as much necessity to aspire after, the highest accomplishments of a Christian and solid virtue, as the gravest and wisest among Christian philosophers" (348). However, despite Law's lip-service to women's potential for rational thought, his Eusebia represents an education reflective "of morals rather than mind" (Philips and Tomkinson 181). For even as he presents a Wollstonecraft-esque critique of an educational ideology focusing on feminine beauty and submissiveness, Law instead shifts the educational emphasis into a moral, rather than an intellectual, register. Thus Law ends up consolidating a somewhat conservative view of femininity, emphasizing the practical effects of a woman's education to further her abilities to perform typically women's duties. A woman should be, in the words of Law's Eusebia, "a plain, unaffected,

political, or religious reasons, for belonging to a class, age, or gender" (13). In this sense, Hays finds herself denied access to this right based on gendered and linguistic barriers. The necessity of apologizing for her lack of linguistic erudition, for instance, in the context of a debate with Wakefield, a philosopher who is ostentatiously fluent in Greek and Latin, underscores the linguistic impediments identified by Derrida as having traditionally denied access to philosophy: "philosophy demands. . . that we liberate ourselves from the phenomena of dogmatism and authority that language can produce" (12).

modest, humble creature,” and her educational goal serves to “bring them up in all kinds of labour that are proper for women, as sewing, knitting, spinning, and all other parts of housewifery . . . not for their own amusement but that they may be serviceable to themselves and others” (359). Thus, the pseudonym contains the conflicting elements of Hays’s debut publishing endeavour. The ostensible ‘face’ put forth by Hays is that of the pious, good-natured Eusebia, embodying the feminine ideals of humility, passivity, and obedience. Lurking beneath this benignly feminine persona, however, is the subversive feminist Hays, whose desire to improve female education will soon manifest itself in the *Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous*. But this more contentious dimension of Hays remains inchoate at the time of the *Cursory Remarks*, implicit only through the pseudonym’s literary connotations. Indeed, the character of Eusebia, an idealized figure of feminine restraint, piety, and ascetic stoicism, will contrast even more radically with the character of Emma Courtney in Hays’s *Memoirs*.

The duality introduced by the Eusebia pseudonym is borne out and complicated even further through the oscillating rhetoric of the *Cursory Remarks*. Although the *Cursory Remarks* is not officially prefaced—that is the ‘preface’ is not typographically distinct from the ‘main text’ and marked as a preface or advertisement—the pamphlet’s opening paragraphs are indeed ‘prefaced’ in a way typical of eighteenth-century women writers. As Helen Elizabeth Howells observes, women writers of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries employed a variety of rhetorical prefatory strategies to carve out a space for themselves in the literary marketplace. In a male-dominated literary world, women faced an especially difficult task in getting their works noticed and taken seriously. Prefaces thus served the very important function of creating a public authorial voice for women writers. However, women writers needed to be especially careful about how they portrayed

themselves publicly. Their primary prefatory strategy was a recurring, self-deprecating stance through which women “used characteristics of contemporary proper femininity (humility, sympathy, and passivity) in order to achieve public authority” (7). Thus, having established a satisfactory feminine *ethos*, the writer could deflect criticism and avoid the provocation associated with an aggressive authorial voice. Hays begins her *Cursory Remarks* by introducing herself in typically feminine terms as

a writer with great presumption; a woman, young, unlearned, unacquainted with any language but her own; possessing no other merit than a love of truth and virtue, an ardent desire of knowledge, and a heart susceptible to the affecting and elevating emotions afforded by a pure and rational devotion. (2)

This excessive humility—a commonplace in women’s prefaces of the period—apologizes for a woman’s venturing into the male-dominated domain of theology, emphasizing her lack of formal education and her feminine vulnerability to emotions. But Hays ensures that this disarming figure represents the source of her unlearnedness, emphasizing the “great disadvantages” that she, as a woman, has endured in her quest for equal education: she has encountered barriers “almost insuperable” (3) that, if not for her “active” and “earnest” (3-4) mind, would have caused her to abandon any intellectual ambitions. Again, Hays’s rhetorical deftness manifests itself; for even as she crafts the figure of an obsequious amateur out of her element in the republic of letters, she simultaneously interposes an almost imperceptible critique of female education. Hays therefore enters the Dissenting public sphere immediately calling attention to her gendered lack of educational opportunities.

But even more striking than the tensions contained within Hays’s prefatory remarks is the contrast between the prefatory figure and the essence of the *Cursory Remarks*’ argument. Although the title *Cursory Remarks*—in keeping with Eusebia’s humble, self-

deprecating feminine persona—characterizes the pamphlet as a hasty or superficial treatment of its subject, the substance of the argument is cogent and sophisticated.⁵⁷ Employing a total of eighteen scriptural passages to support her position (astutely quoted from Wakefield’s own recent translation of the New Testament), Hays presents a solid argument that contradicts the modest self-image she presents at the tract’s outset. She sustains her argument for twenty pages, furthering it with quotations from Rousseau, personal experience of her own positive experiences with public religious ritual, and an emphasis on the moral values inculcated in children through exposure to social worship. The crux of Hays’s argument articulates the necessity of public worship rituals to ensure continued religious devotion among a population incapable of direct communion in the way described by Wakefield. She observes:

Far as the world has advanced to maturity, and enlightened as is the present age, compared with former obscurity; yet are the generality of mankind by no means sufficiently spiritualized, as to be capable of rising into first principles, and regulating their practice from the reason and moral fitness to things; and where through inattention or incapacity, this is not to be expected, even a mechanical devotion, a mere performance of external duties (and private prayer may frequently be no more) may have a restraining effect upon the conduct. . . the world is not yet ripe for a religion purely mental and contemplative. (10-11)

⁵⁷ Responses to Eusebia’s pamphlet testify to the power of her argument. According to the *English Review*, “Eusebia needs only claim the merit of a performance which, in the compass of a few pages, contains all the most striking authorities, as well as the most cogent arguments, for public worship, expressed in a lively and pleasing manner” (qtd. in Kelly, *Women* 83). The *Critical Review* wrote that “Rational religion appears with particular beauty in a female mind, for it is generally animated with warmth of devotion, and rendered interesting by the feminine weakness, which requires support” (qtd. in Kelly, *Women* 83). William Frend praised Hays, declaring “so much candour and sound reasoning clothed in insinuating language excite in us the hopes that the aid of the fair sex may in future be often called in to soften the animosity and fervour of disputation” (qtd. in Kelly, *Women* 84).

At the end of the tract, however, after having very successfully refuted Wakefield, she again reverts to the self-deprecating female persona, apologizing to the reader because

I feel as if I have ventured beyond my depth; I am unequal to the management of controversial weapons, and have, perhaps, though influenced by the purest motives, displayed in the proceeding remarks my weakness only, and incapacity for the discussion. (21)

The bathetic effect of this hasty conclusion calls attention to itself given its positioning directly after a lengthy and climactic concluding paragraph culminating with Hays looking ahead to a future where “we shall . . . penetrate to the source of things, and become true philosophers, without any danger of mistake or hazard” (20-21). She thus frames the pamphlet with remarks designed to solidify her prefatory self-construction as an unworthy amateur out of her depth in intellectual debate. The contrast here between the argument’s self-assured rhetoric and the concluding statement reveals Hays’s dilemma as an eighteenth-century woman writer negotiating her entry into the public sphere: capable of sophisticated argumentation on the same level as a theological scholar such as Wakefield yet compelled to belittle herself as a way of apologizing for her femininity, the necessity of rhetorical duplicity as a means of fostering discursive authority proves crucial to Hays’s survival as a writer.

Wakefield’s response to ‘Eusebia’ tellingly reveals the nature of gender politics in the Dissenting public sphere. Soon after the publication of Hays’s *Cursory Remarks*, Wakefield published a second edition of his *Enquiry* with an appendix responding to the several critiques leveled against his argument. But he directs the bulk of his response to Eusebia, whom he believed to be a man masquerading as a woman. Thus his sexist, *ad feminem* response employs sexual innuendo to belittle his opponent. Quoting from the Proverbs, Wakefield jokes:

There be three things, which are too wonderful for me; yea four, which I know not. The way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent upon a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of a sea, and THE WAY OF A MAN WITH A MAID. (59; Wakefield's capitals)

Clearly, the intended rhetorical effect of Wakefield's humour is a red herring: refusing to engage Eusebia's argument, he instead spotlights her gender to diminish her credibility and to shut down the argument altogether. Wakefield implies that public literary debate with a woman is simply a joke, as revealed through the flippant manner of his remarks. Eventually, however, Wakefield would learn that Eusebia actually was a woman and he assumes a conciliatory tone in his response to Cambridge reformer William Frend,⁵⁸ who has informed Wakefield of his gaffe. Frend knew, through mutual acquaintance with Hays's associates Robert Robertson and Joseph Priestley, that Eusebia was really Mary Hays (*MHI* 127). Frend's letter to Wakefield has not survived, but Wakefield's reply suggests that Frend had written to chastise him for his insensitivity to a woman:

You must lower your opinion of me, for you seem to suppose, that I have the gift of Prophecy: otherwise how was it possible for me to know, without any Means of knowing, that the Author of that Pamphlet was a Lady? There is no artifice more common [and] so often complained of by Reviewers, as that of assuming a female Name to escape the Lash of Criticism. Had I known who it was, I certainly wd by no Means have thought of such a Piece of Levity. (*MHI* 127-128)

⁵⁸ Cambridge reformer and Unitarian scholar William Frend would later serve as the real-life inspiration for the character of Augustus Harley in Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*. Their correspondence began with Frend's positive response to Hays's *Cursory Remarks* and led to an epistolary relationship that Hays misread as a romantic courtship. See Luria, *Growth* 120-21.

However, despite expressing remorse for the glibness of his remarks, Wakefield makes no apologies for the tenor of his rebuttal. His letter to Frennd contains a postscript that elaborates his disdain for men writing under female pseudonyms. Men could sidestep the rigorous expectations for a male author by doing so. And because of women's relative lack of education and public authority, they should avoid publishing in a public sphere in which they are not sufficiently qualified to participate.⁵⁹

The fracas ends later in 1792, when Hays published a second edition of the *Cursory Remarks*, with an attached postscript. The postscript responds to the sexist remarks directed at Eusebia in the second edition of Wakefield's *Enquiry*, and her stance in this postscript is even more apologetic than in the first edition. In this postscript she writes that although "Eusebia" is "highly gratified by the honourable mention Mr. Wakefield makes of her address to him," she is ultimately troubled because he had "prefaced it by a ludicrous sally unworthy of the subject" (22). The "ludicrous sally" referred to by Hays is the quotation from Proverbs cited above. She details the hurt she has suffered from Wakefield's dismissal, which "inflicts on a mind of delicate sensibility, a more painful and complicated emotion than was, perhaps, wished or intended. Abashed and wounded, I withdraw from a polemic controversy to which I profess myself very unequal" (22). She admits that she has "failed" in her attempt to refute Wakefield, and she apologizes for "venturing to address a gentleman of Mr. Wakefield's literary character" (22). Ultimately, "the timidity and gentleness generally attributed to my sex, may render me an incompetent judge" (26). Thus, the paradoxical

⁵⁹ In keeping with the spirit of his remarks, Wakefield published *A General Reply to the Arguments Against the Enquiry into Public Worship*, published after 19 June, 1792. This general reply reassumes the derogatory tone of the *Enquiry's* appendix, and again female Dissenters are singled out for special ridicule. Wakefield alludes to the "cohort of Amazonian auxiliaries" who responded to the *Enquiry*, in particular Eusebia and Mrs. Barbauld. Again, he dismisses the women's arguments in sexist terms, bringing in the Greek epigram in which an armed Pallas Athene challenges the unarmed Venus to a fight. "What occasion have I," asks Venus, "for the shield or spear? If I could vanquish you with my native unadorned beauty, how much more, if I put on armour?" (*MHI* 136). Wakefield's implication is that women's sexual power is greater than their potential for intellectual debate.

nature of Hays's literary debut returns full-circle. Polarized extremes of self-effacement and self-assertion intermingle throughout both editions of the *Cursory Remarks*, mobilized and exacerbated by Hays's insistent prodding of gender politics. In a subtle display of rhetorical sleight-of-hand, Hays almost imperceptibly announces her right to philosophy and her right to theology in the midst of a pamphlet otherwise replete with feminine reticence. Hays's postscript to the *Cursory Remarks*' is especially deceptive in this regard: on the surface an admission of defeat and an apology for venturing out of her depth, the postscript really marks the beginning of Hays's publishing career. For having successfully established herself as a worthy force in the Dissenting public sphere with this first publication, Hays will build upon the discursive authority she has consolidated in her quest for an expanded readership.

The Professional Hays: *Letters and Essays*

Hays would briefly revisit the Wakefield controversy in 1793 with the publication of her first book, *Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous*. In the first letter of the *Letters and Essays* (No. I, To Mr.--), Hays immediately returns to the issue of social worship, a tactic through which she not only partially sets up her argument for the book, but through which she cleverly builds upon the authority she has already established through the *Cursory Remarks*' success. One can perceive, however, a very different authorial voice in the letter compared to that of the *Cursory Remarks*. The letter begins, not with an apology or a self-deprecating remark, but with a brief note of thanks to her imaginary interlocutor for engaging with her ideas on social worship: "Thank you, my friend, for the remarks with which you have forwarded me, on the Wakefieldian controversy" (1). At first glance merely a platitude, the remark is noteworthy for its matter-of-factness and its lack of self-effacing apology, a pattern consistent with the *Letters and Essays*' rhetorical scheme overall. Moving

on to present a new dimension of her argument against Wakefield—the exhilarating and captivating “powers of oratory” (6), which have, throughout history, inspired people to virtue and right action—Hays exploits the momentum she has set in motion with her debut publication. This first letter, despite being somewhat anomalous in terms of the book’s content, captures the essence of the newly reinvented ‘Hays’. The letter’s cordial and reasoned introduction tellingly announces a writer who more confidently asserts her right to philosophy. But the origins of this shift in Hays’s persona can be traced back to the revision process of the *Letters and Essays*’ preface, a process overdetermined by political and professional considerations through which Hays negotiates her entry into the Dissenting public sphere under her own name.

A radical conduct book for women, the *Letters and Essays* constructs, through its sixteen letters, two short narratives, and four poems, a theoretical template for women’s education largely modeled on principles Hays had absorbed during her time spent among the faculty and students of the all-male New College Dissenting academy. Like the *Cursory Remarks*, the *Letters and Essays* primarily targets a Dissenting audience, although Hays’s desire to widen her reading audience is also evident. Dedicated to the Unitarian minister Dr. John Disney, one of Hays’s intellectual and spiritual mentors, the *Letters and Essays* addresses the missing link in Dissenting ideals of equality and education: gender equality.⁶⁰ In the *Letters and Essays*’ preface, Hays establishes her allegiance to Mary Wollstonecraft, whose *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* she had read while composing *Letters and Essays*. Due to Wollstonecraft’s influence, Hays has largely abandoned the false modesty and special pleading that characterized the voice of Eusebia in favour of a noticeably more assertive tone. Wollstonecraft thus functions as the catalyst through which Hays sheds the cover of

⁶⁰ Amy Weldon points out that Dissenters of the late eighteenth century “engaged visibly with nearly every major social issue . . . except one—the rights of women (16).

Eusebia to emerge as an author on her own terms, speaking in a much stronger voice that exhibits rather than begs for its discursive authority. To this end, Hays makes explicit in the *Letters and Essays* preface what was implicit in the *Cursory Remarks*: she forcefully critiques women's subordination in a male-dominated society, focusing specific attention on the deficiencies of women's education. But one must be careful to distinguish the real-life connection between Hays and Wollstonecraft from its rhetorical enactment in the preface. For in a rhetorical sense, Hays's paratextual deployment of Wollstonecraft marks yet another instance of her prefatory figure's protean development. Attaching her name to Wollstonecraft's allows Hays to capitalize on the more famous writer's authority; thus, as signifier, Wollstonecraft represents something in excess of her feminist ideals. In essence, Hays's preface relies heavily on this *argumentum ad verecundiam* or appeal to authority, at least in order to bolster her own fledgling discursive authority. In this case, the *prosopopeial* face through which Hays voices her preface has shifted from Eusebia to devout Wollstonecraft disciple. This figure of Hays as disciple, however, elides the differences between the two thinkers, even as it solidifies their common proto-feminist goals.⁶¹

Mary Wollstonecraft's intellectual influence on Hays has been well documented, and her role as a mentor figure to Hays cannot be denied, especially given the emergence of Hays's significantly more radical feminist argument after having absorbed Wollstonecraft's

⁶¹ Scott Nowka points out that "Although Godwin and Wollstonecraft were undeniably powerful influences on Hays's intellectual life, she cannot be reduced to them, for her thought is part of a genealogy of materialist thinkers that extends far beyond them" (524). Nowka identifies a fundamental philosophical distinction between the two thinkers: whereas Wollstonecraft argues for the importance of women achieving their own agency, Hays "relinquishes that very agency," instead incorporating the "logic of necessitarianism" (524) to emphasize the causal necessity of 'feminine' behaviour. See also Rajan, who points out the "significant differences" (*Romantic* 84) between the two thinkers, focusing especially on Hays's advocacy of passion, romance and sensibility as compared to Wollstonecraft. In addition, Hays was also much more publicly radical than Wollstonecraft, as her *Memoirs* would divulge intimate details of her pursuit of William Frend; Wollstonecraft, by contrast, never publicly revealed her affair with Gilbert Imlay, in keeping with her relative disdain for passion and sensibility. Only with the publication of Godwin's *Memoirs* of Wollstonecraft would that romance be publicized, after Wollstonecraft's death.

feminist treatise. But as Mary Waters argues, Wollstonecraft's influence extended further than the intellectual; she also mentored Hays on the exigencies of professional authorship.⁶² Thus, one of the crucial outcomes of the Wollstonecraft-Hays connection was the resulting self-awareness of Hays's status as an emerging professional author, an awareness manifested through the book's revised preface. The nexus of discursive authority, gender politics, and professionalization characterizing this early phase of the proto-feminist movement reveals itself through the preface's revisionary process. Just as Wordsworth in 1800 will use his revised preface to *Lyrical Ballads* to justify the professional autonomy of the poet, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Three, Hays uses this preface to construct a professionalized image of herself. But Hays proceeds much more subtly in her self-presentation, relying heavily on her prefatory figure to convey herself as a writer to be taken seriously in the mold of a Mary Wollstonecraft. By the time she met Hays in late 1792 through their mutual acquaintance George Dyer, Wollstonecraft was a seasoned professional 'hack' writer in the employ of the publisher Joseph Johnson, to whose periodical *Analytical Review* she regularly contributed reviews and for whom she served as an editorial assistant. Hays had requested a meeting with Wollstonecraft, whose *Vindication* she had recently read and so strongly admired. After having read a draft of Hays's *Letters and Essays* manuscript, which Hays had sent her for feedback and with hopes that Johnson would be interested in publishing it, Wollstonecraft replied with a critique primarily focusing on Hays's textual depiction of herself as author. Wollstonecraft advises Hays to re-write the book's preface to present a professionalized version of herself as author, rather than a Eusebia-like figure characterized by her deference to male authority and self-deprecating tone. Wollstonecraft singles out two of the tactics

⁶² As Waters notes, the Hays-Wollstonecraft mentorship was significant in the history of literary production: a "landmark" in the history of women writers' professionalization, Wollstonecraft's "role as a professional mentor, offering expert guidance to Hays, marks the first time in the history of British letters that such a relationship between two women writers can be traced" (88).

deployed by Hays in her draft preface—special pleading for reader indulgence and assurance that her work had already been warmly received in private—both common prefatory strategies for late-eighteenth century women writers. For Wollstonecraft, the prefatory figure of Hays was abominable for its portrayal of such a meek authorial figure. In her November 1792 letter to Hays, Wollstonecraft articulates her aversion to the draft preface:

I do not approve of your preface—and I will tell you why. If your work should deserve attention it is a blur on the very face of it.—Disadvantages of education &c ought, in my opinion never to be pleaded (with the public) in excuse for defects of any importance. If the writer has not sufficient strength of mind to overcome the common difficulties which lie in his way, nature seems to command him, with a very audible voice, to leave the task of instructing others to those who can. This kind of vain humility has ever disgusted me—and I should say to an author, who humbly sued for forbearance, ‘if you have not a tolerably good opinion of your own production, why intrude in on the public? we have plenty of bad books already, that have just gasped for breath and died.’ (*MHI* 191)

Wollstonecraft singles out the preface’s last paragraph, which she criticizes for “being so full of vanity” (191). She admonishes Hays for her obsequiousness, disapproving of her tendency to solicit compliments from men in private, who would otherwise criticize her works publicly. Wollstonecraft here passes on her hard-won understanding of how discursive authority functions in a text. For as Susan Lanser observes, “even novelists who challenge this [discursive] authority are constrained to adopt the authorizing conventions of narrative voice in order, paradoxically, to mount an authoritative critique of the authority that the text therefore also perpetuates” (7). The crucial element in Hays’s professional

development, in the evolving validation of her discursive authority, is the necessity of assuming the rhetorical stance of the “white, educated men of hegemonic ideology” (Lanser 7) who set the terms of debate. Even Wollstonecraft, despite her radical feminist ideology, recognizes this: significantly, her advice to Hays reverts to the male pronoun when speaking of authority (“nature seems to command *him*”).⁶³ And her choice of the phrase “vain humility” also signifies a gendered allusion to patriarchal hegemony, as “vanity” for Wollstonecraft serves as a derogatory catch-phrase throughout her *Vindication*, encapsulating the effects of societal emphasis on women’s beauty and grooming in place of a rationally-grounded education. Wollstonecraft’s final criticism focuses on Hays’s overbearing prefatory persona. An unknown author such as Hays should stay in the “back ground” because, until the public’s curiosity has been aroused through the publication of a worthy book, nobody cares about her. “Indeed the preface, and even your pamphlet, is too full of yourself” (*MHI* 192), writes Wollstonecraft.

The exact extent to which Hays followed Wollstonecraft’s advice and revised the *Letters and Essays*’ preface is unknown as no extant copies of the draft exist. But a comparison of Wollstonecraft’s letter with the published version of the *Letters and Essays*’ preface reveals that Hays must have heeded Wollstonecraft’s counsel. Both of Wollstonecraft’s main criticisms—her objection to Hays’s special pleading and to Hays’s

⁶³ Even use of the first-person pronoun carried “unspoken assumptions of default masculinity” (Hodson 282). Hays was acutely aware of the myriad connotations associated with the ‘I’ as revealed through comments she will make in her 1798 work *An Appeal to the Men of Great Britain*. The following passage reveals Hays’s acknowledgment of the gendered ‘I’: “Writing in the *first person* then, is a practice condemned by the canons of criticism, and the use of it forbidden, where it can be at all avoided. To *confound* the *persons* is likewise a deadly sin, in the eyes of orthodox critics – Yet against both these rules has the writer of this little sketch, transgressed, in no common degree. In short, it must be confessed, that, ‘the monosyllable’ alleged to be ‘dear to authors’ – that the proscribed little personage – I – unfortunately occurs, remarkably often, in the foregoing pages. And that WE – and all its lawful accompaniments, which were introduced *sometimes*, from a desire to take off from the dictatorial tone of composition; and *sometimes*, as expressive of the sense of the whole sex, as well as that of the author – are fully as liable to the charge of presumption, as even that, for which they were only meant as humble substitutes” (298, Hays’s italics). Hays’s rhetoric, with its echoes of Eve’s biblical fall (“deadly sin,” “transgressed,” “charge of presumption”) displays the woman writer’s predicament even when faced with something as seemingly innocuous as a pronoun.

vanity—are not present in the published version. Indeed, the source of Wollstonecraft’s first tirade, Hays’s excessive apologizing for her lack of education, has been cleverly reversed. In the published preface, Hays, instead of pleading her own educational deficiencies, quotes from Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication* to point out the more general problem of women’s education: “that as society is at present constituted, the little knowledge, which even women of stronger minds attain, is of too desultory a nature, and pursued in too secondary a manner to give vigour to the faculties, or clearness to the judgment” (v). Hays extrapolates this general observation of Wollstonecraft’s to underscore her own predicament as a woman writer, acknowledging that “I feel the truth of this observation with a mixture of indignation and regret.” However, in a remark clearly provoked by Wollstonecraft’s critique, Hays adds, “this is the only apology I shall make to the critical reader, who may be inclined to censure as unconnected, or inconclusive, any of the subsequent remarks” (v-vi). Thus, rather than presenting a protracted, Eusebia-like apology for her lack of refinement and education, the prefatory Hays of the *Letters and Essays* brings in Wollstonecraft’s critique of gendered education to bolster her own brief apology. Wollstonecraft thus becomes a mouthpiece for the very aspect of the preface that she had previously criticized.

If this preface is “full” of anyone, it is full of Wollstonecraft, as Hays repeatedly praises her, quotes her, and aligns her own argument with the *Vindication*’s. Wollstonecraft is referred to as the “Master,” the “admirable advocate for the rights of woman” (vi) whose writings are “irradiated by truth and genius” (vi). The preface’s first section is a self-professed “tribute of public respect” (vi) to Wollstonecraft. Moreover, within the *Letters and Essays*, Hays sets up her ‘argument’ with elaborated reference to Wollstonecraft. Letter III of the *Letters and Essays* presents a protracted defense of Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication*, emphasizing its role in helping to alleviate the “mental bondage” (19) that has “enslaved the

female mind” (20). Hays credits Wollstonecraft as one of the few “distinguished individuals . . . endeavouring to dispel the magical illusions of custom,” proclaiming that “the name of Woolstonecraft [sic] will go down to posterity with reverence, when the pointless sarcasms of witlings are forgotten” (20). Buttressing her own argument against those objections commonly leveled against Wollstonecraft, Hays refutes those who fear that “by enlarging and ennobling our minds, we shall be undomesticated, and unfitted . . . for mere household drudges” (26), while castigating those who dismiss Wollstonecraft’s (and by extension, Hays’s own) theories as unsound because of her “never having entered the matrimonial lists” (27). The ubiquitous Wollstonecraft thus permeates all levels of the book’s structure, from its preface to the third letter, forming the argument’s ideological foundation. That Hays tends to conflate herself with Wollstonecraft, however, remains subtly concealed from the reader. Hays’s pre-emptive counter-arguments ostensibly combat those determined to refute Wollstonecraft, when in reality she intends to disarm the reader from attacking her own argument. The rhetorical subterfuge performed here therefore permits Hays to take cover under Wollstonecraft, deflecting criticism that would otherwise be directed at Hays herself. This strategy becomes especially clear in relief of the 1798 preface to *An Appeal to the Men of Great Britain*, when Wollstonecraft receives an entirely different portrayal, as discussed below.

This preface depicts a more objective authorial persona than the figure presumably depicted in the draft. Contrary to the “vanity” and obsessive self-handicapping that plagued the *Cursory Remarks*’ and the draft’s preface, the published version focuses on the issue of women’s education rather than the author’s neuroses. As such, Hays’s revised preface lays down the book’s ideological premise without any distractions arising from excess self-absorption. The preface’s overall thrust is a rallying call for the “reformation of manners” (viii) necessary to incite the process of women’s empowerment. Railing against a culture that

uncritically perpetuates prescribed gender roles based on unfounded biological distinctions, Hays argues for the necessity of an enlightened social consciousness. To this end, her rhetoric is forceful, even occasionally militant: men, because of their narrow-mindedness and their refusal to acknowledge women's desire for self-improvement, have been the "enemies" (viii) not only of themselves and their women, but also of their children. So deeply ingrained are these ideologies of gender that each successive generation is burdened with the naturalized, outworn assumptions of its ancestors. The "degrading maxims" (vii) dictating our understanding of gender must be overcome; the fountain, which is "poisoned at its source" (viii) must be purified to ensure that all inquiring minds, regardless of gender, have the right to its waters.

Hays's prefatory allusions to Wollstonecraft contextualize the *Letters and Essays* as a radical critique of female education, not only in mainstream British society, but especially within the Dissenting public sphere. Unbinding the tightly-knit connection between education and morality insinuated through the Eusebia of Law's *Serious Call* and substituting the Wollstonecraft-inflected voice as the controlling prefatory figure, Hays brings to the forefront her predominating concern with education. For in the late-eighteenth century, a significant gap separated theoretical support for women's educational equality from its actual practice. Prominent Dissenters like Joseph Priestley would proclaim that women "should be given the [highest] education of which they were capable," consisting of the "learned and the modern languages . . . mathematics and philosophy" because "the minds of women are capable of the same improvement and the same furniture as those of men" (qtd. in Watts 36). But despite the Dissenters' bold claims for women's education, they did not extend educational equality for women in the sense of a formal education. Dissenting academies were not co-educational, nor was a network of academies ever established for women. Thus,

women's education was largely relegated to the private sphere, left to the "tightly knit yet disparate intellectual and cultured Unitarian network" of relatives and friends, through which they would further their education (Watts 67). The "contradictory position" (Weldon 13) of Dissenting women arose from the tension between a belief that everyone possessed the God-given right to rational communion with God, and the conflicting belief that the sensual and emotional nature of women's bodies interfered with their rationality, thus hindering their spiritual potential. In her attempt to overcome such misconceptions, Hays in her *Letters and Essays* and elsewhere, attempts to use Rational Dissent's "own weapons against itself" (Weldon 16). Dissenting principles such as an autonomous approach to individual faith, challenges to religious orthodoxy, and attempts to integrate private life with public action are deployed by Hays to argue for the extension of educational equality to women.

As an example of Hays's liberatory ideas on education—in the sense that improved education leads to freedom, and that an ideal education should permit freedom of intellectual curiosity—Letters IV and VII delineate educational precepts that are not only significant in themselves, but which set up concepts that will be crucial to unbinding the complex logic of *Emma Courtney's* prefatory "warning." Both of these letters deal with the issue of girls' reading, recognizing books as being essential, as she argues in Letter IV, for "moral as well as speculative improvement" (31).⁶⁴ But as Hays makes clear, especially in Letter VII, a text's tendency always has primacy over its moral, beginning a pattern of foregrounding the tendency's interpretive value that she will redouble in the *Memoirs*.

Assuring her interlocutor not to be "alarmed . . . at your daughter's predilection for novels

⁶⁴ The freedom granted by Hays to female readers, especially in regards to novels, is subversive in the context of strong late-eighteenth-century beliefs against the pernicious effects of novel-reading. Katherine Binhammer summarizes the allegedly deleterious effects of novel-reading as perpetuating "mistaken expectations of life, subverted class barriers, increased vice simply by representing it, and caused inflamed female imaginations and neglect of domestic duties . . . by the 1790s the novel had become the culture's latest intoxicating drug" (3).

and romances” (86), Hays develops an argument aligned with Godwin’s sentiments in “Of Choice in Reading”: “let them read with you and let their choice of books be free” (90). Properly trained, young readers should be able to read works of their own choosing. Mothers are advised to instill their daughters with sound literary judgment from an early age:

Converse with them on the merits of the various authors, and accustom them to critical, and literary discussions. They will soon be emulous of gaining your approbation by entering into your ideas, and will be ashamed of being pleased with what you ridicule as absurd, and out of nature, or disapprove, of having an improper and immoral tendency. (91)

Books cannot be blamed for compromising the virtue of young women; regardless of a book’s intention, ultimately the reader decides for herself whether to accept or reject its message. This precept is fundamental to what Hays describes elsewhere in the letter as her attempt at “joining my feeble efforts to those of the admirable assertor of female rights [Wollstonecraft], in endeavouring to stimulate, and rouse my sex from the state of mental degradation, and bondage, in which they have long been held” (92). Hays’s concept of choice in reading underpins a tension between the *Memoirs*’ didactic prefatory premise and the novel’s narrative tendency, the result of a subtle rhetorical sleight-of-hand through which she subverts the novel’s prefatory warning.

Rhetorical Subterfuge: *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*

Having reached the limits of the polemical essay for her purposes of delving into an authentic exploration of the emotions, Hays, seeking to depart from the rigid objectivism of Enlightenment philosophy, turned to the novel, as Godwin had recently done to fictionalize his philosophical precepts in *Caleb Williams*. Louise Joy notes that Hays used fiction to “rehabilitate the subjective component that falls out of accounts of emotions offered by

non-fictional philosophy” (221), and in the highly subjective context of her *Memoirs*, Hays surely had discarded at least one bit of Wollstonecraft’s advice for the *Letters and Essays*’ preface. To criticize the *Memoirs* for being “full of yourself” would be an understatement, at least according to a reading that conflates the novel’s protagonist with its author. Of course, the ‘Hays’ who dominates the *Memoirs* is a figure far removed from the *Cursory Remarks*’ Eusebia in the sense that she has shed her idealized feminine attributes to reveal herself as the fleshly embodiment of a woman struggling to contain her desires. Despite their ostensible differences, however, traces of the Eusebia figure re-emerge in the *Memoirs*. The essence of Eusebia as prefatory figure in the *Cursory Remarks*—her fundamental duplicity, the prosopopoeial face through which she represents Hays—returns as a structuring principle in the *Memoirs*. Yet the rhetorical subterfuge performed by Hays in her prefaces becomes even more elaborate in the *Memoirs*, diffusing itself throughout the multi-layered narrative structure, staging the persistent introjection of the *Memoirs*’ moral value. Incessantly framing and re-framing itself, the novel’s strange composite of preface, epistolary framing device, first-person narration, and intrusive footnotes, along with its epitextual letters to Godwin and intratextual letters to Godwin’s fictional alter-ego, Mr. Francis, constitutes the formal peculiarities of the “experiment” referred to so frequently by Hays. In a narrative scheme characterized by Thorell Porter Tsomondo as “curiously schizothymic” on account of its “counterfeit dialogics” (58), the various strands of Hays’s composite portray a subject anxiously and perpetually in process, a subject that feigns capitulation to the moral expectations of the bourgeois public sphere, yet furtively holds to its conviction of the tendency as the true measure of a text’s reception.

First Frame: The Preface

Ostensibly, the *Memoirs*' preface seeks to impose a moral on the text's tendencies, to pre-emptively dissuade the reader from negative judgments of Emma's conduct, in keeping with the moral expectations of the middle-class public sphere. Her double-voiced discourse allows her to address and placate a middle-class audience through the cautionary warning, while engaging a Dissenting audience more likely to be receptive to a character whose conduct transgresses societal norms. To this end, Hays in the preface famously announces that the "errors" of her heroine "were the offspring of sensibility; and that the result of her hazardous experiment is calculated to operate as a *warning*, rather than as an example" (36).⁶⁵ Her prefatory warning, however, is unconvincing as it epitomizes what Janet Todd identifies as the "contradictions between the novel and the preface" (242), contradictions generated by the fact that the novel's heroine, from whose perspective the tale is told, will more likely "glory in" than "denigrate" her sensibility (242).⁶⁶ Like Godwin's prefaces to *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams*, Hays's preface to the *Memoirs*—along with the preface to her next novel, *The Victim of Prejudice*—provides a deep historical context for the novel: in Hays's case, the necessity of apologizing for her protagonist's behaviour underscores the fact that the late-

⁶⁵ Reviewers from both the *Monthly Review* and *Critical Review* quote this warning in their reviews of the novel. Both reviews are favourable, yet the *Critical Review*'s anonymous reviewer appears somewhat troubled by the character of Emma, concluding his article by remarking that "we do not hold up Emma Courtney as a character for general imitation, any more than, we presume, the authoress herself would" (*Memoirs* 297). He goes on to briefly catalogue Emma's flaws, while informing the reader about the importance of reason and how "our conduct must, in a great measure, be regulated by the welfare and good order of society" (297). Thus, despite the review's positive thrust, the reviewer ultimately reveals an uneasiness with the heroine's depiction. This uneasiness is symptomatic of an ambiguity in the novel's tendency that stems from a tension between Hays's prefatory "warning" and the sheer magnitude of Emma's character.

⁶⁶ To this day, critics remain divided on the issue of whether readers are justified in condemning Emma's 'immorality' despite the preface's warning. See, for instance, Jane Spencer, who faults critics for "making the author and her protagonist bywords for immorality, despite Hays's careful claim that her heroine's story was meant 'as a *warning*, rather than as an example'" (130). Conversely, Nicola Watson points out that the novel in fact upholds the beliefs it purportedly seeks to oppose: "Claiming to be a warning against the over-indulgence of feeling, it actually celebrates and validates the heroine's own infatuated, coercive effusions, with which the reader is virtually forced to identify as a result of the mixed epistolary and memoir format" (46).

eighteenth-century reading public would not likely be receptive to a character such as Emma, whose uncontrolled passion marks her as socially abject. Unlike Hays's previous two publications, the 1796 publication of *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* generated considerable controversy. Marilyn Butler claims that the *Memoirs* "attracted more remonstrance than any other individual revolutionary novel" (Jane 117) on account of its radical portrayal of a woman who, refusing to subordinate her passions to reason, eschews traditional gender roles in the obsessive pursuit of her would-be lover, Augustus Harley.

That the novel would likely attract the censure of her contemporaries was clear to Hays: much of her preface attempts to justify the novel's moral, and Hays takes pains, through the novel's prefatory *insinuatō*, to ensure that readers do not consider Emma as a model for emulation. But more importantly, the way Hays manages her novel's entry into the bourgeois public sphere once again recalls the spirit of dissimulation attributed to Godwin's *Political Justice* preface. Godwin's preface deftly sidestepped the question of its actual political enactment; emphasizing the book's speculative nature, Godwin in his preface seeks to evade responsibility for the consequences of any revolutionary upheaval incited by his book. In the *Memoirs*' preface, Hays takes a similar approach. Her preface likewise seeks to evade responsibility for 'corrupting' her readers through exposure to the impassioned Emma Courtney by acknowledging the book's speculative nature. That both writers classify their works as an "experiment"—Godwin does so in the deleted manuscript preface to *Political Justice*, and Hays uses the term several times throughout her novel not only in the preface but elsewhere in the novel as detailed below—suggests yet another attempt to placate censors and hostile reviewers by stressing the speculative, rather than the pragmatic, dimension of their texts.

Indeed, most of the *Memoirs*' preface elaborates Hays's defense of her protagonist's conduct.⁶⁷ To this end, Hays repeatedly calls attention to her novel's philosophical basis and its utilitarian value. The preface begins with Hays's claim that the "most useful . . . fictions" are those which trace "one strong, indulged, passion . . . by which the philosopher may calculate the powers of the human mind" (35). From the outset, Hays depicts the novel as a primarily philosophical foray into the psychological workings of the human mind. There is, of course, nothing false about this claim: throughout the novel, Hays continually indulges and cites her interest in psychology. But as an instance of Hays's rhetorical subterfuge, the preface's opening adroitly stages the process of conditioning the reader to perceive the novel in a particular way. Similarly, Hays briefly alludes to the method through which she constructs the character of Emma, pointing out that

It has commonly been the business of fiction to pourtray [sic] characters, not as they really exist, but, as we are told, they ought to be—a sort of *ideal perfection*, in which nature and passion are melted away, and jarring attributes wonderfully combined. In delineating the character of Emma Courtney, I had not in view those fantastic models: I meant to represent her, as a human being, loving virtue while enslaved by passion, liable to the mistakes and weaknesses of our fragile nature. (36; Hays's italics)

⁶⁷ Byron, in his original 1812 preface to *Childe Harold* and in his 1813 "Addition to the Preface" follows a similar pattern. In the "Addition to the Preface," he uses the same terminology as Hays does in her preface, assuring the reader that Harold "never was intended as an example, further than to show, that early perversion of mind and morals leads to satiety of past pleasures and disappointment in new ones" (viii). In the original preface, Byron addresses the question of whether or not Harold is based on "some real personage," such as Byron himself. But Byron dismisses the speculation, arguing that "Harold is the child of imagination" (v). Thus, in his preface, Byron performs a similar maneuver, somewhat unconvincingly distancing himself from his main character, while ironically aligning himself with any reader who would be offended by Harold's lewd conduct.

Hays's remarks, which she elaborates one year later in her *Monthly Magazine* article "On Novel Writing," embody her belief that characters should be depicted realistically with virtues and vices, contrary to Samuel Johnson's influential notion that "the most perfect models of virtue ought only to be exhibited" (180).⁶⁸ Referring to Richardson's *Clarissa* as "a beautiful superstructure upon a false and airy foundation," Hays argues that such a character can "never be regarded as a model for imitation" because she is "far removed from common life and human feelings" (180). Hays's prefatory emphasis on the necessity of portraying Emma's faults, however, likely derives from the preface of the very novel against which she contrasts her own method: the preface to Richardson's *Clarissa* also contains a preface that apologizes for depicting 'flawed' characters.⁶⁹ By positioning the novel as a "useful" character study from which philosophers can better understand the human mind, and by emphasizing the 'realism' of Emma's depiction, Hays immediately seeks to contain her protagonist's wild energies, much as Shelley will attempt in his preface to *Alastor*, as I argue in Chapter Four. Yet just as Shelley's preface will fail in its attempt to impose a moral, so too does Hays's attempt fail to subdue Emma's profound emotional excesses.

⁶⁸ See also Frances Burney's preface to *Evelina*, in which she announces her intent to "draw characters from nature . . . and to mark the manners of the times," noting that "the heroine of these memoirs, young artless, and inexperienced, is 'No faultless Monster, that the world ne'er saw'" (96). Similarly, Mary Wollstonecraft's 1788 preface to her *Mary: A Fiction*, points out that "this woman [the novel's heroine] is neither a *Clarissa*, a *Lady G*—, nor a *Sophie* . . . artists wander from nature, when they copy the originals of great masters," arguing that her depiction of *Mary* is "artless . . . drawn by the individual from the original source" (ii-iii).

⁶⁹ In his preface to *Clarissa* (1748), Richardson imposes a rather heavy-handed moral on his novel, a method that likely influenced Hays's prefatory strategy. Throughout *Clarissa's* preface, Richardson repeatedly demonstrates how particular aspects of his narrative are intended to "warn and instruct" (xx). For instance, apologizing for the "professed Libertines" Robert Lovelace and John Belford, Richardson assures the reader that, despite their vices, they are neither "Infidels or Scoffers" who "disbelieve not a Future State of Rewards and Punishments, and who one day propose to reform—One of them actually reforming" (xix). And *Clarissa*, despite being an "Exemplar to her sex" is nonetheless "not in all respects a perfect character" (xx). Overall, like Hays, Richardson foregrounds the "warnings" his novel intends to announce: the work's aim is to "warn the Inconsiderate and Thoughtless of the one sex, against the base arts and designs of specious Contrivers of the other – To caution Parents against the undue exercise of their natural authority over their Children in the great article of Marriage – To warn Children against preferring a Man of Pleasure to a Man of Probity" (xx).

The duality of Hays's prefatory figure reveals itself subtly throughout the preface, especially in those instances when her moralizing tone becomes especially strong. In particular, two instances in the preface expose the rift between the *prosopopoeial* face of the *Memoirs*' prefatory 'Hays' as distinguished from the narrating protagonist Emma Courtney, whose behaviour requires the prefatory "warning." First, the preface's second paragraph elaborates the moral that Hays sets up in the preface. After having introduced the novel's philosophical foundation—tracing the consequences of "one strong, indulged, passion"—Hays proceeds to distinguish the nature of her chosen passion from those already novelistically delineated by Radcliffe ("the passion of terror") and Godwin ("curiosity in the hero, and the love of reputation in the soul-moving character of Falkland") (35). As she sets up this distinction, however, Hays paraleptically stops short of actually naming the passion that her novel so obsessively analyzes. Any one of a number of epithets could describe Emma's "passion"—love, obsessive desire, infatuation, to name but a few—but the prefatory Hays alludes to it obliquely through innuendo. Thus, the reader is informed, in the disinterested third-person passive voice, that "a more universal sentiment is chosen – a sentiment hackneyed in this species of composition, consequently more difficult to treat with any degree of originality" (36).

For the moralizing prefatory persona, the novel's subject matter cannot be named and the voice refuses even to accept agency for its selection. But the omission calls attention to itself, for if the novel really were simply about 'love,' the elaborate preface would be unnecessary given the "hackneyed" thematic prominence of love in so many other contemporary novels. By circumventing the naming of Emma's ruling passion, the prefatory figure reveals, on the one hand, a pious unwillingness to provide details about such potentially unseemly subject matter. But on the other, Hays displays remarkable rhetorical

disingenuousness: for even as she attempts to mitigate hostile receptions of Emma Courtney by presenting the novel as yet another love story, her refusal to name Emma's passion simultaneously highlights the narrative's originality and complexity in the very midst of questioning the likelihood of treating the subject originally. For the *Memoirs* presents much more than a hackneyed love story: indeed, most of the difficulty of naming Emma's passion stems from its elusiveness. As Rajan implies, Emma Courtney's ruling passion cannot be straightforwardly reduced to that of 'love.' Rather, it is overdetermined by various configurations of desire: not only is Emma's desire "excessive" because it "exceeds the objective correlative it tries to find in Augustus," but it is also generated by "a desire for access to knowledge" and a "desire for the enunciative position within the social order that a woman could have only in relation to a man" (*Romantic* 90). Given the multivalent dimensions of her novel's thematic nexus, Hays in the preface thus paradoxically gestures towards an absent theme that implicitly reveals, according to the logic of paralepsis, that which has been omitted. Just as Hays's subtle critique of female education lies concealed in the distant literary connotations associated with Law's Eusebia in the *Cursory Remarks*, so too does her acknowledgment of the myriad social imperatives bound up within the "socially prescribed form of heterosexual love" (Rajan, *Romantic* 90) suspend within itself the critique of a marriage system that Hays will excoriate in her next novel, *The Victim of Prejudice*.

The preface's double voice also reveals itself through the Godwinian logic assumed in the preface's third paragraph, through which Hays—in the midst of a preface outlining the novel's moral—simultaneously acknowledges the primacy of the tendency⁷⁰ using language very similar to Godwin's distinction between moral and tendency:

⁷⁰ In this regard, Hays's preface shares affinities with Defoe's preface to *Moll Flanders*, another of the *Memoirs*' direct influences. In his preface, Defoe is also concerned with assuaging the reader's fears about the potential moral contagion associated with the book's protagonist; thus, Defoe argues that "All possible care . . . has been

Every writer, who advances principles, whether true or false, that have a tendency to set the mind in motion, does good. Innumerable mistakes have been made, both moral and philosophical:--while covered with a sacred and mysterious veil, how are they to be detected? From various combinations and multiplied experiments, truth only, can result. Free thinking, and free speaking, are the virtue and the characteristics of a rational being. (36)

Hays in the *Letters and Essays* had previously stated her position on the question of choice in reading. In the *Memoirs'* preface, she again revisits this subject: her claim that only through “multiplied experiments” can one begin to discern the truth, combined with her emphasis on the necessity of “free thinking, and free speaking” aligns itself with the basis of Godwin’s argument in “Of Choice and Reading.” As I pointed out in the Introduction, Godwin defines the tendency as the “actual effect” produced upon a reader by a text, an effect that “cannot be completely ascertained but by the experiment “ (109). Hays thus slyly unravels the preface’s carefully crafted moral in the very moment of its creation. As she makes the case for Emma’s and the *Memoirs'* moral relevance, she undermines the moral altogether through her subtle deference to the text’s tendency. For a text’s moral and tendency are antithetical: the moral and the tendency can form a dialectical synthesis, but always at the expense of the moral’s sublation. Thus even in situations like Hays’s *Memoirs*, where she prefaces her novel with an explicit moral, ultimately the reader will discern whether or not to retain it. One year later, in her article “On Novel Writing,” Hays revisits this territory,

given to give no lewd Ideas, no immodest Turns in the new dressing up this story” (3). And emphasizing the primacy of his novel’s tendency, Defoe writes, “But as this Work is chiefly recommended to those who know how to Read it, and how to make the good Uses of it, which the Story all along recommends to them, so it is to be hop’d that such Readers will be much more pleas’d with the Moral than the Fable, with the Application than with the Relation, and with the End of the Writer than with the Life of the Person written of” (4). In a Godwinian sense, Defoe’s argument distinguishes the text’s moral from its tendency; individual readers—those who “know how to Read it”—will be able to discern their own moral. Despite having been exposed to a “wicked” character, readers are in no danger of being corrupted by such exposure.

finally making explicit what she has so subtly concealed in the *Memoirs*' preface. For in the article, she openly questions the validity of a novel's moral altogether, suggesting that morality is less significant than the intellectual speculation engendered through the novel-reading experience: "It is not necessary that we should be able to deduce from a novel, a formal and didactic moral; it is sufficient if it has a tendency to raise the mind by elevated sentiments, to warm the heart with generous affections, to enlarge our views, or to increase our stock of useful knowledge" (286-87). Hays's use of the terms 'moral' and 'tendency' in such close proximity likely stems from her recent reading of Godwin's *Enquirer*, also published in 1797, in which his essay "Of Choice in Reading" appeared.⁷¹ But even if Godwin's article hadn't yet been published at the time of the *Memoirs*, Hays was clearly familiar with the terminology through her frequent discussions with Godwin. In light of Hays's understanding of the fundamental distinctions between the moral and the tendency, then, her prefatory "warning" is displaced by her acknowledgment of the tendency's precedence.

Second Frame: Letters to Augustus Harley, Jr.

But the preface is not the novel's only framing device: as a secondary narrative layer, the letters to Augustus Harley, Jr. (Emma's adopted son) also provide a frame (within a frame) for the narrative. The letters to Augustus, Jr. continue the work of addressing the bifurcated middle-class and Dissenting audiences implicitly targeted in the preface, but the

⁷¹ In a 1797 *Monthly Magazine* article "Are Mental Talents Productive of Happiness?," Hays alludes to the recently published *Enquirer*, paraphrasing Godwin's idea that "every attempt, however impotent, to investigate or elucidate the nature and history of mind, is laudable, and has a claim to indulgence; the desire of simplifying its operations, tracing their principles, and reducing them to general laws, it has been justly observed by an eloquent philosophic writer [Godwin], in the preface to a late publication, is one of the grandest efforts of human reason" (284).

figure of Augustus, Jr. also opens up a space for a future audience. In many ways, the letters to Augustus Jr. transpose the prefatory voice of 'Hays' into the fictional voice of Emma Courtney, and even constitute what could be called an 'internal' preface, or an intradiegetic instance of what is normally an extradiegetic maneuver. As I will argue in Chapter Four, part of what constitutes the irony of Shelley's prefaces is their 'literariness,' a primary symptom of which is their thematization of prefacing; instances such as Hays's framing letters pave the way for the development of this aspect of Shelley's prefaces, a characteristic also shared by the 'internal' prefaces of Wordsworth's that I analyze in Chapter Three. But even if the letters introduce the reader to the character of Emma and her mysterious son, they also reiterate the preface's rhetorical pattern. The substitution of the prefatory Hays for Emma allows Hays to continue the duplicity enacted in the preface, allowing her simultaneously to reinforce and to negate the novel's moral by emphasizing the power of its tendencies. There are a total of four letters to Augustus Jr.: two preliminary letters between the preface and the first chapter, a one-letter interlude between the first and second volumes, and a closing letter that ends the novel. The first letter reveals that Augustus' life is beginning to mirror that of his surrogate mother, prompting her compulsion to pen her memoirs. Linking preface with preliminary letters is the emphasis on *warning*, explicit in both narrative levels. Just as the preface-writing Mary Hays reassures the public that her novel should serve as a warning rather than an example, the diegetic narrator Emma Courtney similarly justifies her memoir-penning motivation as directed to warning her son not to repeat the errors she has made, to prevent his "destruction" (41). Young Augustus's situation, a narrative *mise-en-abyme* of Emma's story, is cryptically referred to in the first letter. We learn that Emma has sent Augustus away to cure him of an unrequited obsession with a girl named Joanna. We also learn that Joanna has just been married to someone else.

Presumably this is the first young Augustus will have learned about the marriage. But the parallels are obvious: both mother and son have engaged in the futile pursuit of a lover who is already, in Emma's words, "devoted to another object" (41). This epistolary framing device charges the novel with a sense of urgency from the outset, while creating a sense of necessity: Emma's story is not simply frivolous, but written for the specific didactic purpose of educating young Augustus. Thus, as an extension of the preface, the first letter continues the preface's work of justifying the *Memoirs*' moral relevance. Furthermore, the Emma of the letters figures herself as a devastated and humiliated woman, recalling the "bitterness of [her] past life, that "loathed and bitter portion of existence" which "harrows up [her] soul with inconceivable misery" (41). That the fictional Emma so deeply resents her past conduct crystallizes the preface's warning: haunted by her youthful indiscretions, the mature Emma must suffer for her wrongdoings. Opening her novel with the portrait of a dejected and lachrymose Emma, Hays takes pains to ensure her prefatory warning cannot simply be written off as lip-service.

This immediate juxtaposition of the mature Emma with the prefatory warning suggests that Hays really does intend to condemn her protagonist for so thoroughly indulging her passions. But in keeping with her surreptitious rhetorical technique, Hays quickly unsettles the sincerity of her moral with a series of rhetorical questions posed to Augustus Jr., questions that cast suspicion on the reliability of Emma's moralizing framing narrative:

[S]hall I expose your ardent mind to the incessant conflict between truth and error – shall I practice the disingenousness, by which my peace has been blasted – shall I suffer you to run the wild career of passion – shall I keep

back the recital, written upon my own mind in characters of blood, which
may preserve the child of my affections from destruction? (41)

These rapid-fire questions, although voiced by Emma, expose the method of Hays's rhetorical subterfuge in language that implicitly reveals its duplicitous nature. The dialectical "conflict between truth and error" highlights the very structure through which Hays posits the *Memoirs*' moral, distilling aphoristically the essence of finding truth (right conduct) through the errors of negative example (Emma's unbridled passions). Yet Emma announces her own "disingenuousness" at the very moment of reinforcing her moral; indeed, the proximity of "truth" and "disingenuousness" within the same series of questions only serves to widen the gap between the passion-constricting voice of the preface and the passion-inciting portrayal of Emma enacted throughout the novel. For although the questions are ostensibly directed to Augustus, they really address the novel's actual reader for whom Augustus functions as a proxy. Extracted from their context, these questions taunt more than they moralize, their utterance characterized by a provocative, teasing tone. Tantalizing the reader with the imminent details of her "wild career of passion," Emma playfully debates whether or not she should actually narrate her tale. Even the form of her utterance—rhetorical questions—manifests Emma's disingenuousness. The rhetorical question is a fundamentally duplicitous instance of the interrogative mode, disguising itself as a question but really functioning as a declarative statement. Formally, then, the mode of utterance replicates its content, the false question conveying the feigned coyness of Emma's attempt at toying with the reader. Further adding to Hays's rhetorical obliqueness is the stylistic shift distinguishing the prefatory Hays from the fictional Emma. From the outset, Emma's tone and diction contrasts with the prefatory Hays's: whereas the preface depicts the moralizing Hays speaking in measured and authoritative prose, Emma appears as stammering and

unfocused throughout the first letter. Characterized by frequent dashes and continuously interrupted clauses, Emma's writing reflects her agitated state of mind, a depiction in keeping with the intensity of her unrestrained passion. Spoken by Emma, however, the prefatory warning becomes especially suspect, for her anxious rambling calls into question the narrative's alleged depiction of its protagonist as a woman who, settling into maturity, has overcome her "wild career of passion." As evidenced by this first letter, recollecting the scenes of her youth arouses strong feelings in Emma, casting doubt on her claim that Augustus has "[torn] from [her] heart" the incidents from her life that she had hoped no "cruel necessity" would ever cause her to revisit.

The moralizing Emma Courtney of the framing letters re-emerges in between the novel's two volumes to repeat the moral. Indeed, this intermediary framing letter almost directly replicates the same pattern of ideas already laid out in the preface and the first two letters. Hays's/Emma's repetition compulsion manifests itself as yet another attempt to reinforce the novel's moral, a tactic becoming increasingly desperate with each successive attempt. In this letter, Emma reminds Augustus that "it is for your benefit, that I have reviewed the sentiments and the incidents, of my past life" (127). The narrative's didactic function is, she again emphasizes, "the reformation of our errors" (127). To this end, "It is by tracing, by developing, the passions in the minds of others; tracing them, from the seeds by which they have been generated, through all their extended consequences, that we learn, the more effectually, to regulate and to subdue our own" (127). But again, just as she does in the first set of framing letters, Emma subtly taunts the reader with hints of her dissimulation in the very moment of imposing the moral: "I repeat, it will cost me some pain to be ingenuous in the recital which I have pledged myself to give you; even in the moment when I resume my pen, prejudice continues to struggle with principle and I feel an

inclination to retract” (127). And once more repeating the preface’s keyword, Emma reminds Augustus that she intends her narrative as a “warning” to keep his “little bark” from destruction from the “quicksands” and “rocks” against which hers has crashed. Inserting the moral into every possible interstice within the novel—before the first volume, in between volumes, and at the narrative’s end—Hays overcompensates for what she realizes constitutes the novel’s subversive subject matter.

Footnotes

The dubious “warning” of the preface and the letters to Augustus already constitute a somewhat aggressive attempt to dictate a moral. But in keeping with her propensity to fill all of the novel’s interstices with the prefatory figure’s intervening voice, Hays uses footnotes⁷² as yet another opportunity to insert the moralizing voice into the text. Most of the novel’s footnotes are simply citations, but two particular footnotes, appearing in the novel’s second volume, show how Hays’s prefatory voice encroaches into the margins of the text, appearing directly after two particularly incendiary statements. Shari Benstock, in her analysis of fictional footnotes,⁷³ observes that Fielding’s footnotes “counterpoint and undermine the narrative voice(s) of the text” (205), a description that perfectly encapsulates Hays’s method. Hays thus extends and displaces the preface’s *insinuatō* into the footnotes, inserting the prefatory warning as a counterpoint to the narrator’s discourse. The first such

⁷² Genette points out the “affinity of function” between notes and prefaces, observing that “the discourse of the preface and that of the apparatus of notes are in a very close relation of continuity and homogeneity” (320). Using the example of Chateaubriand’s *Martyrs* and his *Essai Sur les Revolutions*, Genette points out that in both of these texts, “a single discourse . . . is divided between the preface and the notes, the preface dealing with general considerations and the notes taking responsibility for points of detail” (320). One could assign a similar function to the preface-footnote relation in Hays’s *Memoirs*, as the preface provides the general moral “warning,” with the notes assigned to comment on particular instances that transgress the warning.

⁷³ As Benstock notes, “footnotes in a literary work highlight the interplay between author and subject, text and reader, that is always at work in fiction, giving us occasion to speculate on self-reflexive narration as an aspect of textual authority” (205).

footnote occurs after Emma has spent a fortnight fruitlessly waiting for a reply from Augustus Harley. Exasperated, she comes to realize that “those who have courage to act upon advanced principles, must be content to suffer moral martyrdom” (163). This remark anticipates the same sentiment revealed in the novel’s final letter. But whereas the same idea in the final letter can be stated without annotation, Hays affixes a terse footnote to its utterance in the novel’s body: “The sentiment may be just in some particular cases, but it is by no means a general application, and must be understood with great limitations” (163). Hays reveals a strong awareness of the perilousness of her situation. Recognizing that she might have gone too far with her use of the term “martyr,” she feels immediately compelled to qualify—and, consequently, defuse—her rhetoric by acknowledging the limitations of such a bold claim. Aligned with the novel’s rhetorical subterfuge, however, the footnote’s moralizing voice presents itself as yet another instance of Hays’s moral posturing, an attempt to deploy the prefatory figure’s extradiegetic voice to mollify a bold statement at the very moment of its utterance. Indeed, the footnotes provide a vivid glimpse into Hays’s rhetorical method, as they expose an unmediated instance of the dialectic between the prefatory figure and the character of Emma. An immediate juxtaposition of Emma’s voice with the extradiegetic narrator’s voice generates the tension between the two opposing points of view, providing the reader with a microcosmic instance of Hays’s rhetorical scheme. Within this scheme, set up in the preface and carried out through the letters to Augustus Jr. and the footnotes, the moralizing, extradiegetic ‘Hays’ becomes a hovering presence, always at the ready to intervene during potentially contentious narrative moments. Although the identity of the footnote’s ‘speaker’ might be difficult to identify in this case, one assumes that the prefatory figure is also the extradiegetic narrator of the preface.

The second footnote provides a much clearer instance of the extradiegetic narrator's intervention, for its tone and diction are closely aligned with that of the preface. This footnote appears four pages later, after a particularly strong passage in which Emma questions the existence of God:

And must I live – *live for what?* – God only knows! Yet, how am I sure that there is a God – is he wise – is he powerful – is he benevolent? If he be, can he sport himself in the miseries of poor, feeble, impotent beings, forced into existence, without their choice – impelled, by the iron hand of necessity, through mistake, into calamity? – Ah, my friend, who will condemn the poor solitary wanderer, whose feet are pierced with many a thorn, should he turn suddenly out of the rugged path, seek an obscure shade to shroud his wounds, his sorrows, and his indignation, from the scorn of a pitiless world, and accelerate the hour of repose. Who would be born if they could help it?
(167)

The audacity of this passage is provocative, with its undertones of atheism and existential angst. It forcibly demonstrates the extreme suffering endured by Emma, and serves as a powerful index of Emma's depression. Yet Hays again feels the need to intervene, so attached to the end of this passage is another footnote which seeks to downplay or evade the passage's sentiments: "This is the reasoning of a mind distorted by passion. Even in the moment of disappointment, our heroine judged better. See vol 2. chapter 7" (167). This unexpected interruption of the author's footnoted voice again reveals Hays's acute awareness of her experiment's hazardousness. This footnote occurs during the novel's emotional climax, immediately after Emma has received the letter from Mrs. Harley informing her that Augustus has been married for the past three years. Presumably—given Emma's progressive

melancholic descent—the reader would not be surprised that the news would produce in Emma a virulent reaction. The fact that the footnote refers to Emma in the third person (“our heroine”) leaves little doubt that it is voiced by the prefatory ‘Hays’: she has already referred to Emma as “my heroine” (35) in the preface. In this instance, the extradiegetic narrator’s intervention again reinforces the preface’s warning in a specific way. Of Emma’s character flaws, heretical notions would be equally as offensive as her sexual aggression would for Hays’s late-eighteenth-century audience; therefore, in the very moment of Emma’s doubting the existence of God, ‘Hays’ cannot but immediately appear on the scene to condemn her heroine. But Hays’s rhetorical astuteness manifests itself again, for she still allows Emma to voice such strong feelings despite the disapproval. Another variation of the figure of *paralepsis*, this instance encapsulates the duality of the Emma-‘Hays’ dialectic. Despite the narrator’s intervention, intended to negate the sentiments of Emma’s outburst, the utterance’s emotional force cannot be retracted. The dynamic between footnote and utterance replicates the wider dynamic between the moralizing prefatory figure and the character of Emma, playing out the repeated staging of an imposed moral. But the logic of *paralepsis* involves mentioning that which should remain unmentioned—to manifest what is otherwise latent—thus permitting Emma’s original utterance to remain on the page. Of course Hays could just as easily have deleted the offensive passage, but she justifies her decision to allow Emma free rein to express her feelings by offsetting them with a disapproving footnote.

Epitext: Letters to Godwin / Intratext: Letters to Francis

Emma’s correspondence with Mr. Francis—a fictionalized version of Godwin—forms another of the novel’s narrative layers, and I will conclude my analysis with a

discussion of how the fictional letters and Hays's letters to the real-life Godwin further complicate the novel's narrative scheme. In the *Memoirs*' context, Godwin's influence extends beyond his intellectual and personal friendship with Hays: Godwin had suggested the novel in the first place, encouraging Hays to present a fictionalized account of her relationship with Frennd. And much of the content of the fictional letters to Francis consists of verbatim transcriptions or paraphrases of actual letters exchanged between Hays and Godwin. Ultimately, however, Godwin was unsatisfied with the novel. Although his critique focuses on narrative aspects, his real dissatisfaction might very well stem from his feelings that Hays had in fact gone too far with her depiction of Emma's unrestrained passion. In this sense, Hays's thematizing of Godwin as Francis takes issue with the expectations Godwin had when he suggested writing the novel, and Hays continues the work she has begun in the *Cursory Remarks*: to carve out a female space within the Dissenting public sphere. The prominence of passion as a defining feminine characteristic is part of Hays's depiction of the feminine, and in the context of a strongly rationalist Dissenting ideology, her advocacy of passion is bound to meet resistance. Indeed, the Dissenting bias against women that I identified earlier in the chapter, founded on the belief that the sensual and emotional nature of women's bodies hindered their rationality, is directly confronted by Hays in the *Memoirs*, where she seeks to valorize passion as concomitant with reason.

As figured in the character of Mr. Francis, Godwin takes on the role of straw man, seeking to uphold strict principles of Dissenting rationality, against whose ideals Emma stands in relief. His letters become progressively didactic, chastising Emma for indulging in such capricious habits of obsessive desire. His second letter to Emma, and Emma's response to it, encapsulates the dynamics of their epistolary debate. In this letter, Francis

derides Emma for her conduct: “you nursed in your mind a passion, which . . . is the unnatural and odious invention of a distempered civilization . . . You addressed a man impenetrable as a rock, and the smallest glimpse of sober reflection, and common sense, would have taught you instantly to have given up the pursuit” (169). Emma’s rebuttal, however, conflates reason with passion in an attempt to justify her conduct within the parameters of Godwinian principles: “do you not perceive, that my reason was the auxiliary of my passion, or rather my passion the generative principle of my reason?” (172). In thus presenting passion and reason in dialectical terms, Hays seeks to overturn the Godwinian/Dissenting emphasis on reason at the expense of passion. Not only does Emma justify her conduct here, but more widely at stake is the issue of women’s right to philosophy, in the sense that women cannot be denied philosophical, intellectual, or theological authority simply because their passion supersedes their reason.

The letters to Godwin raise the issue of private vs. public, questioning the very nature of the preface as the laying something before the “public” with consequent expectations of objectivity. Just as prefaces straddle the boundary between the inside and outside of a text, so too do the *Memoirs*’ letters to Francis straddle the boundary between the ‘private’ realm of personal correspondence and the ‘public’ realm of the novel. But if the letters to Francis seek to extend Hays’s argument for the rights of female Dissenters, and if the novel’s elaborate paratextual apparatus serves to perpetuate the prefatory Hays’s warning throughout the novel, two letters from the real-life Hays to Godwin expose a slightly different ‘Hays’ lurking beneath the moralizing voice’s duplicitous method. These two letters—both from May of 1796—chronicle Hays’s reaction to Godwin’s comments on an early draft manuscript of the *Memoirs*. These letters comprise what is almost an alternative preface, addressed to the Dissenting public sphere as represented by Godwin. As such,

Hays's concern with morality and convention, which dominates the content of the *Memoirs'* preface, diminishes; in its place, Hays conflates herself with the fictional Emma in ways that contradict her attempts in the preface to separate them. In many ways, these letters undo the moralizing of the preface to reveal the 'private' motives for Hays's composition of the memoirs. In the first letter, she responds to Godwin's charges that the narrative is uninteresting because it chronicles a "hopeless, persevering & unrequited attachment," because of its "austerity of character," and because the heroine displays "no mixture of hope or encouragement" (*Memoirs* 251).

But even in this private correspondence, in which she ostensibly assumes a tone much more sincere than that of the dissimulating prefatory voice, she again calls her own sincerity into question. Responding to what must have been Godwin's suggestion to alter the relationship between Emma and Augustus, Hays argues for the necessity of ambiguity in their relationship: "Whether the relationship was reciprocal must still remain, in some measure, equivocal & at present it is not, nor did I mean it to be, a circumstance perfectly clear & unambiguous" (252). Thus, Hays characterizes the novel's focal point as intentionally obscured, an attempt to withhold from the reader the full story of what actually transpired between Augustus and Emma. Godwin, seeking sincerity in the form of full disclosure, advises Hays to clarify whether or not the relationship was actually reciprocated; Hays, in keeping with the novel's rhetorical method, refuses to oblige him. Her reasoning makes explicit to Godwin what remains latent in the novel: the *Memoirs'* autobiographical dimension. For nowhere in the novel does Hays make reference to any connection between the novel's contents and her own life. But to Godwin, she admits that "the wound is too recent, & the scar too deep . . . I cannot be unaffected by private motives" (252). Further elaborating the "motives" for her writing, Hays admits the purpose of Emma's composition

has been “to divert, perhaps to disburthen, my mind under the *immediate* pressure of disappointment” (252). She does, however, acknowledge her failure to achieve catharsis through having narrated her tale: ultimately, she admits, “I have entangled myself . . . I cannot hide from myself” (252-3). Thus despite her attempts to cathect her pent-up frustration into the fictional realm of the *Memoirs*, Hays instead finds herself caught up within the very narrative she intends to free her.

Hays’s admission that she cannot “hide from [her]self” (253) underscores her ambivalence about the effectiveness of her rhetorical subterfuge. In one sense, her comments anticipate the public furor that would arise after the *Memoirs*’ publication.⁷⁴ While she has attempted in the preface to characterize her novel in a scientific spirit, and to dissociate herself from its protagonist, the public would not be persuaded by the prefatory warning. But the second letter to Godwin goes even further in its emphasis on the *Memoirs*’ autobiographical strain, as she admits to displacing her private affect into the public forum of the novel. This letter contains Hays’s most self-conscious revelation of her duplicity, elaborating on the ulterior motives already hinted at in her first letter:

I will not deceive you, unless I first deceive myself. My MS was not written *merely* for the public eye – another latent, & perhaps stronger, motive lurked beneath . . . my story is *too real*, I cannot violate its truth, by making Augustus either a coquet or a lover . . . I urged him too far – carried on headlong by

⁷⁴ A rumoured 1799 incident involving Charles Lloyd best embodies the extent to which Hays was publicly equated with Emma: after Hays spent an evening with Lloyd, he reported to acquaintances that she, just as Emma had done in the *Memoirs*, had declared her love for him and offered herself to him sexually (Luria, *Growth* 200). Lloyd claimed to have rejected her advances, which caused her to break down emotionally. Whether or not Hays actually offered herself to him, or whether Lloyd misread her motives was irrelevant to him. After the event, he allegedly claimed that “he felt free to slander her because her principles were so immoral that he suspected her conduct towards him (200). Thus, one of the primary motives for Hays’s description of the novel as a “hazardous experiment” is to distance herself from its protagonist.

my own sensations I did not sufficiently respect his. I confess my fanaticism.
(255)

Hays's language here, characterized by its emphasis on deception, latent and lurking motives, again reconfigures the structure of the *Memoirs*' rhetorical dissimulation, now positing a different purpose. Notably, Hays does not actually identify the "stronger" motive, just as, in the preface, she does not name the passion that her novel will analyze; rather, she leaves it implicit, to be defined in contrast to the novel's "public" dimension. Presumably, then, she revisits the territory of her previous letter to Godwin, where she stresses the "disburthen[ing]" function of the *Memoirs*. But again, Hays remains forthright and unapologetic about the nature of her attachment to Frennd: the "fanaticism" inherent in her pursuit of him discloses the madness of her passion. Thus, in contrast to the novel's carefully crafted warning, this letter ambivalently posits an altogether different motive for the *Memoirs*. What precisely that motive is remains somewhat mysterious because of Hays's circumlocutionary description, but in keeping with the *Memoirs*' rhetorical method—and the pattern established throughout the prefaces to all three of Hays's publications thus far—Hays's equivocating perpetually complicates easy understanding of her meaning, making the necessity of individual readers negotiating their own tendencies especially crucial in the absence of any firm interpretive ground.

The novel's closing letter to Augustus, Jr. finishes the novel with yet another recital of Emma's moral: she has "unfolded the errors" of her past life, "laid bare" the contents of her mind, and through these "experiments," she hopes to have benefited her son (220). But this final letter concludes with sentiments that could more appropriately be attributed to the Hays of the preface, rather than to the fictional Emma. For here Hays speculates about her place in posterity in remarks addressed to Augustus, Jr., who represents the novel's future

audience. Hyperbolically implying that “moral martyrdom” will be the “fate” of those bold enough to question the prejudices and ideologies of a society in dire need of reformation, Hays recapitulates the language of the preface to depict the moral value of her novel:

Posterity will plant the olive and the laurel, and consecrate their mingled branches to the memory of such, who, daring to trace, to their springs, errors the most hoary, and prejudices the most venerated, emancipate the human mind from the trammels of superstition, and teach it, *that its true dignity and virtue, consist in being free.* (221; Hays’s emphasis)

Hays’s sentiments here elaborate the preface’s emphasis on the use-value of the *Memoirs*. As she does in the preface, she highlights the novel’s methodology of ‘tracing’; however, distinguishing the closing letter from the preface is a modulated depiction of the ‘traced’ object. For whereas the preface depicts the *Memoirs* as concerned with “tracing the consequences of one strong, indulged, passion, or prejudice . . . [to] calculate the powers of the human mind, and learn the springs which set it in motion” (35), the closing letter broadens this scope considerably to gesture towards what is more a genealogy of morals than an analysis of an individual mind’s passions. Notably, the concept of warning has completely disappeared from this rehearsal of the novel’s moral. Hays lets down her guard subtly enough to abandon her prefatory pleading, to reveal the novel for its true purpose: not to condemn Emma for her inappropriate conduct, but to begin the work of constructing a new model of femininity permitting women to express their passions, to reincarnate a femininity long buried through age-old efforts of what Clarissa Pinkola-Estes has called “extincting the instinctual” (2) of feminine nature. Thus, the novel’s subversive intention is finally made explicit at its conclusion, in the form of a claim for the *Memoirs*’ contribution to a nascent reformation of gender codes. But as quickly as she reveals this incendiary motive,

Hays covers herself again with one final gesture calculated to reinforce the novel's prefatory moral. The final letter ends with Emma apostrophizing to Augustus, Jr.: "let me behold my Augustus, escaped from the tyranny of the passions, restored to reason, to the vigor of his mind, to self control, to the dignity of active, intrepid virtue" (221). Fulfilling the dictum of Hays's prefatory warning, Augustus Jr. emerges as a rehabilitated subject, having absorbed the lessons learned through Emma's erroneous behaviour. Again, as proxy, Augustus Jr. functions as a substitute for the novel's actual reader. Thus, having witnessed the "humiliating" (220) excesses of Emma's conduct, the reader also should be rehabilitated, restored to reason after such a display of unbridled passion. But Augustus Jr. also represents a future audience, which crucially mediates between the other two and keeps the interpretation of the text open. Closing the novel with a plea to the future reader, Hays ensures the novel's tendencies always remain speculative and open-ended, forever containing the potential to override the 'moral' she has been compelled to impose on the text.

The Vanished Authoress: *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain*

Given the staggering comprehensiveness of the *Memoirs*' meticulous rendering of a fictionalized Mary Hays, it is somewhat surprising that her next publication, *An Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women*, would excise all traces of Hays. Significantly, if one believes the preface's narrative, she had written the *Appeal* several years earlier, but she did not publish it until 1798 for reasons I will discuss below. The *Appeal* was published anonymously and although the evidence to support Hays's authorial identity is not incontrovertible, it is generally accepted as having been written by her.⁷⁵ Why Hays chose to

⁷⁵ Gina Luria Walker, in her 'Note on the Authorship' to a reprint of the *Appeal*, believes there is "every internal evidence" (i) to suggest that Hays is its author. Gary Kelly, however, is not entirely convinced,

publish anonymously is not known,⁷⁶ but her publisher, Joseph Johnson, was preparing to defend himself against charges of seditious libel.⁷⁷ The danger of being associated with

pointing out that, stylistically, the book does resemble sister Eliza Hays's contributions to the *Letters and Essays* (*Women* 113). According to Kelly, the book is generally attributed to Mary only because she is cited as its author in an 1825 book by William Thomson and Anna Wheeler, *Appeal of One Half of the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to Retain Them in Political and Thence in Civil and Domestic Slavery* (113).

⁷⁶ In the eighteenth century and throughout the Romantic period, anonymous publication was quite common. Robert Griffin emphasizes that, contrary to what we might surmise given the connections between the author-function and its economic imperative, the "history of publication shows unequivocally that there is no cause-and-effect relation between the ownership of literary property, or the lack of it, and the presence or absence of the name of the author" (4). Suggesting some of the reasons for anonymity, Griffin suggests "aristocratic or a gendered reticence, religious self-effacement, anxiety over public exposure, fear of prosecution, hope of an unprejudiced reception, and the desire to deceive" (7) as some of the primary factors. James Raven, in his analysis of anonymously published novels, charts the fluctuating statistics of publication: from 1750-1790, over 80 percent of novels were anonymously published; in the 1790s, 62 percent were anonymous; from 1800-1810, less than 50 percent; but in the 1820s, the number again rose to 80 percent (143). Perhaps most surprisingly, in the 1810s, of the 44 percent of novels named, the vast majority were written by women. In addition to reasons suggested by Griffin, Raven also surmises motives for anonymous authorship. For instance, new writing, the "stock-in-trade" of booksellers and circulating librarians, attracted many new writers to the trade, resulting in an influx of first-time and write-to-order writers who tended to keep themselves anonymous for lack of discursive authority (146). Raven also points to the dramatic socio-economic change in authorship occurring between 1780 and 1820, during which women writers became much more prominent. For instance, between 1788 and 1790, 33 novel title pages named women authors compared to only eight with named male writers. This imbalance suggests, according to Raven, that female authorship was being "deliberately promoted," especially given that an "unprecedented number" of other title pages were attributed to "a Lady." Borrowing "furtively" (154) from foreign originals is also cited as a reason for anonymity, as a means of distancing one's signature from what might be plagiarized material. Some writers, such as Walter Scott, chose anonymity if their "authorial persona conflicted with their daily one": Scott did sign his poetry, but did not sign *Waverley* so as not to compromise the dignity of a court officer. Also, writers might "test the waters" (8) before signing: Horace Walpole, for instance, famously signed his seminal gothic novel *Castle of Otranto* under the pseudonym William Marshall, Gent., who allegedly had translated it from a sixteenth-century original. Griffin also emphasizes the practice as an "officially tolerated form of sanctuary" (5), noting that in cases where booksellers or printers were prosecuted, anonymous authors could sometimes avoid persecution. For instance, Percy Shelley's anonymous 1812 broadsheet "The Devil's Walk," which slandered the Prince Regent, was seized by authorities, yet only Shelley's Irish servant, Daniel Healy, was imprisoned for its circulation as no clue existed as to the printer or the author (5). Furthermore, almost all reviews and magazine articles in the periodicals were anonymous, an attempt to project a sense of objectivity in their judgments. See also Genette, 37-54, who discusses anonymity and pseudonymity, noting that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, "anonymity generally had nothing to do with a fiercely protected incognito: quite often the public knew the identity of the author by word of mouth and was not in the least surprised to find no mention of the name on the title page" (43).

⁷⁷ Johnson was convicted, on 17 July 1798, of seditious libel for selling Gilbert Wakefield's *Reply to the Bishop of Llandaff*. Labeled a "malicious, seditious, and ill-disposed person" in the court's indictment, Johnson was charged on grounds that he "wickedly and seditiously did publish and cause to be published a certain scandalous and seditious libel" (qtd. in Andrews 154). He served six months in prison; after his release, he ceased his radical book-publishing and selling endeavours. For his part, Wakefield was sentenced to two years in Dorchester Gaol for writing the pamphlet. A polemical reply to the Bishop of Llandaff's pamphlet, which sought to rally support for war against the French and to raise national taxes to support the war, Wakefield's *Reply* expressed his unflagging support for the French Revolution and attacked the privileges of the wealthy. Pitt's administration "seized the opportunity Wakefield gave them to make an example of a leading polemicist, along with two leading radical publishers—J.S. Jordan (publisher of the *Rights of Man*) and the eminent Joseph

Johnson, in addition to the increasing conservative backlash against radicals, likely motivated Hays to publish anonymously. I will situate my discussion of Hays's final two texts of the 1790s—the *Appeal* and her 1799 novel *The Victim of Prejudice*—within the context of a late-eighteenth century political climate within which the feminist ideals espoused by Hays and Wollstonecraft were no longer tolerated in the public sphere. The brevity of this nascent call for women's equality has been well documented.⁷⁸ Generally, the movement begins with Wollstonecraft's seminal 1792 *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and ends with the publication of Godwin's 1798 *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, his biography of the recently deceased Wollstonecraft. A combination of public outcry over lurid details of Wollstonecraft's life, combined with mounting British resistance to revolutionary ideals, stunted the growth of the early feminist movement in its infancy. The popularity of a writer like Mary Hays, whose works were generally well received up until the decade's end, fluctuated according to the dictates of popular opinion. Just as Godwin's name fell into disgrace following the publication of *Caleb Williams*, so too did the names of other 'Jacobin' writers associated with him.

In this phase of the development of her discursive authority, Hays stands at a crossroads: the intellectual climate within which the *Memoirs* were published has proven ephemeral. One can sense the difficulty faced by Hays as she attempts to navigate the indeterminate terrain of a changing public sphere increasingly intolerant of radical ideas.

Johnson" (Butler 220). Tellingly, as an index of the restriction of liberal free expression, Johnson's conviction happened only a fortnight before the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, the *Analytical Review's* ideological enemy—and Mary Hays's most vocal detractor—published its first issue (Andrews 154).

⁷⁸ See, for instance, Jump, who notes that "by the mid-1790s . . . the excesses of the Terror led to a conservative, anti-Revolutionary backlash which affected all but the most radical thinkers . . . The small number of radical feminist texts that did appear after [Wollstonecraft's] death were either published anonymously, like Mary Hays, *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain* (1798), and Mary Ann Radcliffe, *The Female Advocate* (1799), or, as in the case of Mary Robinson's *A Letter to the Women of England* (1799), under a pseudonym ('Anne Francis Randall'). As the eighteenth century came to a close, Revolutionary feminism effectively ceased to exist" (xiv).

Hays's rhetorical subterfuge, however, allows her to navigate the minefields of what has become a dangerous historical moment. Again, through her construction of a prefatory figure designed to obscure the subversiveness of her feminist argument, Hays reincarnates the essence of Eusebia to depict a persona calculated to convey her radical message in a disarmingly understated guise. After the professionalized voice of the *Letters and Essays*' preface and the strident, if not duplicitous, voice of the *Memoirs*' preface, the return to a Eusebia-like figure at first seems out of sync with the development of Hays's prefatory personae. But as a tactic calculated to conceal the subversive force of her message, Hays's prefatory strategy provides her with an innocuous cover under which to disseminate her feminist message.⁷⁹ After the death of Wollstonecraft, Hays stood alone as a voice of radical feminism. But through the very act of continuing to publish, Hays ensures that her ideals, despite their unpopularity, continue to reach an ever-widening reading audience. As a product of the historical moment within which the *Appeal* was published, its preface is obsessed with its own belatedness. But Hays's emphasis on her own belatedness only serves to distract the reader from recognizing that the revolutionary energies that have supposedly waned by 1798 in fact continue to emanate from her pen. Anonymity thus contributes to the concealing of Hays's authorial persona, a maneuver that reveals itself simultaneously as a capitulation to the forces of ideological repression and as a redeployment of authorial energies, a complex negotiation of authorial identity learned from the *Memoirs*' overdetermined terrain.

⁷⁹ William Stafford points out that even the *Anti-Jacobin Review* agreed with much of the *Appeal*'s sentiments, even though in 1798 its tirades against Mary Hays were at their most "virulent" (18). The review stated that the *Appeal* contained nothing "'offensive to the feelings of delicacy, nor injurious to the interests of religion and morality'" (qtd. in Stafford 18), suggesting that the reviewer was fooled by the book's "modest and unassuming tone" (18), which obscured Hays's authorship.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of the *Appeal's* advertisement is how it, like Godwin's preface to *Caleb Williams's* second edition, situates the work within a repressive political context, thus creating a sense of greater urgency or relevance for the book. But Hays manages this prefatory tactic in ways that differ from Godwin's. Godwin published *Caleb Williams* under his own name, and as such the prefatory figure in that novel is clearly Godwin himself. By contrast, the *Appeal's* prefatory figure, effaced by its lack of association with an authorial name, remains shadowy and obscure. And whereas Godwin's preface tersely and directly alludes to the conditions that resulted in the original preface's suppression, Hays's preface stages the precariousness of her situation in a more circumlocutionary manner. From its first paragraph, the *Appeal's* advertisement reveals an anxiety with the timing of its publication. Hays informs the reader that the *Appeal* was written "some years ago" with the intention of "advancing and defending the pretensions of society" (1). When originally conceived, earlier in the decade, the *Appeal* would have likely been well received by the public. Hays describes the reading public at that time as "at leisure . . . to encourage the endeavours of individuals to instruct, or amuse" (1). A few short years previous, her "little work" (1) would have "come in for its share of notice." In 1798, however, she perceives a significant change in public tastes: "times and circumstances are now so different, that some apology is necessary for obtruding it on the public; after having kept it back at a moment, when it might have been better received" (2). The preface's narrative revolves around the reasons why the *Appeal* was not published earlier in the decade. Because of the appearance of two prominent works on similar subjects, both of which were published when Hays was composing the *Appeal*, she felt as though her work was rendered obsolete. The first work she cites is Alexander Jardine's 1788 *Letters from Barbary, France, Spain, Portugal, &c.*, a work she praises for "the author's opinions with regard to women" (2).

Jardine's work presents a proto-feminist argument that bears similarities to Hays's ideas. Professing his belief in the innate equality of men and women, he laments the constricts of an English society which systematically denies women the rights accorded to men. Jardine proposes the "best remedies to those evils" as "the admission of women to a better education, and to more influence in the councils of taste and learning" (310). Linking cultural evolution with gender equality, Jardine is optimistic about the "progression" (310) he has observed in Europe, and he expresses his hope that England will absorb some of these positive ideological changes. In its emphasis on female education and its insistence on the necessity of transforming cultural gender assumptions to maximize individual and social potential, Jardine's book indeed anticipates the fundamental arguments put forth by Hays. Thus, having been beaten to the press, Hays acknowledges her sense of frustration: "it could not but occur to me, that, as he had—though, but incidentally—treated the subject of it so well; those who should come immediately after him, could have little claim to notice" (3).

The second publication alluded to in the *Appeal's* preface is Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. The treatment of Wollstonecraft in the *Appeal's* preface has changed notably from her depiction in the preface to *Letters and Essays*. In the latter's preface, Hays praises Wollstonecraft at length, acknowledging her genius and significance as a cultural revolutionary. In the *Appeal's* preface, however, Wollstonecraft is portrayed as more of a competitor than an influence. Indeed, to borrow Harold Bloom's taxonomy, one could argue that the *ephebe* Mary Hays struggles to overcome her precursor's influence through creative misprision. For having outlived Wollstonecraft, Hays could sense the potential of assuming the mantle of feminist renegade, herself taking on the role of "Master" with which she imbued Wollstonecraft in the *Letters and Essays'* preface. In this context, one

could identify Hays as engaging in *clinamen*, the swerve through which the precursor is ‘corrected’; Hays manages this swerve by reinventing herself as a sort of populist author, in contrast to her characterization of Wollstonecraft as one who writes for an elite readership. As she neared completion of the *Appeal*, Hays complains that, “as if the very *demon of intelligence* were let loose, to persecute me with information, though in an obscure corner of the kingdom—the Rights of Woman was sent by a friend, for my perusal” (4). Hays recalls her reaction to the *Rights of Woman* upon receiving her copy of the book: one might expect Hays to remember the feelings of delight she experienced when reading it, yet she admits to being “mortified” (4). This sense of mortification stems from her awareness that, once again, her *Appeal* has been obviated by the appearance of a similar work:

It [Wollstonecraft’s *Rights of Woman*] was more likely than even the first, to impede the success of an attempt, which now had less claim to that novelty which endures at least temporary notice; I flung aside my little sketch in favour of women, with a degree of disdain, which, I begin to hope, it did not deserve. (4)

Hinting that “envy” (4) might have been the true motive for her reaction to Wollstonecraft’s book, Hays then chronicles the subsequent difficulties she experienced in her efforts to complete the *Appeal*. She admits to being “discouraged” and “despairing” about her ability to finish it. The reasons why Hays might have reconfigured her relation to Wollstonecraft align with her decision to publish the work anonymously. Hays was well known as a close collaborator with Wollstonecraft, so more excess praise of Wollstonecraft could divulge Hays’s identity. Hays had already published an obituary of Wollstonecraft in the September 1797 *Monthly Magazine*, and Hays’s use of her authorial name for that publication proved to be a source of anxiety as well. The original obituary is unsigned; however, in the following

month's *Monthly Magazine*, she published a brief note explaining her desire to have affixed her name to the obituary: "To the paragraph in your Magazine for September, announcing the decease of mrs [sic] Godwin, it was my desire and intention to have affixed my name, as a public testimony of respect and affection for my late admirable friend. But by some misconception, this intention appears to have been defeated" (*Memoirs* 336). Hays was clearly concerned about the implications of her authorial name at this point, as indicated by the unusual step she takes in publishing the note. The *Appeals* were published shortly after Godwin published his *Memoirs of the Author of the Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, after which public opinion of Wollstonecraft and her associates turned outright hostile due to Godwin's frank treatment of her affairs with Imlay and Fuseli and her suicide attempts. So whereas late in 1797 Hays might have still possessed the courage to publicly associate herself with Wollstonecraft, by 1798 her resolve may have diminished.

The second half of the *Appeal's* preface, however, cleverly takes off from the premise of the first half. Hays's lament for the book's belatedness reveals itself as somewhat disingenuous as one strand of her rhetorical strategy becomes clear. Ultimately, this preface seeks to distinguish the *Appeal* from Jardine's and Wollstonecraft's books through its emphasis on the *Appeal's* intended audience. Hays points out that works like Jardine's *Letters* and Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* targeted a limited, intellectually elite audience, another prototype of the "clerisy" identified by Klancher as one of the reading audiences envisioned by Coleridge as developing in the late eighteenth century:

That which raises them in the eyes of the few, either sets them beyond the reach of the multitude; or, what is infinitely worse, renders them obnoxious to its hatred and persecution. If any thing indeed can be objected to, in the works to which I have alluded, it is an error but too commonly attendant on

genius; who seldom deigns, by managing, and sympathizing with, the prejudices of mankind, to make new and unexpected truths palatable to common minds. (5)

This second part of the preface thus positions the *Appeals* as the populist extension of feminist ideals already disseminated among the intelligentsia. In the wake of Wollstonecraft's death, Hays seeks to broadcast her message to an even wider middle-class audience. Paradoxically, however, at the very moment Hays makes the attempt to reach "the generality of mankind" (5), negative public opinion against radicals has doomed her attempt in advance to failure. Nonetheless, she steadfastly argues for the need to convey her message to the masses: the "multitude" must be persuaded that "all prejudices are inimical to its happiness and interests" (5). And stressing the Godwinian principle of gradualism, she adds her intention to "recommend this gradual reformation, this gentle emancipation from error" (5). But again, just as Godwin's emphasis on gradualism becomes suspect in the context of a preface that contradicts its gradualist precepts, so too does Hays's rhetoric disfigure itself: stressing the necessity of "gentle" reform cathects stereotypically feminine attributes onto the site of ideological revolution, a tactic that reveals itself as a synecdoche of Hays's rhetorical strategy for the *Appeal* as a whole.

The *Appeal's* preface closes with a return to the question of authorship, in which Hays is provocatively coy about her identity. She claims that "the fear of appearing in a new character before them [her friends], though not a very numerous body, is one of the reasons which determine me to take shelter behind the scenes" (6). What exactly Hays means by "new character" is not exactly clear, but she likely alludes to her revamped public persona as a populist author. This change in character, however, is not as radical as she makes it out be; after all, the *Memoirs* were conceived as a novelization of her philosophical ideals for the

same reason: to disseminate her revolutionary feminist ideals to as wide an audience as possible. To this end, she describes her “ludicrous” situation, which consists of “having written a book which I wish to expose to the public; I yet have not the resolution to submit it, to the eye of friendship or affection” (5). One can discern traces of Wollstonecraft’s advice from late 1792, when Wollstonecraft chided her for begging praise from friends who in turn feel put upon to flatter her with compliments. The Hays of the *Appeal* is a shadowy presence “behind the scenes” who wishes to avoid revealing her identity and subjecting her writing to her friends’ criticism. To further obscure her identity, Hays ends the preface with comments that depict her as an amateur, or a newcomer to the literary scene, returning full-circle to the *Cursory Remarks*’ rhetorical method. “[Here] I am with my Appeal in my hand, determined to print and publish,--yet not knowing a printer or publisher in the *whole* world, to whom to apply” (6). Of course Hays is deliberately misleading here, as she was good friends with Johnson, who published the book. Hays thus predicates her strategy for connecting with a more general audience on this depiction of her character as an amateur. Shorn of her name’s Jacobin and Wollstonecraftian associations, the Hays of the *Appeal* attempts to create a persona whose naïveté about the publishing world positions her as a sort of everywoman fit to converse with the masses rather than as a representative of the literary elite.

Finally, just as the *Memoirs*’ prefatory strategy pervades the novel’s multi-layered narrative structure, so too does the *Appeal* diffuse its prefatory figure throughout its narrative levels. In addition to her shadowy prefatory identity, Hays also reverts to a Eusebia-like persona in the book’s “Introduction.” In this section, situated amidst her outline of the book’s argument, one can perceive a return of the self-conscious authorial voice that characterized Hays’s earliest authorial endeavours. To this end, she assures her readers that

I come not in the garb of an Amazon, to dispute the field right or wrong; but rather in the humble attire of a petitioner, willing to submit the cause, to him who is both judge and party. Not as a fury flinging the torch of discord and revenge amongst the daughters of Eve; but as a friend and companion bearing a little taper to lead them to the paths of truth, of virtue, and of liberty. (vi)

The docility and timidity attributed to the author in this passage further the development of her character in the advertisement. In addition to her status as a nameless amateur unknowledgeable about how to navigate the publishing world, she is also an unassuming “companion.” Contrasting her own tame identity with other more aggressive stereotypes of femininity—Amazons⁸⁰ and furies—this Hays seeks to downplay the radical potential of her feminist message. Her strategy here, in keeping with her rhetorical pattern already well established in the *Cursory Remarks*, Le22H5AKCw19'1507F-50097HUA'0K wH7gPTE9KEUwM5A051FH0D9KgnA0

irrational—a false notion perpetuated by men—is unsupported by any rational evidence; therefore, women’s subjection is irrational in itself, perpetuated only by force, violence, and the dogma of received opinion. And throughout the book, Hays argues that women are morally superior, repeats her call for improved female education, harshly critiques the tyranny of marriage, and lambastes a legal system that denies women fundamental rights. Thus the docile author-figure is a Trojan horse, allowing Hays to earn the trust of her readers while allowing her to convey an argument much more subversive than her ‘feminine’ demeanour would lead the reader to believe. This is the same rhetorical pattern established in 1792 with the *Cursory Remarks*; the difference, however, lies in the comprehensiveness of her argument. No longer confined to the sphere of religion, Hays now takes her right to philosophy as a given, systematically expounding a thorough critique of things as they are.

The Ends of Radical Feminism: *The Victim of Prejudice*

If Hays was nervous about publishing the *Appeal* under her own name, however, by 1799 she has regained the confidence to appear in public, as her next novel, *The Victim of Prejudice*, was not published anonymously. Its title-page bears not only the name Mary Hays, but also refers to her as the author of the *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*. As Hays’s final publication of the revolutionary decade, and her last radically feminist work, *Victim* ostensibly marks the end of this early epoch in the history of women’s liberation. And its prefatory advertisement, terse and direct, adds an additional layer of historical significance to the novel. A reading that takes the preface seriously as a narrative level requires the conflation of protagonist and author in ways that differ from their relationship in the *Memoirs*. In other words, the fictional ‘Mary’ of *Victim* assumes a different connotation when subsumed under the ‘Mary Hays’ of the advertisement. *Victim*’s Mary is clearly a fictional

construct, as opposed to the *Memoirs*' Emma, who is based on the author herself. The events of *Victim* are purely fictional, meant to be allegorical in the same way that Godwin's *Caleb Williams* is a fictional allegory exploring similar themes of aristocratic abuse of power. But the *Victim*'s advertisement, through its reference to Hays's post-*Memoirs* plight, recontextualizes the novel in such a way that Hays herself emerges as the victim of prejudice. Or, even more widely, any writer attempting to espouse the ideals of a revolutionary feminism by 1799 could be a victim of the prejudices outlined in the novel. Thus, ostensibly a novel denouncing a society that systematically shuns women of limited wealth or rank, depriving them of opportunity and subjecting them, without recourse, to the whims of profligate aristocrats, *Victim* also, through its advertisement, interpolates the narrative of Hays's own 'failed' struggle to disseminate her feminist message. But Hays's prefatory narrative of failure is precisely the manifestation of her rhetorical subterfuge as performed in the *Appeal*'s preface. Aligned with Mary Shelley's prefaces to Godwin's re-issued novels of the 1830s, which I discussed in Chapter One, and to Shelley's posthumous works, which I will discuss in Chapter Four, *The Victim of Prejudice*'s preface functions in a related way: they all allow for the resuscitation of supposedly extinguished or dormant revolutionary energies under the guise of (in Mary Shelley's case) toned-down characterizations of their authors or (in Mary Hays's case) presenting her books as irrelevant for having been published after-the-fact.

Upon encountering *The Victim of Prejudice*, the reader first meets the prefatory Hays, who immediately refers to the *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*'s preface:

In a former publication, I endeavoured to inculcate an important lesson, by exemplifying the errors of sensibility, or the pernicious consequences of indulged passion, even in a mind of no common worth and powers. To

avoid, as I conceived, the possibility of misconstruction, I spoke of my heroine, in the preface, not as an *example*, but as a *warning*: yet the cry of slander was raised against me; I was accused of recommending those excesses, of which I laboured to paint the disastrous effects. (1)

The “cry of slander” alluded to here by Hays encompasses a wide variety of attacks on her character. At the time of *Victim*’s publication, she was suffering the effects of rumours spread by Charles Lloyd, as already narrated above, based on his own misguided projection of Emma Courtney onto the real-life Hays. In addition to the Lloyd incident, Hays was also satirized in his 1798 novel *Edmund Oliver*, appearing as Lady Gertrude Sinclair. In that same year, Hays had also been ridiculed in Richard Polwhele’s poem “The Unsex’d Females,” in which she is called “flippant” and “cynical” (104). Shortly after the *Victim*’s publication, she was again satirized in Elizabeth Hamilton’s *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*. Even her relations with Godwin were strained after Wollstonecraft’s death as Hays’s demands for the immediate return of her letters to Wollstonecraft annoyed Godwin (Luria, *Growth* 192). Thus, the context surrounding the *Victim*’s creation and publication, although tersely expressed in the preface, frames the novel from its outset. Only through the preface, however, is this context divulged. Indeed, what Hays reveals here is the failure of her attempt to impose a moral in the preface, as the moral has been superseded by the text’s tendency. Those readers who did not obey the *Memoirs*’ preface, for whom the text’s tendency was to depict a subversive model of femininity meant to be emulated by its readers, are the target of Hays’s new attack.

Yet *Victim*’s preface would also be criticized for what readers saw as a prefatory moral out of sync with the novel’s tendency. In a review published in the *Analytical Review*

shortly after *Victim's* publication, the anonymous reviewer points out that the novel's events do not carry out the moral announced in the preface:

We have yet to object to our author, that she has not kept properly in view the object which she proposed to herself in the outset. If we have understood her rightly, this was, to exhibit the impropriety of the means used to ensure female chastity, and to expose the inconsistency of man, in expecting a virtue which he so grossly neglects himself. The connection between the moral or the story before us, and the enforcement of this doctrine, we confess we do not clearly perceive; and many of the accidents, so far from being at all illustrative of the doctrine, thus professed to be the great purpose of the story, have scarcely any connection with each other.

(249)

The "great purpose" that the reviewer sought to locate in the novel's events has been outlined by Hays in the *Victim's* advertisement. After having censured those readers who refused to heed her warnings in the *Memoirs'* advertisement, she turns to a brief summary of the *Victim's* moral. She emphasizes the theme of chastity and the hypocritical situation of men who expect chastity from women yet who hold themselves to no such sexual standard:

Less dullness or malignity should again wrest my purpose, it may be necessary to premise, that, in delineating, in the following pages, the too-great stress laid on the *reputation* for chastity in *woman*, no disrespect is intended to this most important branch of temperance, the cement, the support, and the bond, of social-virtue: it is the *means* only, which are used to ensure it, that I presume to call into question. (1)

The remainder of the preface elaborates this theme. Hays attributes the “corruption of our youth” to the societal double standard that permits men promiscuous license while denying women the same freedoms. As she does in *Letters and Essays* and her *Appeal*, Hays focuses on the cyclical, generational effects associated with a false gender consciousness. As long as men remain corrupted in this way, the pattern of female subjection will continue; society will fail to reach its full potential with one-half of its citizens enslaved. Indeed the metaphor used to end the *Victim’s* advertisement is the same used by Hays in the preface to *Letters and Essays*. “Can the streams run pure while the fountain is polluted?” (1), she asks rhetorically. In the *Letters and Essays* preface, as already noted above, she had also written of poisoned fountains to illustrate how ideology becomes naturalized through generations of its uncritical acceptance. The *Victim’s* advertisement thus purports to chronicle how the convention of chastity is one of the fundamental sources of contamination.

To an extent, the *Analytical* reviewer is correct about the *Victim’s* failure to develop its “great purpose.” The problem with Hays’s prefatory moral is its narrowness: she emphasizes only one strand of a very complex thematic nexus. But this narrowness is integral to the method of Hays’s prefatory *insinuatio*. To be sure, Mary’s downfall results, in large part, from having been raped by Sir Peter Osborne. After the rape, amidst the rumours and gossip that follow her everywhere she goes, she is shunned by society for not adhering to the code of chastity. Similarly, her mother’s ruin was predicated on her unplanned pregnancy: abandoned and alone, stigmatized by the shame of having engaged in premarital sex, the elder Mary was also outcast from society. The repetition of these similar life stories—Mary’s plight is almost identical to her mother’s—reinforces Hays’s point about the futility of women seeking escape from outmoded social customs. What really becomes clear through Hays’s prefatory moral in this case is the intensified bifurcation of her reading

audiences—the Dissenting public sphere and the general public sphere—subtly revealed through her double-voiced addressing of both spheres. Thus, Hays inserts the red herring moral about chastity to placate the general public sphere, which Hays achieves by de-emphasizing the comprehensiveness of her radical critique. The Dissenting public sphere, on the other hand, would be receptive to the allegorical implications of the *Victim*, understanding the subversive logic of Hays’s inscribing the novel within its own narrative of failure. To this end, one source of the strength generated through the *Victim*’s ‘failure’ arises from its narrative’s power to reintegrate itself back into a Dissenting consciousness that has always refused to succumb to the ideological pressures of a constrictive mainstream society.

The true “great purpose” of *Victim*, however, is thus not simply an analysis of the convention of chastity. Rather, chastity is but one symptom of a much wider social problem: the systematic subjection of women in a patriarchal society. Hays’s prefatory moral, then, ultimately serves to mollify the novel’s true tendency, which is a more wholesale condemnation of the hypocrisy endemic in the actions of those entrusted with power. The nightmarish villain Sir Peter Osborne, whose wealth and status are the source of his power, wields his dominance over nearly every character in the novel, from Mary to Mr. Raymond to the Nevilles to the various servants who carry out his plans. Osborne embodies all of the evils that contribute to the continued subjection of women. Despite his exalted rank and title, he is licentious and dissolute, undeserving of the respect demanded of his inferiors. A parodic caricature of the chivalrous aristocrat envisioned by Burke as personifying the ideals of antiquity, Osborne instead symbolizes man’s potential for abusing his power. He is the novel’s most powerful character, yet his conduct is always selfish and brutal. Given the *Victim*’s true agenda, then, which goes far beyond a simple analysis of chastity’s wrongs, one can suspect why Hays provides such a narrow moral in the advertisement. Hays well knew

she was publishing the novel in the midst of a risky intellectual climate.⁸¹ *Victim's* severe condemnation of a patriarchal British society, in which an aristocratic male character is depicted as so thoroughly evil, was bound to create controversy. Moreover, Hays had already experienced first-hand the ignominy of having been associated with the fictional Emma Hays, so she was likely aware of the potential for similar treatment after publishing a work that chronicles the plight of the protagonist, a prostitute's daughter, who also suffers sexual disgrace. Thus, Hays's emphasis on chastity disguises what is a much more wide-scale polemic against patriarchal and aristocratic corruption.

Negatively affected by this corruption are Mary, the protagonist; Mary, her disgraced mother; and Mary Hays, the author. In a *mise-en-abyme* situation similar to that enacted within the *Memoirs's* narrative, each of the three Marys' plights mirrors the others'. Just as the *Memoirs* displayed the generational repetition of wrongs, shown through young Augustus' tendency to replicate his mother's mistakes, *Victim* also reveals the generational consequences of women's subjection. But whereas Emma's novel is meant to correct the behaviour of her son before it is too late, *Victim's* Mary has no such warning: even despite having learned of her mother's troubled life, she is still unable to prevent her own downfall. The story of Mary's mother is embedded within Mary's first person narrative, delivered to the reader in epistolary form. The protagonist Mary's narrative forms the bulk of the novel. And Mary Hays's brief narrative forms the preface. The interplay of these three narratives creates a multivalent narrative scheme similar to that experienced by the reader of the *Memoirs's*. The schizophrenic tendency mirrors a situation within which all characters find

⁸¹ The language of the Treasonable Practices Bill of 1795 was broad enough to include any publication that included "any words or sentences to excite or stir up the people to hatred or contempt of the person of his Majesty, his heirs or successors, or the government and constitution of this realm" (qtd. in A. Booth 114). Thus, Hays's harsh criticisms of patriarchy and aristocratic privilege could conceivably be subject to persecution upon these grounds.

themselves trapped within the ‘man-forg’d manacles’ of a society that refuses to recognize the rights of women. Mary is literally trapped after being tricked by Sir Peter upon her arrival in London and led to a house from which she is unable to escape. She is also imprisoned in a jail. But for Mary the protagonist, physical confinement is preferable to the ideological imprisonment which dictates her fate: “I demand the prison you threaten: I will owe no obligations to a wretch whose presence blasts my sight” (149). Prison at first represents the opportunity for Mary to seek justice, to allow her to plead her cause in a court of law. However, she is soon disabused of any notions of fairness, when she realizes that Sir Peter’s wealth and status make him legally untouchable. Like Caleb, whose attempts to elude Falkland are always thwarted because of the aristocrat’s limitless resources, Mary also cannot compete with Osborne. All three of the *Victim’s* heroines are trapped within a culture that denies them the opportunity to reach their true potential. Mary Hays’s situation is not as extreme as the *Victim’s* Marys, yet she too has been persecuted and ridiculed by a patriarchal society intolerant of her attempts to improve the status of women.

The *Anti-Jacobin Review* published a review of *The Victim of Prejudice* and the *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* in 1799. The sentiments of this review reflect the end-of-century public disdain for Hays’s ideas as reviewers sought to conserve the dictates of a threatened patriarchy. Hays is accused of undermining the very gender-based foundations of British society. The reviewer finds “the same indiscriminating and mischievous censure of everything society has hitherto deemed sacred, and necessary to its existence” (254). The novel is not even worth reviewing on the basis of its own merits, according to the reviewer, but the review has been published solely “to guard the female world against the mischievousness of their [Hays’s ideas] tendency” (255). As it turns out, the female world was guarded, for a time, against Hays’s tendencies. From 1799 on, she abandoned her

radical feminist stance, focusing on works of history and children's books. She did, however, retain her interest in promoting the achievements of women, publishing *Female Biography; or, Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women, of All Ages and Countries* in 1803 and *Memoirs of Queens, Illustrious and Celebrated*. But the reviewer's defensiveness belies the truth about *The Victim of Prejudice*: its prescience. For the reviewer's hostility to Hays's ideas, and his dismissive attitude towards the novel obscure what must be, at the least, the unconscious realization that once unleashed, the spirit of feminist critique spawned by thinkers such as Wollstonecraft and Hays cannot be recalled.

—THREE—

WORDSWORTH'S PREFACES, PROFESSIONAL AMBITION,
AND THE PROBLEM OF PARATEXTUAL DIALOGISM

“The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers” (222).

--Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*

“I do not know who wrote these Prefaces they are very mischievous and direct contrary to Wordsworth's own practice” (qtd. in Adams 175).

– William Blake, in in the margin of his copy of Wordsworth's *Poems*

Like Godwin and Hays, Wordsworth is a compulsive prefacer. Wordsworth's canon contains a motley assortment of paratexts—prefaces, revised prefaces, appendices to prefaces, supplementary essays, advertisements, and notes. Also like Godwin and Hays, Wordsworth describes his published works as experiments. The Advertisement to the original 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* claims that the poems are stylistic “experiments” to determine whether the language of the lower and middle classes could be used to achieve “poetic pleasure” (738). Even in the vastly expanded 1800 and 1802 Prefaces, he retains the term to highlight the avant-garde nature of the collection. It is, however, this emphasis on the avowedly experimental that troubled Charles Lamb, who in an 1801 letter to Wordsworth expresses his discomfort with Wordsworth's decision to include the Preface as part of the *Lyrical Ballads*' second edition. After noting that he “wished that the critical preface had

appeared in a separate treatise,” Lamb goes on to explain precisely why he feels the Preface’s inclusion harms the collection:

All its dogmas are true and just and most of them new, *as* criticism.—But they associate a *diminishing* idea with the Poems which follow, as having been written for Experiments on the public taste, more than having sprung (as they must have done) from living and daily circumstances. (266-67)

Lamb’s criticism identifies a crucial friction inherent in the organization and structure of the 1800 and 1802 *Lyrical Ballads*: the tension between the poems and the frequent intrusions of the paratextual “authorial” voice that appears in the interstices of the text. For Lamb, the Preface is problematic because its excessive theorizing reduces the poems to mere experiments written simply for the sake of testing out the theory. What constitutes the essence of the poems for Lamb—the biographical, experiential and mimetic representations—is obscured by the Preface’s polemical articulation of a theory of poetic language that undermines the apparent spontaneity and vibrant nature of the poetry. To be sure, Lamb was not the only one who found the Preface problematic. As Coleridge would later claim in his *Biographia Literaria*, the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* was the “true origin of the unexampled opposition which Mr. Wordsworth’s writings have been since doomed to encounter” (42). Many of the early critical attacks against Wordsworth were predicated on statements made in the Preface, taking offence to a “system” that “threaten[ed] the structures of authority which define both literature and society” (Hess 471).⁸²

⁸² Philippe LeJeune’s remark, quoted in Chapter One, is worth revisiting in the context of the *Lyrical Ballads*’ prefaces: he states that the preface is the “fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one’s whole reading of the text” (qtd. in Genette 2). Allowing a preface to dictate one’s reading of a text is dubious, especially in the case of the *Lyrical Ballads*, in which the original advertisement developed into two different versions of the preface, which was written after most of the poems were composed. However, nearly all of the collection’s contemporary reviews contextualize their analyses within the preface’s framework. For instance, of the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*’ contemporary reviews, the *Critical Review*, the *Monthly Mirror*, the *Analytical Review*, the *New Annual Register*, the *New London Review*, the *Monthly Review*, the *British Critic*, the *Naval Chronicle*, and the

But Wordsworth's "experiment" reveals itself as indeterminate, a corollary of the process through which the Advertisement to the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* develops into the continuously expanding 1800 and 1802 Prefaces. The 1798 Advertisement—and, to a lesser extent, the 1800 Preface—performs the typical function of an elusive preface, posing a moral that emphasizes the linguistic dimension of Wordsworth's poetic experiment, while allowing the poems themselves to develop their radically democratic tendencies. But by the time of the 1802 third edition's Preface, Wordsworth's experiment is no longer focused on the linguistic. Of course traces of the original experiment remain, as Wordsworth continues to elaborate his connection between poetic language and the "common man" whom he seeks to represent in the poetry. The sociolinguistic aspect of the Preface continues to comprise an essential part of Wordsworth's project to assimilate the poet into a turn-of-the-century industrial age, a project whose success hinges on his ability to overcome the monological voice of a conventional poetic to open a dialogic space for other voices within his poetic universe. But by 1802, the experiment becomes increasingly preoccupied with Wordsworth's attempt to theorize a contemporary model of the Poet.

Thus, on the one hand, Wordsworth's Advertisement and Prefaces to the *Lyrical Ballads* are elusive in the same way as Godwin's and Hays's prefaces: they elide the more radical aspects of the volume's political dimension through a prefatory *insinuatio* that obscures the poetry's connection with post-Revolutionary ideals. In this context, Olivia Smith discerns Wordsworth's "evasions," noting the extent to which the Preface to *Lyrical*

Antijacobin Review, all frame their reviews with quotations from the advertisement, thus granting it a significant degree of interpretive influence. Similarly, of the 1800 edition's few contemporary reviews, the *British Critic*, the *American Review and Literary Journal*, and the *Edinburgh Review* incorporate the preface as a fundamental element of their review. Thus, one cannot underestimate the preface's rhetorical power as a means for influencing interpretation.

Ballads hints at but does not explicitly reveal its affinity with contemporary radical thought.⁸³

In 1800, the year of the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* and a year after Hays published her last radically feminist work, *Victim of Prejudice*, radicalism was even more out of favour than it was half a decade earlier when Godwin's *Caleb Williams* was published. So although Wordsworth's preface does promote an aesthetic radicalism that challenges elitist and class-based valuations of poetry, it also downplays its own radical tendencies by, for instance, not mentioning Horne Tooke, whose egalitarian theories of language obviously influenced Wordsworth's own.⁸⁴ In publishing a work such as *Lyrical Ballads* that confidently announces its subversive aesthetic innovation, Wordsworth and Coleridge well knew that overtly associating it with a known political radical would likely alienate readers.⁸⁵

Wordsworth, as noted in Chapter One, had abandoned much of his earlier revolutionary fervour by 1798, but many of his and Coleridge's radical tendencies were transposed into the democratically-infused poetics announced in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*.

But on the other hand, Wordsworth's advertisement and prefaces also reveal a *self-elusive* poet, in the sense that Wordsworth, throughout his anxious paratextual

⁸³ In a different vein, Jerome McGann has drawn attention to the "act of evasion" through which Romantic authors such as Wordsworth poetically "occlude and disguise" (82) their own historical involvement, seeking instead an escape into a pure idealized consciousness. As McGann observes, one of the "basic illusions" of what he calls the Romantic ideology is that "only a poet and his works can transcend a corrupting appropriation of 'the world' of politics and money" (13).

⁸⁴ Smith attributes these evasions to the "frightened temper of 1800. To write a clear argument in favour of the intellectual capability of the lower and middle classes and to criticize roundly an elitist tradition of literature might well have been considered risky and certainly would have lessened the numbers of those who were willing to listen to an aesthetic argument" (208). She glosses Tooke's linguistic theory as stating that "rustics speak a pure language because they live among and are surrounded by the origins of words, as if they were standing in a landscape of language" (215), a clear influence on the *Lyrical Ballads*' preface's emphasis on the connection between rustic characters and the purer language of their rural habitat.

⁸⁵ It could, however, be argued that the choice of the ballad form was in itself a subtly radical maneuver. The 1797 *Encyclopedia Britannica* explicitly associates the ballad with political upheaval and the lower orders, tententiously defining it as a "kind of song, adapted to the capacity of the lower class of people; who, being mightily taken with this species of poetry, are thereby not a little influenced in the conduct of their lives. Hence we find, that seditious and designing men never fail to spread ballads among the people, with a view to gain them over to their side" (qtd. in Rowland 39).

experimentation, continually seeks to craft a figure of the poet capable of performing the social functions essential to his vocation, a figure continually eluding his grasp. Like Mary Hays, the prefatory Wordsworth is also a perpetual subject-in-process characterized by a shifting range of self-figurations in the poetry and the paratexts throughout his poetic career. Wordsworth, however, is less comfortable with being in process than Hays. Indeed, whereas Hays deploys her prefatory figures pre-emptively, as a rhetorical tactic calculated to disarm the publics she addresses, Wordsworth's figures are by contrast reactionary. As he becomes aware of his failure to achieve the democratic poetic ideals the *Lyrical Ballads* were intended to set in motion, Wordsworth builds up, for compensatory reasons, his egotistically sublime myth of himself as the clerisy-bearing Poet. But the prefaces continually lag behind the poetry, trying to fit them and their frequently errant tendencies into the moral of this myth. Moreover, because Wordsworth remains uncertain of how he sees the Poet or his audience, the poems' and the prefaces' effects are more heterogeneous than the myth, making the prefaces an archive of a high romantic poet's irresolute sense of his vocation and his audience in changing times.

Section one of this chapter therefore traces the preface's development through its revised and continuously expanding 1798, 1800, and 1802 incarnations to show how this Poet-figure's processive development coincides with Wordsworth's increasingly anxious desire to construct his own self-authorizing vocational identity during the onset of industrialization and modern professionalism, as he struggles between defining the Poet in objective and subjective terms.⁸⁶ But Wordsworth's prefatory strategy of creating the

⁸⁶ I apply the terms "subjective" and "objective" as defined by Robert Browning in his "Essay on Shelley" as they are also relevant in the context of Wordsworth's ongoing attempt to formulate the poet's social role. For Browning, the objective poet is "one whose endeavor has been to reproduce things external . . . with an immediate reference, in every case, to the common eye and apprehension of his fellow men . . . It has been obtained through the poet's double faculty of seeing external objects more clearly, widely, and deeply, than is

egotistically sublime Romantic Poet threatens to sabotage the democratic poetic goals chronicled in the Advertisement and Preface, as the Poet's lofty grandeur undermines his potential to perform his function as a "man speaking to men." The 1802 Preface—with the addition of the "What is a Poet" section—signals a turning away from the characters who are supposed to be the focus of the collection, instead devoting a disproportionate amount of attention to the figure of the Poet. In section two, however, through an analysis of the internal prefaces appended to individual poems within the collection, I argue that Wordsworth's hybridization of linguistic consciousnesses within the poems, combined with the staging of a diminished Poet-figure, allows Wordsworth to realize the dialogic potential for his poetry. Finally, section three reads the 1815 Preface and its companion piece "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" as the culmination of the apotheosis partially attained in the 1802 Preface. Wordsworth becomes fixated with the Poet's place in posterity through an imaginative appeal to a select readership whose critical judgment will elevate him to the Pantheon of poetic immortality, a wish-fulfillment realized by Victorian writers such as Matthew Arnold and John Stuart Mill.

The Poet in the Prefaces: From 1798 to 1802

It is important to keep in mind that the *Lyrical Ballads* are not, as commonly claimed, a singular event from a particular historical moment (1798). Rather, like Godwin's *Political*

possible to the average mind" (1008). On the other hand, the "opposite tendency" characterizes the subjective poet: "He, gifted like the objective poet with the fuller perception of nature and man, is impelled to embody the thing he perceives, not so much with reference to the many below as to the one above him, the supreme Intelligence which apprehends all things in their absolute truth . . . Not what man sees, but what God sees—the *Ideas* of Plato, seeds of creation lying burningly on the Divine Hand. . . He is rather a seer than a fashioner" (1009). And whereas the objective poet "chooses to deal with the doings of men," the subjective poet, "whose study has been himself, appealing through himself to the absolute Divine mind, prefers to dwell upon those external scenic appearances which strike out most abundantly and uninterruptedly his inner light" (1009). The tension between Wordsworth's vision of the poet as both objective and subjective will become especially complex in light of the 1802 preface, whose rhetoric entangles itself in an attempt to work through its antithetical depictions.

Justice, the volume was substantially revised and expanded throughout the seven years of its publication history. The final 1805 edition is radically different from the original 1798 edition in a variety of ways. One significant difference between the 1798 version and the subsequent editions is the evolution of 1798's brief Advertisement to the fully formulated Preface of the 1802 edition. In the context of the *Lyrical Ballads*' publishing history, the emergence of the preface's Poet-figure is the culmination of an ongoing process. In each successive edition, Wordsworth increasingly presents a more fully developed yet increasingly contradictory depiction of his authorial persona. In keeping with the tradition of the "lyrically impersonal ballad" (Eilenberg 8), the 1798 first edition was published anonymously.⁸⁷ There was no preface to the first edition, merely a brief yet provocative Advertisement. The Advertisement presents an early formulation of the ideas that will eventually comprise the Preface, but it differs in several important ways. The first and most obvious difference is the title. If the preface is a difficult-to-define generic entity, the advertisement is just as slippery. The OED provides a general definition of the advertisement: "A (written) statement calling attention to anything; a notification, a 'notice.'" Advertisements were common enough front matter in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, and although the term did not carry its modern connotations, one could argue that it does in fact function as an advertisement in the commercial sense.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Explaining his reasons for the 1798 edition's anonymity in a letter to publisher Joseph Cottle, Coleridge writes, "Wordsworth's name is nothing, [and] to a large number of persons, mine *stinks*" (*Letters* I: 412). In this sense, anonymity is also a form of elusiveness. Coleridge was associated with Jacobinism; thus, had the first edition been signed by him, readers would be more inclined to perceive its contents as politically radical.

⁸⁸ Douglas Berman suggests that because the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* were published as a money-making enterprise to finance a proposed trip to Germany, the advertisement could be read as an attempt to convince readers of their originality in an effort to increase sales (32). As early as 1794, as indicated in a letter to his friend William Mathews, Wordsworth conceived of publication as a purely commercial endeavour. In the wake of bad reviews of *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*, he claims that he has a new poem ready for the press but "certainly should not publish it unless I hoped to derive from it some pecuniary recompense" (*EY* 120). And in response to Southey's negative review of the 1798 ballads, Wordsworth admits in a letter to Cottle that "I

Because the *Lyrical Ballads* were not especially novel, the advertisement could have been written as an attempt to persuade the reader that the poems were sufficiently unique to warrant the purchase.⁸⁹

In keeping with the anonymity of the first edition, very little is revealed about the author's identity. Unlike the later preface, the advertisement is written in a detached third-person voice that refers cryptically to "the author." The anonymous author (it is not known whether the advertisement was written by Wordsworth, or Coleridge, or both) expounds a miniature version of the later preface's argument, one primarily concerned with a socio-linguistic aesthetic theory of poetic language combined with a polemical attack on the "gaudiness and inane phraseology" (65) of modern writers. The most crucial difference between advertisement and preface is the modification of the advertisement's specific emphasis on social class: the Preface claims that "they [the poems] were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure" (738). Although the reference to the "middle and lower classes" is altered in the preface, replaced by "the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation," Francis Jeffrey still quotes the phrase from the then-obsolete Advertisement in his famous 1802 attack on the "Lake School of Poetry."⁹⁰ Otherwise, the text of the 1798 advertisement is absorbed into the preface with very little revision.

published those poems for money and money alone. He knew that money was of importance to me. If he could not conscientiously have spoken differently of the volume, in common delicacy he ought to have declined the task of reviewing it" (*WL* I 267-68).

⁸⁹ As Robert Mayo points out, the content and form of the *Lyrical Ballads* were not original. His survey of contemporary magazine verse shows that not only the ballad form, but much of Wordsworth's subject matter was commonplace: "Except for the language and the style of a few poems, supported by the theory of diction advanced in the preface, and a few limited experiments with meter, the *manner* of the volume cannot be regarded as extraordinary (disregarding, of course, all considerations of merit)" (506).

⁹⁰ Jeffrey (mis)quotes this passage in his unsigned 1802 review of Southey's *Thalaba* from the *Edinburgh Review* to condemn Wordsworth's poor stylistic judgment, emphasizing that the language of the lower classes is "unfit

But if the incipient 1798 Advertisement's pithy and confident assertion of the volume's socio-poetic goals reflects the focused ambitions of the idealistic neophytes Wordsworth and Coleridge, the fully-formulated 1802 preface, by contrast, reveals an ambivalent Wordsworth at pains to articulate his vision of the Poet. For the 1802 Preface—particularly the lengthy 'What is a Poet' section that distinguishes it from its 1800 predecessor—archives the myriad paradoxes arising from Wordsworth's attempt to define and contextualize the Poet. As Wordsworth seeks to define the poet's social role and to consolidate the mythology of the High Romantic poet that constitutes the preface's moral, he unwittingly exposes increasingly wide fissures between his antithetical depictions of the poet. The rhetorical entanglements that so frequently plague the 1802 Preface reveal themselves as symptoms of Wordsworth's involvement in the precarious work of defining his vocational role in a turbulent phase of early capitalism. The prefaces preserve the contradictions inherent in the poet's struggle for professional autonomy, capturing a historical moment during which Romantic authorship defines itself in irresolvably conflicting terms. Broadly speaking, the three primary strands of the poet's character that intertwine uneasily throughout the 1802 preface are the poet as post-revolutionary common man, the poet as inspired *Vates*, and the poet as middle-class professional.

In a material sense, the various strands of Wordsworth's 1802 poet-figure arise from the *Lyrical Ballads*' anxious engagement with early-nineteenth century print culture in its nascent industrialized form. In his analysis of the literary mode of production (LMP), one of his six categories of materialist criticism, Terry Eagleton states that the literary text "bears the imprint of its historical mode of production" ("Categories" 47). The literary mode of production is comprised of the structures of production, distribution, exchange and

for poetry" (*WCH* 156). He likely chose to quote from the preface because the direct reference to social class provided greater fodder for his condemnation than the revised and more general reference to "real men."

consumption that regulate its existence. A single text, however, is not necessarily the product of a single mode: emerging literary modes can coexist with older ones. To illustrate, Eagleton uses the example of the coexistence of “artisanal” literary production—the distribution of poetry on street-corners—with the capitalist mode of literary production. One of the primary tensions of the preface concerns Wordsworth’s attempt to negotiate such an antithetical coexistence of past and future methods of poetic dissemination.

To this end, the Preface chronicles the poet’s struggle to come to terms with the emerging capitalist literary mode in an age of industrialization and urban expansion. The most obvious instance occurs in Wordsworth’s tirade against mass culture, in which he laments a general “blunt[ing] of the discriminating powers of the mind,” degraded through the consumption of inferior, mass-produced popular literature (73). Wordsworth’s consternation at the sheer volume of literature available to the masses is underscored by his use of descriptors denoting excess: “deluges” of extravagant and idle verse stories, the “magnitude of the general evil,” a “multitude” of causes combining to blunt the mind (73). For Wordsworth, the emerging mode of literary mass production causes a flood of inferior literature that overwhelms his “feeble effort” of aesthetic amelioration. Harking back to an idealized, pre-capitalistic ‘bardic’ mode of literary production, Wordsworth depicts himself as one removed from the din of contemporary mass consumption. Indeed, the ballad and pastoral forms replicate this idea of oral authority, as Wordsworth imaginatively depicts himself in the poems as a sort of wandering balladeer, engaged in the wish-fulfilling act of conversing with and narrating tales to the public in a forum unmediated by the economic machinery of modern literary production. Thus, despite the preface’s attempt to elude its material substratum through a depiction of the poet as transcending the base world of

commodified art and mass production, one can perceive the imprint of the volume's mode of production on the poet-figure.

What is a Poet in 1802?

The various 'Wordsworths' who emerge in the 1802 Preface reflect Wordsworth's continued anxiety about his ability to achieve the poetic goals set out in the 1800 preface. By 1802, Wordsworth's egalitarian inclinations were slowly becoming obscured by his fixation with his poetic persona and how that persona could be integrated into a society whose rapid changes he intuited, but could not fully comprehend. Thus, whereas the 1800 preface elaborates a primarily mimetic poetic theory, the 1802 preface presents, in W. J. B. Owen's words, "a poetic almost entirely expressive" (*Wordsworth as Critic* 43), as the figure of the Poet comes to dominate the ground previously occupied by the peasants and rustics foregrounded in the former.⁹¹ The addition of 1802's lengthy "What is a Poet" passage appears on the surface to create an idealized portrait of a quintessentially High Romantic poet-figure whose superior attributes equip him for the all-important Wordsworthian task of "speaking to men." But the passage is fraught with contradictions. Criticizing the passage on the basis of its incongruity with the rest of the preface and the rest of the volume, Coleridge states that

on the dignity and nature of the office and character of a poet, that is very grand, and a sort of Verulamian power and majesty—but it is, in parts, (and this is the fault, *me judice* [in my opinion], of all the latter half of that preface)

⁹¹ This process, however, can be traced back as early as the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*, in which Wordsworth's meticulous attention to detail in preparing the contents of the 1800 edition reflects a desire to establish himself as a 'professional' poet. The rhetoric of the second edition is characterized by Kurt Heinzelman as "increasingly inflected with terms of commerce and business, accumulation and exchange" (202) and Stephen Gill points out that the second edition was, first and foremost, a "commercial product to be marketed" (*Life* 185), a reality that belies the later 1802 preface's lofty depiction of the poet-figure who appears to transcend the base materiality of publishing for money.

obscure beyond any necessity—and the extreme elaboration and almost constrainedness of the diction contrasted (to my feelings) somewhat harshly with the general style of the poems. (*Letters* 387)

Although pleased with Wordsworth's description of the poet's grandeur, Coleridge is perplexed by the passage's style. But Coleridge's operative adjective, "obscure," describes more than the reader's difficulty in deciphering the hyperbolic flight of fancy that characterizes the prose in these nine paragraphs. On another level, this passage obscures, through its very elaborateness and loftiness, its more mundane and practical function: to make the case for the professional autonomy of the poet. The extravagance of the prose and the grandiloquent description of the poet belies the passage's material subtext, Wordsworth's contribution to what Clifford Siskin calls the "myth of vocation" (107). To trace the evolution of Wordsworth's prefatory Poet-figure from 1798 through to 1815 is to locate the primary origin of the Poet-as-prophetic-genius so inextricably associated with Romanticism, along with the figure of the Victorian Sage who would also materialize from this Wordsworthian mold. But in the context of Wordsworth's struggle for professional autonomy, all of these texts are entangled in what Terry Eagleton has called the "notable historical irony" of the Romantic poet's self-creation. For Eagleton pinpoints the conceptual emergence of the Romantic poet-genius and the autonomous work of art as concomitant with the author's awareness of having been "debased to a petty commodity producer" (*Ideology* 64-55) in the era of early capitalism. Thus, seeking "spiritual compensation" (65) for this degradation, the author mythologizes himself to overcome his self-awareness of his mundane social function.

The "What is a Poet?" passage begins with a fairly straightforward series of four questions, which appear to set the parameters of the discussion of the poet: "what is meant

by the word Poet? What is a Poet? To whom does he address himself? And what language is to be expected from him?" (77). The initial, deceptively simple response is that the poet is a "man speaking to men." At first glance, this claim would appear to be in keeping with the egalitarian spirit of the preface, a democratic pronouncement of the poet as everyman. But Wordsworth's preface is, as Thomas Pfau notes, "troubled by the conflict between his democratic convictions and his professional ambition" (751).⁹² This conflict reveals itself in an entangled relationship between poet and common man: immediately after making the claim, after having posited the initial clause, Wordsworth unleashes a series of qualifications making it clear that it is the poet's radical otherness, his *difference from* other men that really earns him the right to the title of Poet. In an almost tautological series of provisos, Wordsworth lists these differences in a paragraph exhibiting the "extreme elaboration" alluded to by Coleridge:

A man, it is true, endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them. (751)

⁹² Pfau's reading of the *Lyrical Ballads*' prefaces stresses a similar elusive or what he calls a "masking" function: the preface "performs the ideation of a sweeping cultural theory while masking the utility, the situational specificity or 'pragmatics,' that inform his practice as a theorist" (239). To this end, Pfau isolates Wordsworth's continued emphasis on the importance of rural or rustic characters and values, highlighting the extent to which Wordsworth's idea of the rural is always inscribed within the parameters of an antithetical middle-class consciousness: "Wordsworth argues that the 'rural' is to be excavated from the entanglements that, in the view of the Preface, characterize the constitutively alienated middle-class urban consciousness whose economic and social ambition Wordsworth time and again manages to enlist for what he presents as a journey of affective self-recovery" (249). In this sense, my argument is aligned with Pfau's, especially with his identification of the tension between Wordsworth's democratic and professional ambitions.

This initial barrage of epithets rouses the reader to appreciate the poet as *vates*, an inspired and visionary being whose creative powers result from his uncommon energy and innate capacity for taking pleasure in the external world. The unruly sentence contains within itself a trajectory from the earthly to the universal, in which the first clause describes the poet's human qualities, the second his spiritual attunement, and the third his god-like participation in the affairs of the universe. By the end of this apotheosis, the poet has acquired creative powers that permit him to go beyond the limitations of what has already been created in order to create what he cannot find in the phenomenal world.

Wordsworth's characterization of the poet has shifted to the opposite pole of Browning's distinction between the objective and subjective poet. The language used by Wordsworth is the same as that used by Browning when he defines the subjective poet: Browning's subjective poet is likewise "impelled" to create what he sees, but what he sees is not simply the goings-on of men, but rather "what God sees—the *Ideas* of Plato" (1244). But for Wordsworth, whether or not the poet is in control of these gifts remains unclear. On the one hand, the poet is, in the words of *The Prelude*, "a favor'd Being, [who] from his earliest dawn / Of infancy" (1: 364-65) has been blessed with this special visionary power. In addition to having been "endued" or invested with these abilities, the poet is also "habitually impelled" to create, suggesting that in some sense he is blindly driven by a natural force. On the other hand, the poet is "pleased with his own . . . volitions" (78), which implies that he does possess the freedom to create at will. Shelley, in his "Defence of Poetry," agrees with the former, when he claims that "poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted to the determination of the will. A man cannot say, 'I will compose poetry'" (*SPP* 531). James Chandler points out that Wordsworth "contrived" to endow himself with "a kind of poetic

authority that would transcend the conscious intention of the rational will” (259), an integral element of Wordsworth’s efforts to assert the quasi-divine nature of his poetic abilities.

The paragraph goes on to provide yet another series of differences that continues to increase the distance between poet and common man. But embedded in the next paragraph is a partial answer to the question “what language is to be expected from him?” After having made the case for the poet’s superiority, Wordsworth makes an unexpected turn by informing the reader that the poet’s language must necessarily “fall far short of that which is uttered by men in real life” (751). This moment of bathos stands in stark contrast to its lofty antecedent, and emphasizes one of the preface’s central paradoxes: the aporia of Wordsworth’s attempt to combine the qualities of the ‘real man’ with those of the poet. As I will demonstrate in the next section of this chapter, Wordsworth more successfully works through the poet/common man antithesis in the poetry itself. But in the Preface, rather than achieving a synthesis of the two character types, Wordsworth instead backs himself into a theoretical corner. An inability or refusal to abandon the linguistic ideal of the “real language of men” left intact from the 1800 preface creates this dilemma. The incompatibility of the remainders from the earlier preface with the additions to the revised preface blur into a negative dialectic within which the figure of the poet—and the figure of the ‘real man,’ for that matter—dissolves into an indistinct concept. Further unraveling the figure of the poet, Wordsworth goes on to suggest that “his situation is altogether slavish and mechanical, compared with the freedom and power of real and substantial action and suffering” (751). Partly a meditation on language’s feeble inability to express “thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears,” partly an attempt to reconcile the new description of the poet with the old linguistic theory, this notion of the poet’s work as slavish and mechanistic diverges from his otherwise organic conception of the poet as Nature’s chosen son. Implicit in the claim that

the poet merely “describes and imitates passions” (751) is Plato’s critique of the poet from his *Republic*. To compensate for the poet’s inability to express real action and suffering, Wordsworth offers a modified version of Plato’s *Ion*, in which the boundaries of the poet’s ego dissolve until he “let[s] himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound[s] and identif[ies] his own feelings with theirs” (751). After having returned from this altered state of consciousness, the poet merely engages in “selection,” which ensures that everything “painful or disgusting” has been removed from the utterance. Moreover, there will be no need to “trick out or to elevate nature,” and “no words, which his fancy or imagination can suggest, will be to be compared with those which are the emanations of reality and truth” (751). In the space of two paragraphs, the poet has been demoted from one capable of creating the “goings-on of the universe” to one who must divorce his faculty of imagination from the creative process to avoid contaminating the truth.

The Poet in an Age of Science

These three paragraphs encapsulate the difficulty Wordsworth faces in constructing his figure of the poet: Wordsworth’s poet is a problematic composite of mythical visionary and post-revolutionary common man. But Wordsworth faces the additional task of subsuming his concept of the poet within a nascent socio-economic model of professionalization.⁹³ Thus, Wordsworth compares the poet with other intellectual

⁹³ The early years of the nineteenth century were also the early years of modern professionalization, a period in the midst of Britain’s ‘great transformation’ into industrial capitalism when a new market-centered economy required a new division of labour and ever-increasing specialized knowledge. Although the professions as we now know them are a “Victorian creation” (Reader 2) to serve the needs of an industrial society, their origins can be traced from the eighteenth century through the Romantic period. Whereas in the eighteenth century the term ‘job’ had “overtones of corrupt patronage and dishonorable conduct” (Reader 5) and were reserved for second sons or down-and-out gentlemen, by the Victorian period the burgeoning middle class had established a hierarchy of autonomous professions with varying degrees of status. Defined by sociologist Magali Larson as “occupations with special power and prestige,” professions are granted such rewards because they possess

professions in an attempt to validate the professional category of poet. Asserting the Poet's superiority over the Biographer, the Historian, the Chemist, the Mathematician and the Anatomist, Wordsworth argues that the Poet's superior powers of observation endow him with the ability not only to derive pleasure from his own knowledge, but to gain additional pleasure from the act of observing other men engaged in the act of pleasurable contemplation (752). Michael Mason illuminates the relation between this passage and Wordsworth's use of a narrator in most of the *Lyrical Ballads*, noting the "striking second tier of reference" (75) involved in the poet's depiction of an individual who is pondering the "infinite complexity of pain and pleasure." The poet's representation of this act of contemplation creates a continuum of "acting and reacting" through which the poet expresses his own feelings at having observed the individual in the act of meditation. A *mise en abyme* effect is created, through which the poet emerges as possessing superior faculties of observation, which are elsewhere in the Preface described as a "more comprehensive soul." Hence the poet's difference from other men is reformulated in new terms: whereas other men are stimulated to acquire knowledge through its association with pleasure, only the poet can portray the inner workings of this elemental pleasure principle in action.

But the remainder of the "What is a Poet?" section tellingly archives Wordsworth's effort to align the poet with the "Man of Science," evincing the primary anxiety of the preface's engagement with modernity. In an age of science, Wordsworth must posit the poet's relevance in relation to the developments of scientific inquiry to show that poetry has not been superseded by the truth claims of science. Wordsworth directly responds to this challenge, although his description of the dialectic between poetry and science relies heavily on a recursive series of figures that expose the complexities of reconciling the two modes of

esoteric knowledge essential to social needs and also because they are perceived to be motivated by altruistic, rather than material, incentives (x).

knowledge. To return to Coleridge's critique of the passage, the digression on the poet and the man of science are likely what Coleridge had in mind when describing the revisions as "obscure" and characterized by "extreme elaboration." Wordsworth, as noted by W. K. Thomas and Warren Ober, had a peculiarly split opinion on the value of science. In 1829 Wordsworth was confronted by his friend William Hamilton, a mathematician and astronomer, about negative comments on science made in the *Excursion*. Wordsworth's reply distinguished between two kinds of science: the one was concerned with "a bare collection of facts for their own sake, or to be applied merely to the material uses of life" versus a science whose purpose is "elevating the mind to God," which he "venerated" (qtd. In Thomas and Ober 4-5). His opinions on science and the Man of Science in the preface and poems of the *Lyrical Ballads*, however, suggest that in 1802 Wordsworth's attitude to science corresponded to the former. In "The Tables Turned," he complains that "Our meddling intellect / Misshapes the beauteous forms of things; / We murder to dissect," before exclaiming "enough of science" (*LB* 26-29). And "A Poet's Epitaph" parodies the scientist on the basis of his cold, unfeeling rationality: "Physician art thou? One, all eyes, / Philosopher! a fingering slave, / One that would peep and botanize / Upon his mother's grave?" (17-20).

The depiction of the Man of Science in the preface is less antagonistic than in "The Tables Turned" and in "A Poet's Epitaph," yet the scientist is still characterized by his flaws and compared unfavourably with the poet. Wordsworth reinforces the stereotype of the scientist as a self-absorbed Victor Frankenstein-type recluse, claiming that the "Man of Science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude; the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion" (752). Personifying the

concept of 'truth' despite his disapproval of personification elsewhere in the preface, Wordsworth portrays the poet as a joyous participant in the community of humanity in contrast to the solitary scientist. And to bolster his argument, he deploys an onslaught of allusions to lend credence to an argument which has proven somewhat abstract for its intended effect: the poet "looks before and after" (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*); he is the "rock of defence of human nature" (Psalms 31:2); he is an "upholder and preserver" (Psalms 145:14, 20); he is the "first and last of all knowledge" (Revelation 1:11).⁹⁴ I suggest that Wordsworth resorts to these venerable allusions because he cannot fully articulate the extent to which science has usurped the function of the inspired prophet in revealing 'truth.' In what amounts to a fallacious close encounter with *argumentum ad verecundiam* (appeal to authority), Wordsworth appropriates this biblical and Shakespearean phraseology to raise the poet's stature. But the intent of the allusions is clear: Wordsworth wants to characterize the poet as indispensable, as having always been the most essential member of society; or, in Mark Schoenfield's words, society has always been "dependent for stability" on the work of the poet.⁹⁵ But overall, Wordsworth is participating in the division of professional labour that came to characterize the post-Romantic public sphere, while also claiming to have conquered this division: he seeks to divide taxonomically in order to conquer professionally.

Ultimately, after having reached this rhetorical impasse, Wordsworth concludes his digression by diminishing the scientist's contemporary significance and looking to the future to emphasize the relation between poet and scientist:

⁹⁴ Michael Mason notes these allusions in his "General Introduction" to the 1805 *Lyrical Ballads* (77).

⁹⁵ As Schoenfield observes, "professions aim to represent to a society its own structure as acceptable, even desirable, and as dependent for stability on the profession that puts forward the representation" (70). To this end, one of the primary aims of Wordsworth's 1802 preface is to make the claim for the poet's necessity in an age when, to use an acerbic expression of Peacock's, the poet could be considered a "semi-barbarian in a civilized community" (693). Although written two decades later than the *Lyrical Ballads*, Peacock's utilitarian critique of poetry's role in society accurately describes the cultural climate into which the fledgling poet Wordsworth emerged: hence Wordsworth's elaborate attempt to assert the poet's relevance.

If the labours of Men of Science should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the Poet will sleep then no more than at present, but he will be ready to follow the Man of Science, not only in those general indirect effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the Science itself. The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, if the time should ever come when these shall be familiar to us, and the relations under which they are contemplated by the followers of these respective Sciences shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings. If the time should ever come when what is now called Science, thus familiarized to men, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the Poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration, and will welcome the being thus produced, as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man. (753)

Margaret Barnes calls this passage a "prophecy not yet fulfilled" (15). But it is not so much a prophecy as an account of the emerging dominance of science and the figure of the scientist, which Wordsworth attempts to downplay through his use of the conditional mode. The anaphoric repetition of "if . . . should ever" and "if the time should ever come" suggests that science is in its infancy, and could possibly, but not necessarily or even likely, become the dominant epistemological mode. The apparent nonchalance of this portrayal of science belies the obvious struggle faced by Wordsworth as he contemplates the impact of science on the truth-value of poetry. Moreover, science is portrayed as an upstart mode of knowledge, in contrast to poetry, which is described in terms of permanence and

universality. Without the conditional ‘ifs,’ the passage would read as an accurate appraisal of the “material revolution” (*LB* 753) that was occurring as Wordsworth wrote the preface. But Wordsworth’s rhetoric, replete with modal verbs, defers the age of science to a vague future when poets will, if necessary, equip themselves to the task of writing about scientific discovery. His critique suggests that poetry’s effects, being more powerfully spiritual as a complement to science, will in fact be more palpably felt, and thus, ironically, more material than those of science. And by projecting poetry’s power as a desire to be fulfilled, he also creates the conditions of a kind of interminable ideological battle that poetry can always *potentially* win. Therefore, poetry is always in the position of holding its power in reserve against a future victory, never losing the battle because the battle has not yet been waged, the battle and the poet’s powers forever immanent.

The Poet in the Poems: Internal Prefacing and Dialogism

If the various strands of the poet detailed in the prefaces portray a figure whose indeterminacy is, to a significant extent, historically determined, the poems further complicate Wordsworth’s attempt to articulate a unified vision of the poet. Another result of Wordsworth’s strategy of compensating for his reception anxiety with increasingly elaborate paratexts is the extension of the prefatory work of defining the poet into the poems themselves. Several poems in the volume are singled out either through having been mentioned in the Advertisement or the Preface, or through paratexts of their own. The extradiegetic prefaces to the *Lyrical Ballads* therefore co-exist in relation to various other paratexts: in several cases, the prefatory activity is internalized in the poetry itself. Thus, just as Mary Hays’s *Memoirs* incorporates instances of what one could call internal prefacing, in which intradiegetic characters perform a prefatory function, so too does the *Lyrical Ballads*

incorporate intradiegetic prefaces and notes to individual poems. In this section I will demonstrate how the internally-prefaced poems—the “Poems on the Naming of Places,” “The Thorn,” and “The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman”—exacerbate a tension between Wordsworth’s egotistically sublime moral and the antithetical tendencies of the poems, as the internal prefaces thematize and stage the persona of the Poet that Wordsworth constructs in the extradiegetic Preface.

The effect of the preface-poem relationship in the *Lyrical Ballads* corresponds with elements of dialogism as defined by Mikhail Bakhtin, which I will interpolate throughout my analysis of the poetry. Specifically, the dynamics among the controlling prefatory voice, the internal prefaces, the narrators, and the characters within the poems result in a situation paralleling that articulated by Bakhtin, when he writes of a novelistic dialogism characterized by “never-ending, internally unresolved dialogues among characters” whose discourse remains “free and open” because it is “never entirely subsumed” by the voice of the narrator (349). Furthermore, Bakhtin applies the term hybridization to refer to a mixture of two social languages or “linguistic consciousnesses” (358) conflated within a single concrete utterance.⁹⁶ The concept of hybridization is especially relevant within the *Lyrical Ballads*’ sociolinguistic context: indeed, one of Wordsworth’s primary poetic goals is the creation of a truly dialogic form of poetry, a hybrid of the colloquial “real language of men” as filtered through the poet’s consciousness. Wordsworth’s sustained critique of the “particular language” expected from poets thematically links the 1798, 1800, and 1802 prefaces, and his

⁹⁶ The *Lyrical Ballads* are not, of course, a novel; however, as Michael Eskin points out, much of Bakhtin’s terminology is contradictory in the sense that, “as Bakhtin himself admits, novels can be monologic, while poems can be just as ‘novelistic,’ that is, polyphonic or dialogic, as, say, Dostoevsky’s novels” (383). Bakhtin admits, “even in strictly poetic [utterances] . . . internally dialogic [that is, polyphonic] speech is possible” (qtd. in Eskin 383). Thus, according to Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, “Bakhtin assigns the term ‘novel’ to whatever form of expression within a given literary [and sociopolitical] system reveals the limits of that system as inadequate, imposed, or arbitrary” (226), a conception very similar to Wordsworth’s characterization of the contemporary poetry whose style he seeks to revolutionize.

efforts to posit a new theory of poetic language are grounded in a rejection of elaborate neoclassical style. Here Wordsworth anticipates the criticism of Bakhtin, who also condemns an artificial poetic with no relation to actual speech.⁹⁷

Just as the prefaces to *Caleb Williams*, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, and the *Victim of Prejudice* exist on a higher narrative level than the narrated action of the novels proper, so too does the preface to *Lyrical Ballads* introduce an extradiegetic ‘metanarrator’ under whose authority the individual poems are subsumed. A reading that questions the stratification of the poems and the poems’ narrators in relation to the overarching figure of the ‘Poet’ as depicted in the Preface significantly complicates attempts to answer the question of who is ‘speaking’ the poems. Indeed, the tension-filled dynamic between the domineering figure of the prefacing ‘Wordsworth’ and the voices of the individual narrators and characters of the poems could be phrased, in Bakhtinian terms, as the struggle between the monologic voice of the Poet and the dialogic potentiality of the characters whose autonomy hinges on their ability to distinguish their own voices from the Poet’s. As I hope to demonstrate, however, Wordsworth’s extension of the prefatory persona into the poems via the internal prefaces creates a strong sense of *bathos* that demystifies the poet’s authority, subsequently allowing

⁹⁷ For other ‘Bakhtinian’ readings of Wordsworth, see, for instance, Bialostosky, whose *Wordsworth, Dialogics, and the Practice of Criticism* posits the Bakhtinian adjective “dialogic” as a possible descriptor for the Wordsworthian canon. Bialostosky’s paradigmatic reading of “The Mad Mother” convincingly exemplifies the practical application of his approach: a dialogic analysis of the old woman’s speech versus the narrator’s representation of her character calls attention to the “discrepancy between the awkward language in which the woman accounts for herself . . . and the ideologically charged languages that define the poet’s response” to her narrative (70). Gordon Thomas and Stephen Bidlake respectively take a similar approach in their analyses of various lyrical ballads. Thomas argues that thematic unity of the *Lyrical Ballads* is constituted by Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s preoccupation with language, characterizing the volume’s theme as “dialogized heteroglossia,” defined by the two poets’ awareness that “genuine expression, valid utterance, takes place only in a dialogue and can be produced only in a condition of attentiveness to the other partner in the dialogue” (106). Similarly, using Bakhtin’s concept of the “hidden dialog,” Bidlake provides a reading that draws out the “two-voiced” aspect of a monologue, delineating the presence of other voices which are implicitly contained within the speaker’s utterances. In a somewhat different vein, Paul Magnuson uses the term “dialogic” to classify the inextricable interrelationship between Coleridge’s and Wordsworth’s poetry, a symbiotic corpus in which individual poems can productively be read in the context of other poems, fragments, and drafts.

the poems' characters to supersede the controlling persona. Thus, the internalized struggle between Poet, narrators, and characters within the poems results in an authentically dialogic form of poetry in keeping with the democratic spirit of the Preface.

“The Thorn” is one of the poems critiqued by Coleridge in chapter XVII of his *Biographia Literaria*, where he presents a sustained analysis of the *Lyrical Ballads*' aesthetic flaws. For Coleridge, Wordsworth's mixture of high and low speech is one of the “chief defects” of his poetry (Bialostosky 61). Coleridge's criticism of “The Thorn” is predicated on this distaste for juxtaposed modes of speech. The main character, depicted through his rambling and repetitive mode of discourse, is pinpointed by Coleridge as the poem's primary defect: “it is not possible to imitate truly a dull and garrulous discourser, without repeating the effects of dullness and garrulity” (36). On the other hand, Coleridge praises those parts of the poem written in the poet's own language: “the parts. . .which might as well or still better have proceeded from the poet's own imagination, and have been spoken in his own character, are those which have given, and which will continue to give universal delight” (*Biographia* 194). Coleridge's criticism directly contradicts Wordsworth's poetic intention. In composing “The Thorn,”—his version of an oft-told contemporary motif that had recently been poeticized by Gottfried Bürger, John Langhorne, Robert Merry, and Joseph Cottle (Mason 118)—Wordsworth sought to avoid Bürger's monologic tendency to create characters who are simply projections of himself.⁹⁸ Critiquing Bürger's version of the tale, Wordsworth wrote to Coleridge that “I do not perceive the presence of character in his personages. I see everywhere the character of Bürger himself. . . But yet I wish him

⁹⁸ For a more detailed analysis of Bürger's influence on Wordsworth, see Primeau, who notes the extent to which several of the lyrical ballads (such as “Idiot Boy,” “Hart-leap Well,” “Simon Lee,” and “The Thorn”) can be directly related to poems by Bürger. Moreover, Primeau points out that many of Wordsworth's ideas in the *Lyrical Ballads*' preface are a response to Bürger's contemporary popularity: for instance, Wordsworth's complaint about the “deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse” primarily refers to the immense popularity of Bürger's macabre supernatural ballads, “Lenore” and “Der wilde Jäger,” which were translated into English in the late 1790s.

sometimes at least to make me forget himself in these creations” (*EY* 234). As early as the 1798 Advertisement, Wordsworth was anxious about his poetic experiment, singling out “The Thorn” to assuage the reader that the poem “is not supposed to be spoken in the author’s own person: the character of the loquacious narrator will show itself in the course of the story” (738). For Coleridge, however, those parts phrased in Wordsworth’s ‘own’ voice save the poem from being as dull as its main character: ultimately, the Poet-figure and the character of the old seaman are so antithetical to one another that their mutual presence in the poem cannot be reconciled.

For Byron, however, the Note to “The Thorn” served as the very model of an elusive preface, as evidenced by comments he makes in his draft preface to *Don Juan*. In that preface, which was written in 1818 but not published until early in the twentieth century, Byron cites Wordsworth’s note to “The Thorn” to distance himself from the narrator of *Don Juan*. In the context of a preface that repeatedly ridicules Wordsworth for his political conservatism and the abandonment of his youthful Jacobinism, while poking fun at Wordsworth’s Note through selective misquoting, Byron nonetheless reveals, in the midst of an otherwise acerbic satire, an affinity for Wordsworth’s narrative method. For Byron requests that the reader approach the narrator to *Don Juan* with “a like exertion of imagination” (*WCH* I: 901) to the request made by Wordsworth in his Note to “The Thorn,” in which Wordsworth is careful to distinguish the “loquacious” narrator of the poem from the voice of the Poet himself. And Byron’s confusion about the Note’s placement— it appears “in a note or preface (I forget which)” (900), he admits, referring to the Note—underscores the Note’s indeterminate textual status, likely stemming from the Note’s own fixation with prefatory function, evidenced by its repeated insistence that “The Thorn” requires an “introductory poem” to sufficiently develop the narrator’s character.

Thus, “The Thorn,” with its Note serving the function of an internal preface, works through the tension between the domineering voice of the prefacing Poet and the voice of its seafaring narrator. The result of this encounter crucially determines the success of Wordsworth’s dialogic ambitions. The poem’s narrative scheme represents the praxis of the theoretical project laid out in the Preface, another stage in the experiment of constructing a contemporary poet-figure. The most contentious and revealing site of the conflict between the monologic moral of the clerisy-bearing poet and the poetry’s dialogic tendencies occurs in the bathetic conclusion to stanza three: “I’ve measured it from side to side / ‘Tis three feet long, and two feet wide” (32-33). These two lines have attracted considerable derision since their publication, often being singled out—not only by Coleridge, but by many other critics as well—as symptomatic of a shortcoming in Wordsworth’s stylistic experiment.⁹⁹ On the one hand, “The Thorn” is, as G. Kim Blank describes it, an attempt to articulate “Wordsworth’s own difficulty in comprehending the experience of suffering” (117). But in the context of Wordsworth’s “experiment,” the poem is also about—and Wordsworth reinforces this point in the 1798 advertisement all the way through the 1800-5 prefaces—how to reconcile the Poet with the type of rustic “real man” in whose discourse the poem is narrated. What Bakhtin calls hybridization is attempted, if not achieved, by Wordsworth in “The Thorn,” as the poem’s stylistic effect arises from the tension between the dualized linguistic consciousnesses whose discourse is intertwined throughout the poem. With surgical precision, Coleridge isolates the instances that comprise the “unpleasant sinkings” resulting from Wordsworth’s abrupt transition from the “height” to which he has “lifted” the reader to the banal depths of common speech: the last couplet of stanza three, the seven last lines of the tenth, and the five following stanzas are singled out for their prosaic *bathos*.

⁹⁹ Paul Sheats provides a thorough account of reactions to these lines and other examples of the “fatuity of prosodic emphasis” (93) that, according to the poem’s detractors, spoils the poem’s effect.

Indeed, those instances identified by Coleridge exhibit the narrative characteristics so frequently mentioned by Wordsworth in his Thorn-related paratexts: repetition, along with simple and often monosyllabic or bisyllabic diction, in contrast to the heightened and evocative imagery conveyed through the Poet's voice. But to return to Byron, and the legions of others who have ridiculed Wordsworth's Note to "The Thorn," Wordsworth's experiment is in fact so successful that the 'Poet' of the internal preface ends up looking somewhat foolish because of his inability to stand aside and let his narrator speak for himself. Indeed, having worked through this hybridized narrative process, Wordsworth achieves in the poem what he could not articulate in 1802's 'What is a Poet?' section. Ironically, the success of the poem's dialogism becomes especially clear in relief of the poem's excessive paratextual appendages.

Thus, the effects of bathos result not only from the "sinkings" of style distinguishing the narrator's speech from the Poet's: the depiction of the Poet-figure in the Note is also bathetic in relation to his depiction in the 'What is a Poet?' section of the 1802 Preface, where, at his peak, he is endued with god-like powers of observation and re-creation. By contrast, the Poet-figure of the Note is more akin to the model of a poet who, in the words of the preface, merely engages in a sort of linguistic "selection." Or at its worst, the Note represents the workings of a poet unable to compose the poem altogether, especially when he admits his inability to write a prefatory poem due to "never having felt myself in a mood when it was probable that I should write it well" (350). His fixation with the missing introductory poem, the necessity of reverting to a prose supplement to describe a character whose detailed description is largely irrelevant to the poem, his anxious defence of tautology, and his defence of the poem's "Lyrical and rapid Metre" all combine to portray a poet-figure quite different from the exalted voice of the preface. Thus, Wordsworth's attempt to stage

internally a poet-figure whose character extends the prefatory voice into the poetry results, paradoxically, not in a “diminished” version of the poem’s narrator, but instead diminishes the authority of the prefatory figure as he recedes into the background, allowing the seafaring narrator to take centre stage.

A similar dialogic effect results from another internally prefaced poem—or, more precisely, a series of poems—the “Poems on the Naming of Places.” The “Poems on the Naming of Places,” which made their first appearance in the 1800 edition, are, like “The Thorn,” internally prefaced in a way that extends the prefatory voice, along with the spirit of his aesthetic credo, into the space of the poem. Revealed through the advertisement to the “Poems on the Naming of Places” is an aspect of Wordsworth’s prefatory persona that corresponds generally with the poems added to the 1800 edition. Stephen Parrish has observed that the poems of 1800 constitute “a program centered on the pastoral mode” (262). This modal shift from 1798’s ballads to 1800’s pastorals coincides with the parallel construction of a paratextual Wordsworth, whose persona increasingly becomes localized, an extension of the “man speaking to men” mentioned in the preface. Distinguishing the narrator of “Naming” from the narrator of “The Thorn” is a more distinctively ‘Wordsworthian’ persona: whereas the latter is narrated in the rambling and informal discourse of its seafaring narrator, the former is clearly narrated by a ‘Wordsworthian’ figure who seeks to archive for posterity the names of local spots that, as he notes in the poems’ Advertisement, have been “given to Places by the Author and some of his friends” (241).

However, the Poet-figure depicted in the advertisement and notes to the “Poems on the Naming of Places” is, like his prefatory counterpart in the Note to “The Thorn,” diminished in relation to the narrator of the poems. Whereas the act of naming in the poems is imbued with many levels of significance—intertwining the emotional, mystical and

the sublime—the act of naming in the paratextual Advertisement and notes is, by contrast, prosaic and utilitarian. For instance, the second poem in the cycle, “To Joanna,” climaxes with a scene in which the echoes of Joanna’s laugh seem to take on a life of their own, the personified rocks and echoing mountain-peaks joining in a call-and-response cacophony of raucous noise. The speaker admits to a moment of metaphysical confusion: he is unable to tell whether the auditory hallucination is the “work” of “the brotherhood / Of ancient mountains” (69-70) or whether his “ear was touch’d / With dreams and visionary impulses” (70-71). At any rate, the speaker is at least sure that there was a “loud uproar in the hills” (72-73). The poem thus chronicles a profoundly spiritual incident during which the narrator and his companion, Joanna—who has already been introduced as a native city-dweller who “is slow to meet the sympathies of them / Who look upon the hills with tenderness” (6-7)—experience a truly sublime moment of natural grandeur. The experience so moves Joanna that she reacts with a mixture of terror and amazement typifying psychological reactions to the sublime: she “drew, as if she wished / To shelter from some object of her fear” (75-76). The poem concludes, however, with a bathetic prose Note that, to borrow Coleridge’s description of the stylistic dualism characterizing “The Thorn,” exhibits “sinking” qualities resulting from the abrupt shift from the sublime to the mundane. For the Note concerns itself exclusively with verifying the geographic details of the rocks described in the poem. The geographic features that, in the poem, had been personified and infused with such deep metaphysical significance are recounted in the Note as simply cartographic features of the Cumberland and Westmoreland landscape. Thus, paralleling the demystification of the poet in the internal prefaces is the Note’s demystification of the poem’s imagery, which at times borders on the pedantic, as when the note explains that although the rock inscriptions imaged in the poem are often “mistaken for Runic,” they are “without doubt, Roman” (242).

Moreover, the contrast between the poem's narrator—who compares himself to a “Runic Priest” (28) and whose immediate reaction to the echoes is to interpret them as “visionary impulses” (71)—and the fact-checking internal prefacer further opens the stylistic and metaphysical gap between poem and note.¹⁰⁰

Finally, “The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman” also contains a paratext of its own, in addition to being singled out in the Preface for special mention. The brief prefatory introduction to “The Complaint” explicitly locates the poem in a northern Canadian setting, and Wordsworth takes great care to provide a brief overview of the woman's situation. Wordsworth explains the native's cultural practice of leaving the sick and dying behind on a journey and attributes the source material to Hearne, whose “interesting work,” *Journey from Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean*, he had read and admired. Concluding with a visual and auditory description of the northern lights, also inspired by Hearne, the Preface informs the reader that when they “vary their position in the air, they make a rustling and a crackling noise” (111). The final sentence notes that “this circumstance is alluded to in the first stanza of the following poem” (111). Like the Note to the “Naming” poems, the Preface to the “Complaint” also empirically verifies, and therefore demystifies, the poem's imagery. In the first stanza, the northern lights are imaged as a mysterious synaesthetic phenomenon, a hallucinatory symptom of the abandoned protagonist's tormented mental state. The protagonist “heard the northern gleams . . . In rustling conflict through the skies,

¹⁰⁰ All four of the endnotes from volume two of the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads* follow the same pattern as the “To Joanna” note. The two notes to “The Brothers” both specify geographic locales and details about local residents. Note I verifies an incident alluded to in the poem, in which lightning struck the summit of the pike, causing one of two parallel springs to stop running; Note II observes that “there is not any thing more worthy of remark in the manners of the inhabitants of these mountains, than the tranquility, I might say indifference, with which they think and talk upon the subject of death” (381-82). And the two notes to *Michael* perform a similar function. Note I corroborates the story of Richard Bateman, noting that “the story alluded to here is well known in the country” (403) and describing the chapel mentioned in the poem; Note II describes the construction and function of the sheep-fold.

/ I heard, I saw the flashes drive” (3, 5-6). The protagonist’s sensory confusion, emphasized through her inability to distinguish between the visual and aural dimensions of the lights, conveys a sense of incipient madness. But read in the context of the preface’s scientific explanation, the imagery becomes literal, a simply matter-of-fact experience of a well-documented meteorological phenomenon. The thoroughly rational preface attempts to shut down the potential for madness or supernatural speculation that the poem opens up, yet another instance of the prose attempting, yet ultimately failing, to control the tendencies of the poetry.

The rather obtuse introduction to the “Complaint” thus inserts the controlling prefatory figure into the space of the poem. Therefore, the poem itself, which is entirely written in the first-person voice of the titular Indian woman, is at risk of being subordinated to the authorial voice of the note. Stephen Bidlake, in his analysis of the Bakhtinian concept of “hidden dialog” in the “Complaint,” claims that the poem is characterized by its “complete lack of a narrative frame” and that of all Wordsworth’s 1798 ballads, this poem “omits the mediation of a narrator’s or the poet’s own voice” (190). But Bidlake overlooks the prefatory note, which is potentially even more intrusive than a narrator’s voice in the poem. In this dramatic situation, the Poet indeed risks “speak[ing] through the mouths of his characters,” especially since he has framed the poem with a preface that threatens to subsume the protagonist’s voice under his own. Indeed, there is little evidence in the poem that the protagonist actually is an authentic Indian woman, apart from her having been introduced as such in the poem’s title. However, as Mary Jacobus notes, the woman’s situation “serves to underline a recognizable humanity” (192-93) so that Wordsworth intentionally avoids specific linguistic and geographical details in order to emphasize the universality of her suffering. The complaint is a traditional poetic genre and similar

depictions of 'exotic' characters were eighteenth-century poetic commonplaces.¹⁰¹ So although this attempt at universalization contradicts the linguistic tenets found in the preface, which imply that descriptive accuracy and 'real' language comprise an ideal poem, Wordsworth does in the poem achieve a degree of hybridization similar to that accomplished in "The Thorn." For despite the intrusion of the prefatory voice, the woman's narrative cannot be subsumed by the Poet's; indeed, the poem derives its stylistic effect from this unresolvable tension between the two voices. In keeping with the principles of Wordsworth's stylistic experiment, the woman's speech is relatively plain. She does, however, occasionally indulge in what Wordsworth in the preface calls the "arbitrary and capricious habits of expression" (744) expected of a conventional poetic. For example: "Oh wind, that o'er my head art flying / The way my friends their course did bend, / I should not feel the pain of dying, / Could I with thee a message send!" (45-48). These lines combine an apostrophe to the wind with the formal diction of "art" and "thee," along with the inverted syntax of "course did bend" and "could I with thee." At this crucial moment in the poem's narrative arc, the moment at which she becomes acutely aware of her desperate forlornness, Wordsworth poeticizes her speech to heighten the dramatic effect of her dire situation. Thus, this momentary and nuanced heightening of the poem's syntax and diction subtly intensifies the sense of pathos, while adding dignity to the woman's suffering. Indeed, rather than exhibiting a "sinking" of style, these lines raise the poem's stylistic tenor in such a way that the two disparate linguistic consciousnesses harmonize to achieve a momentary equilibrium of poetic expression.

Overall, the tension between the poems' characters and the prefatory voice is a synecdoche for the aim of Wordsworth's project. For Wordsworth's ability to create a

¹⁰¹ For an account of Wordsworth's indebtedness to "magazine poetry," see Jacobus, 184-208.

dialogic situation in the poems becomes a crucial component for determining his success in resuscitating the radically democratic tendencies of the 1798 volume. As the prefaces turn away from the very characters upon whose depiction the original ballads predicated themselves, the poems steadfastly refuse to allow themselves to be diminished by the prefatory Poet-figure. Furthermore, to the extent that a further tension between the prose and the poetry reveals itself as symptomatic of Wordsworth's capitulation to the demands of a prosaic age, in the sense that the poetry requires the prose paratexts to validate the poetry, the poetry similarly resists being diminished by the prose.

The Poet in Posterity: The 1815 Preface and "Essay, Supplementary"

In 1815, Wordsworth published *Poems*, a collection comprised mainly of previously published work from the *Lyrical Ballads* and the 1807 *Poems, In Two Volumes*. Thirteen years had passed since the 1802 *Lyrical Ballads* and Wordsworth's attempts to establish himself as a professional poet had not, judging by the hostile tone of the 1815 preface, borne fruit. Written in the wake of overwhelmingly negative critical reaction to his 1814 publication *The Excursion*,¹⁰² the Preface to *Poems* and especially its "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" depicts a Wordsworth consumed with anxiety resulting from his lack of wide-scale contemporary fame. The Preface and its "Essay, Supplementary" from the 1815 *Poems* are polemical responses not only to Jeffrey's criticism specifically, but to Wordsworth's more general predicament of having failed in his decade-and-a-half-long endeavour to establish himself as England's preeminent professional poet. In a May 1814 letter to Samuel Rogers shortly before the *Excursion's* publication, Wordsworth had already expressed his contempt

¹⁰² *The Excursion*, of which 500 copies were originally printed in July of 1814, had only sold 331 copies by June of 1816, a sales figure obviously disappointing to Wordsworth (Owen, "Costs, Sales, and Profits" 96).

for Byron's and Scott's popularity in contrast to his own lack, noting that "I am about to print—(do not start!) eight thousand lines, which is but a small portion of what I shall oppress the world with, if strength and life do not fail me. I shall be content if the Publication pays its expenses, for Mr. Scott and your friend Lord B. flourishing at the rate they do, how can an honest *Poet* hope to thrive?" (MY 148). Tellingly, Wordsworth's description of himself as "honest *Poet*" implicitly suggests that Byron and Scott are not Poets in Wordsworth's sense; Byron and Scott are more likely exploiting the public's desire for "outrageous stimulation" than tapping into poetry's capacity for moral amelioration. These remarks suggest that Wordsworth's fixation with his place in posterity is not simply egotistical: believing himself to be the progenitor of a morally and spiritually uplifting poetic spirit, Wordsworth interprets his lack of mainstream popularity as yet another symptom of his contemporary society's degraded tastes.

In the context of the development of Wordsworth's prefatory persona, the 1815 paratexts archive his changing relationship with his audience, while imaginatively envisioning his place in posterity through a self-apotheosis much more definitive and comprehensive than that attempted in the 1802 Preface. A culminating symptom of his attempt to attenuate this indeterminate movement between himself and his public, Wordsworth's 1815 preface to *Poems* will become preeminently symptomatic of his discomfort with his evolving persona. Yet it remains symptomatic, haunted by its own inability to fix the egotistical sublime—a haunting built into the very structure of his corpus as *gothic* cathedral, as he describes it in the Prospectus to the *Excursion*¹⁰³—producing the vertiginous effects created by the sublime

¹⁰³ "The two Works [the Prelude and the Recluse] have the same relation to each other . . . as the ante-chapel has to the body of a gothic church. Continuing this allusion, he may be permitted to add, that his minor Pieces, which have been long before the Public, when they shall be properly arranged, will be found by the attentive Reader to have such connection with the main Work as may give them claim to be likened to little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses, ordinarily included in those edifices." (171)

nature of this project. And as an elusive preface, the 1815 Preface seeks not only to elude the majority of his contemporary reading public, but it also ambivalently seeks to escape its connections with the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. The 1815 Preface begins with a self-referential allusion to its predecessors, downplaying the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* as a “slight and imperfect” (WLC 188) attempt to convey Wordsworth’s earlier poetics, but its principles have since become outmoded. Wordsworth emphasizes the necessity of including a new preface, one that can more adequately explain the “enlarged and diversified” nature of the poems collected in 1815. Whether or not this claim is yet another attempt by Wordsworth to sever ties with the “system” so often associated with his poetry is not exactly clear. But, curiously, Wordsworth does include the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* as part of the collection, having “transferred” it, as he informs the reader, to the end of the second volume “to be attended to, or not, at the pleasure of the Reader” (188). Symbolically, Wordsworth’s gesture here is ambiguous. It represents neither a wholesale departure from his earlier poetics nor a stubborn attachment to his earlier theories. His words in the 1815 Preface suggest that the *Lyrical Ballads’* preface is merely a curiosity, a relic to be perused for the reader’s “pleasure,” a statement which places little theoretical value on its contents. But the very fact that he has chosen to include it within the new volume suggests that he feels it still possesses some degree of importance.

The subordination of the Preface within a broader organizational scheme is in keeping with the overall paratextual framework of the 1815 *Poems*. For the 1815 volume is subdivided into fourteen sections, with all selected poems classified according to their subject matter or—in select cases—the extent to which they demonstrate the psychological workings of the poet’s imagination. Wordsworth’s interest in the imagination, which he

details throughout the 1815 Preface and “Essay, Supplementary,” combined with the logical ordering of the poems, evinces his desire to present his volume as an exemplary production of poetic genius according to the logic that will ground Coleridge’s 1817 *Treatise on Method*. As Dahlia Porter has demonstrated, Coleridge’s concept of method combines “the interpenetration of empirical procedure with imaginative production, the habit of a mind both observant and creative” (70). What Porter defines as the essence of a Romantic method is the conflation of the remainders of empirical method—“the process of collecting, comparing, distinguishing, and combining scattered observations to arrive at general principles” (vi)—with the creative power of the imagination. But according to Porter, Coleridge’s definition of method “elevate[s] the poet over the man of science” (251) as method in literature predates and supersedes method in science through the poet’s superior imaginative faculties. Thus, the antithesis between the poet and the man of science that Wordsworth struggles to work through in the 1802 Preface diffuses itself throughout the very structure of the 1815 volume. The categorical arrangement of the poetry unifies Wordsworth’s entire poetic corpus up to 1815, and lends a quasi-scientific structure to the volume, thus creating the impression of a thoroughly methodical approach to poetry infused with the very imaginative power that Wordsworth argues constitutes the poet’s “genius” in the Preface.

Wordsworth’s 1815 preoccupations had already been hinted at in the *Excursion*’s brief Preface, published a year earlier. In the blank verse “Prospectus” attached to the *Excursion*’s preface, Wordsworth quotes Milton’s humble desire to reach a coterie readership: “fit audience let me find though few” (*WLC* 172). These sentiments mark a radical departure from the Poet-audience dynamic delineated in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, where Wordsworth’s description of the Poet as a “man speaking to men” suggests his desire to

reach the very mass audience whose “degraded” intellectual predilections he sought to correct through exposure to his voice. By 1815, Wordsworth has, like Hays, bifurcated his reading audience. But whereas Hays’s bifurcation strategically allows her to target simultaneously a Dissenting and a middle-class readership, Wordsworth’s bifurcation implicitly alienates the bulk of his contemporary readership to set up a binary between an elite readership and a mass audience. Wordsworth’s dismissal of the “ignorant, the incapable, and the presumptuous” is presented as a general harangue not only against critics like Jeffrey, but against a reading public who has failed to appreciate Wordsworth’s genius. Moreover, the rhetoric of the 1815 Preface is inflected with terms of permanence: phrases like “judgment of posterity” and “holden in undying remembrance” encapsulate the Essay’s preoccupation with posthumous fame. The emphasis on the poet’s permanence marks another significant departure from the *Lyrical Ballads*’ Preface. In that Preface, too, Wordsworth is concerned with permanence and transience. But it is not his own intransience with which he is concerned. First and foremost, the subject-matter of the *Lyrical Ballads*—low and rustic life—is described in terms of stability, as the rustic is portrayed as the ideal human archetype because of his close relation to the “permanent forms of nature” (LB 743-44). The simple and unaffected language of the poetry is supposed to convey this sense of immutability, as Wordsworth claims his poetic language is “a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language” (744) than the rhetorically elaborate language generally expected from poets. Nowhere in the 1815 Preface or “Essay, Supplementary” is this claim for the stability of the rustic or the language of the ballads repeated. In 1815, Wordsworth is mainly concerned with the permanence of his own poetry. Hence his final statement on the imagination in the 1815 preface defines imagination—the special quality that Wordsworth claims he, along with a select group of

history's greatest poets, possesses—in terms of eternity: “Fancy is given to quicken and to beguile the temporal part of our nature, Imagination to incite and to support the eternal” (*WLC* 185). Coleridge will of course seize upon this aspect of the imagination to articulate his Kantian-inflected definition of the primary imagination as “a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM” (*Biographia* 167). But the connection between Wordsworth's idea of the imagination as eternal, his identification of himself with the imaginative faculty, and his appeal to posterity based on his imaginative powers, all contribute to a definition of the imagination tightly bound with a sense of himself—the representative of a morally ameliorative poetic spirit—as an unrecognized genius waiting for acknowledgment.

The lengthy “Essay, Supplementary” reaches its climax with two related conclusions. The first is Wordsworth's statement that “every author, as far as he is great and at the same time *original*, has had the task of *creating* the taste by which he is to be enjoyed” (*WLC* 210). The second is his identification of a new readership to whom his poems will be addressed: “the People, philosophically characterized” (214). In another instance of his methodical classificatory scheme in the 1815 *Poems*, Wordsworth categorizes two contrasting groups of readers, dividing the “PUBLIC” from the “PEOPLE” (214, Wordsworth's Capitals). The “public” is defined as that “small though loud portion” of the community characterized by its “factitious influence” (214) and who wish to pass themselves off as members of the people. The “people” are those who are truly capable of receiving the power imparted by the Genius. Collectively, the people form the “great Spirit of human knowledge” (214), the voice of which is the “Vox Populi” inspired by the Deity. The Genius must realize that his works will first be appreciated only by the people, who will then participate in the more general task of creating the taste for future generations. It is to the “embodied spirit of their

knowledge, so far as it exists and moves, at the present, faithfully supported by its two wings, the past and the future, his [the poet's] devout respect, his reverence, is due" (214).

Wordsworth's description of the "people" shares similarities with Coleridge's delineation of the clerisy, a select readership envisioned by Coleridge as charged with the responsibility for interpreting texts and ensuring the diffusion of ideas throughout the general population. A "culturally reproductive body antithetical to the increasingly passive, consuming audiences who, as Wordsworth feared, acted as mere functions of the marketplace" (Klancher 153), the clerisy's function is to "authoritatively interpret texts" and "establish interpretive procedures for others" (168).¹⁰⁴ Although Coleridge's clerisy is somewhat more formally institutionalized than Wordsworth's more *ad hoc* depiction of the "people," both writers share the common belief that interpretation cannot be left to the devices of an uncritical, mass reading audience. Like Godwin, who derided the "mob monster" readership who might misconstrue his ideas, Wordsworth too deplores a segment of the public incapable of philosophical enlightenment.

Ultimately, Wordsworth did successfully create the conditions for his own reception. The figure of the poet constructed in the pages of these prefaces would become the 'Wordsworth' of the Victorian period:

Now it was commonplace to invest with a spiritual aura a lifetime apparently spent secluded from the follies and temptations of the world in solitary pursuit of a personal vision of truth. Wordsworth was now credited with the

¹⁰⁴ For an in-depth analysis of Coleridge's concept of the clerisy, see Klancher 150-70. Recognizing the failure and futility of governmental control over reading in an age of censorship, Coleridge devised the clerisy as an important way of avoiding state control in intellectual matters. For Coleridge, the clerisy involved the "making of an interpretive institution that at once resituated the political state, reestablished a state of intellectual grace, and restructured the circulatory practices of reading and writing" (153). The effect of the clerisy would be "diffusion" of knowledge throughout the nation: "The clerisy will operate as a nucleus with its local orbits; each orbit forms again the center of a larger sphere of influence, until the whole nation—and by indirection, the whole of Europe—shall be as a great series of teachers and audiences radiating outward from the symbolic field of the high-clerical core" (165).

power of the seer, whose visions were supremely worthy of poetic utterance, whereas once he had been contemned as an egotist in thrall to his own delusions. (Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians* 20)

Wordsworth's ubiquity in the Victorian period demonstrates how far his reputation had evolved. Victorian readers seem to have elided the 1815 Preface's distinction between the people and the public, as Wordsworth finally reached a mainstream audience.¹⁰⁵ Such influential Victorian critics as Matthew Arnold and John Stuart Mill contributed to the canonization of Wordsworth, taking their Wordsworthian model straight from the pages of the 1815 "Essay, Supplementary." In the preface to his 1879 collection *The Poems of Wordsworth*, Arnold, whom Klancher calls the "great theorist of the clerisy" (159), supports Wordsworth's claims to poetic immortality:

Wordsworth has been in his grave for some thirty years, and certainly his lovers and admirers cannot flatter themselves that this great and steady light of glory as yet shines over him. He is not fully recognized at home; he is not recognized at all abroad. Yet I firmly believe that the poetical performance of Wordsworth is, after that of Shakespeare and Milton, of which all the world now recognizes the worth, undoubtedly the most considerable in our language from the Elizabethan age to the present time. . . . taking the roll of our chief poetical names, besides Shakespeare and Milton . . . Wordsworth's name deserves to stand, and will finally stand, above them all. (348)

¹⁰⁵ Sales figures for volumes of Wordsworth's poetry in the Victorian period attest to the poet's mainstream popularity. Cumulative production of Gall and Inglis' 1857 *Family Edition of the Poets* edition of Wordsworth, which peaked between the 1870s and 1890s, was 51,000 copies; Nimmo's *Editions of the Poets* sold roughly the same as the Gall and Inglis edition; Routledge's *British Poets* 1858 edition of Wordsworth produced 91,000 copies; Moxon's *Popular Poets* edition of Wordsworth, which began in 1870 sold over 100,000; Frederick Warne's middle-range edition of Wordsworth produced 38,500 copies; Milner's edition sold 29,000 copies (St. Clair, *Reading Nation* 715-23). By contrast, the original print run of the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* was 500; 1800 was 1,000; and 1802 was 500. 1,000 copies of 1807's *Poems, in Two Volumes* were printed, with 230 copies remaindered in 1814. 500 copies of the 1815 *Poems* had sold out by 1820 (660-64).

Arnold's narrative of Wordsworth's slow and troubled rise to fame parallels Wordsworth's own narrative in the "Essay, Supplementary." Noting that the "poetry-reading public was very slow to recognize him, and was very easily drawn away from him" (343), Arnold nonetheless points to a future when Wordsworth's name will be classified among the great poets.

Furthermore, John Stuart Mill, in his *Autobiography*, constructs himself as the ideal Wordsworthian reader, one whose malaise is alleviated through a first reading of Wordsworth. A synecdoche for the healing powers of Wordsworth's poetry, which Wordsworth had claimed as early as his 1800 preface, Mill's experience manifests the redeeming effects of the poet's verse. Turning to the 1815 *Poems*, in the midst of a deep and debilitating depression, Mill would discover that the miscellaneous poems of Wordsworth were a "medicine for my state of mind" (148). For Mill, Wordsworth has fulfilled his 1802 promise for the poet's role in an age of science: the poet's "medicine" proves to be more effective than any remedy concocted by science. Citing Wordsworth's "states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty" (148) as the source of the verse's therapeutic value, Mill discovers through Wordsworth's poetry that "real, permanent happiness in tranquil contemplation" (148) was possible. The private experience of Mill, a respected intellectual figure, thus becomes a public testimony to the therapeutic powers of Wordsworth's verse, fulfilling Wordsworth's prefatory claim that his poetry is the tonic for a corrupted society. Indeed, the causes attributed by Mill to the development of his symptoms parallel the symptoms identified by Wordsworth as afflicting his turn-of-the-century public. Mill observes that he "had some gratification of vanity at too early an age . . . like all pleasures enjoyed too soon, it had made me blasé and indifferent to the pursuit" (139). Wordsworth's diagnosis of his contemporary society's degradation from the 1800

preface similarly identifies a collective loss of the capacity for experiencing simple pleasures, implicit in his pinpointing the “degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation” as symptomatic of this loss. Therefore, as narrated by Mill, the act of overcoming one’s depression through the act of reading—reading Wordsworth, in particular—becomes enshrined in the consciousness of a Victorian culture whose reverence for Wordsworth completes the apotheosis painstakingly created in the prefaces.

The essence of Wordsworth’s 1815 argument—his appeal to an elite readership whose superior judgment will assure his place in posterity—will also be rehearsed in various ways by Percy Bysshe Shelley, who will target his 1821 *Epipsychidion* to a “select class of poetical readers” and whose 1821 elegy *Adonais* takes Wordsworth’s fixation with posterity to its limit. *Adonais* imaginatively works through the process through which worthy poets unknown or unappreciated in their own times transcend the boundaries of their ephemeral historical moment to join in a pantheon of poetic greatness comprised of poets from all ages. Although Shelley’s portrayal of the poet in posterity aligns itself with Wordsworth’s, its mawkishness and hyper-theatrical histrionics will mark it as a significantly more ironic thematization of the poet’s social function. Nonetheless, both poets, despite their differing approaches, are at some level grappling with the difficulty of contextualizing the poet in a modern industrial age, of keeping alive the spirit of Poetry in a prosaic age.

—FOUR—

ROMANTIC IRONY AND THE PREFACES OF P.B. SHELLEY

“Just as lifeboat instruction is given on luxurious ocean liners, so Romantic Irony aims at teaching the spirit of poetry how to keep afloat in the approaching floods of what Goethe named the Prosaic Age: ‘The Age of Analysis’ (189).

—Erich Heller, *In the Age of Prose*

Like Wordsworth, Shelley is also a poet writing belatedly in an age of prose with a similar agenda.¹⁰⁶ Both poets seek to make a real social impact through their poetry, despite their nervous awareness of the increasing marginalization of poetry in the bourgeois public sphere.¹⁰⁷ The anxiety of influence borne by Shelley as he both perpetuated and reacted against the poetic ideals espoused by Wordsworth reveals the complex substratum of his feelings for his precursor. Shelley’s 1815 poem “To Wordsworth” contrasts the ideal of the early Wordsworth—“Thou wert as a lone star whose light did shine / . . . Above the blind

¹⁰⁶ In his *Aesthetics*, Hegel distinguishes between a poetic and a prosaic age. Hegel’s formulation defines the two terms as collective modes of representation or forms of consciousness: he considers his own early nineteenth century historical moment (and thus Shelley’s as well) as an age of prose. In an age of prose, poetry “readily acquires a certain artificiality, and the result, even if it does not appear to be an actually intended one, is that poetry can scarcely be transposed into that original and direct way of hitting the truth” (I: 1006). One could attribute the ubiquity of prose prefaces in Shelley’s oeuvre and in the Romantic period generally to poets’ awareness, conscious or unconscious, of a widespread cultural dissociation from a poetic mode which characterized certain earlier periods of human history. Yet, according to Hegel’s logic, prose cannot adequately convey the content of poetry, as “prosaic commentators on poetry have a lot of trouble before they succeed by their intellectual analyses in separating meaning and image, extracting the abstract content from the living shape, and thereby disclosing to the prosaic consciousness an understanding of the poetic way of putting things” (1005).

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Love Peacock caustically points out the dearth of enlightened poetry readers in a letter to Shelley: “there is no longer a poetical audience among the higher class of minds . . . the poetical reading public . . . is composed of the mere dregs of the intellectual community” (*PBSL* 2: 245).

and battling multitude” (*SPP* 7, 10)—with the negative figure of the later Wordsworth, whom Shelley believed to have abandoned his early radicalism in favour of a stodgy conservatism: “Deserting these, thou leavest me to grieve, / Thus having been, that thou shouldst cease to be” (13-14). Ostensibly a lament for the aging poet laureate’s shifting ideology, Shelley’s sentiments in “To Wordsworth” also reveal an anxiety about his own poetic situation, a projection acknowledging the difficulty of holding to one’s ideals in the midst of a hostile intellectual climate equally—if not more—intolerant to radical thought than the late-eighteenth century historical moment when Godwin and Hays struggled to disseminate their ideas. But of the four writers analyzed in this study, Percy Bysshe Shelley’s relationship with the public sphere is the most complex. His prefaces, like those of Godwin, Hays, and Wordsworth, are deployed, in the most general sense, for the purpose of mediating his work to the public. They present an argument for the relevance of his work calculated to secure a sympathetic readership. Past critics of Shelley’s prefaces have analyzed the relationship between his prefaces and poems and their relation to the public sphere, constructing a shared figure of a Shelley whose prefaces, characterized by the poet’s rhetorical mastery, “control” (Gold 66), “condition” (Behrendt 16) or “pre-empt” (Laplace-Sinatra 89) the reader’s response to the poems.¹⁰⁸ In these instances, Shelley’s agency is foregrounded, suggesting that he actively created, or at the very least was marginally successful in determining the conditions of his reception. In this chapter, I present a reading

¹⁰⁸ Elise Gold, Michael Laplace-Sinatra, and Stephen Behrendt deal with these aspects in their studies of Shelley’s prefaces. Behrendt focuses on Shelley’s prefaces in the larger context of how his prose writings simultaneously control and demarcate his audiences. In addition, Behrendt shows how the prefaces rhetorically “condition” readers to accept the ideas conveyed through the poetry. Gold similarly emphasizes the preface’s role as the site of initial interface between reader and poem, which, taken as a whole, “function as indices as his changing relationships with his audiences and as responses to his poetic failures and successes” (64). Furthermore, Gold argues that the prefaces are especially valuable for “tracing the evolution of his poetics” (64). Laplace-Sinatra demonstrates how Shelley’s prefaces engage with contemporary reviewers, where he anticipates imminent criticism and defends his works against past criticism. For Laplace-Sinatra, the prefaces contain Shelley’s “thoughts regarding the way his poems are to be read, his reactions toward criticisms, and . . . his relationship with his audience” (89).

contrary to those emphasizing Shelley's agency, suggesting instead that the prefaces, in the context of the poems they uneasily introduce, reveal a poet caught as a subject-in-process between the public sphere and an increasingly endangered aesthetic sphere. One of the fundamental Shelleyan paradoxes is his simultaneous desire to effect political, religious and social reform in the world through his poetry, while always remaining deeply ambivalent about his poetry's power to achieve these goals. This ambivalence manifests especially in Shelley's prefaces, which present a shifting array of speakers and rhetorical strategies crafted to engage a readership that Shelley can never fully define and to obviate the hostility of a critical establishment seeking to vilify him.

The stance taken by Shelley in his prefaces could be characterized as ironic, at least according to the ways in which the critics above have described the function of his prefaces. The logic for this classification would be predicated on the assumption that Shelley, in his prefaces, attempts to create an ironic distance between the idealistic vision of his art and the exigencies of a literary public sphere for which he harbours strong feelings of contempt. To be sure, Shelley's derision for the public sphere is even more pronounced than Wordsworth's. Even at Wordsworth's most pessimistic, as when he laments the public's "outrageous thirst for stimulation" in the *Lyrical Ballads*' preface, or when he outright dismisses the "public" altogether in 1815 as a mass incapable of comprehending the truth-value of poetry, Wordsworth steadfastly persists while never tempering his vision with irony. But this is not to suggest that Shelley himself *uses* irony to any significant extent as a defence mechanism, or that his *corpus* excessively engages irony for purposes of satire or parody.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Indeed, even in the heyday of New Critical infatuation with the concept of irony, Shelley's poetry was systematically devalued because of its lack of irony. I.A. Richards influentially defined irony as an "equilibrium of opposed impulses" (249). Following Richards, Cleanth Brooks similarly defines irony in the context of his Coleridgean focus on organic unity as "the recognition of incongruities" which characterizes "mature poetry . . . which does not leave out what is apparently hostile to its dominant tone and which, because it is able to fuse

Certainly, there are many instances of rhetorical irony¹¹⁰ in Shelley's poetry and prefaces, a technique that, to cite but two very different examples, generates the humour and scathing critique of Wordsworth's lost poetic vision in *Peter Bell the Third*, or structures the haunting disconnect between the inscription on Ozymandius' statue and the desert wasteland within which it decomposes. Unlike the more cynical Byron, for whom the ironic spirit that permeates *Don Juan* is perpetuated by its joking, intrusive narrator, and whose poetical vision seeks to satirize without offering a clear moral alternative, Shelley generally presents a much more earnest aesthetic and philosophical persona in his poetry.¹¹¹ But it is precisely this earnestness, combined with the myriad paradoxes that characterize Shelley's poetry, that generates a profound sense of what might be more precisely termed romantic irony. For as Lilian Furst puts it, "far from *using* irony, as the traditional ironist does, the romantic ironist *is* ironic" (229). In other words, Shelley's very situation as a visionary idealist poet operating belatedly in a particular historical moment is fundamentally, regardless of whether or not he consciously employs irony rhetorically, a primal scene of romantic irony. It is not only because Shelley's poetry (and prose) incessantly delve into themes aligned with Friedrich

the irrelevant and the discordant, has come to terms with itself and is invulnerable to irony" (732). Richards and Brooks, along with other New Critics such as F. R. Leavis and Robert Penn Warren derided Shelley's poetry on the basis of its lack of this structuring principle. For their part, the New Critics inherited their disdain for Shelley from their precursor T. S. Eliot, who dismissed Shelley's poetry as "repellent" and "shabby" (81, 90). For an overview of the New Critics' approach to irony in Shelley's poetry, along with an attempt to disprove their judgements, see Ford.

¹¹⁰ Rhetorical irony can be distinguished from romantic irony in the sense that romantic irony is the expression of a worldview, a method of interpreting or reacting to the paradoxical nature of existence. Samuel Johnson's definition of irony, for instance, concisely conveys its rhetorical sense: irony is "a mode of speech in which the meaning is contrary to the words" (123). One can pinpoint the early nineteenth century as the origin of a turn in the meaning of irony, as it shifted from rhetorical device to pervading spirit (Furst 23-27). Thus Schlegel in his essay "On Incomprehensibility" presents a hierarchy of ironies, with rhetorical irony assuming a lower position than other forms (such as common irony, subtle irony, supersubtle irony, straightforward irony, dramatic irony, double irony, irony of irony).

¹¹¹ Studies of English romantic irony tend to focus on Byron while ignoring Shelley. For instance, Frederick Garber's *Self, Text and Romantic Irony*, despite briefly acknowledging ironic structural elements in Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," deals exclusively with Byron; similarly, Anne K. Mellor's *English Romantic Irony* makes no mention of Shelley in the context of romantic irony.

Schlegel's seminal definitions of the concept—such as lamenting the impossibility of complete communication, or mining the gulf between the infinite and the temporal—that considering his works as a locus of romantic irony is justified. The paradoxical nature of Shelley's conflicting, wavering, fluctuating attitude towards his own works, his relation to his reading public, and his anxiety of influence about posterity and his place in the literary pantheon all contribute to a deep sense of romantic irony that pervades his corpus.

The essence of romantic irony is paradox: irony, as conceived by Schlegel, is the “form of paradox” (48). Schlegel's seminal concept of romantic irony¹¹² is founded on a single, overarching paradox generating myriad other paradoxes.¹¹³ In *Lyceum* fragment 108, an early definition of romantic irony, Schlegel identifies this fundamental paradox as the recognition of a tension between man's uneasy awareness of the finite nature of existence and the seemingly infinite nature of objective reality: irony “contains and arouses a feeling of indissoluble antagonism between the absolute and the relative, of the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication” (131). The only artist truly capable of representing a chaotic universe in constant flux is the artist who approaches his subject matter with intentional ambivalence, whose self-reflexive attitude towards his work captures the contradictions inherent in human existence. Through the practice of irony, the artist

¹¹² The word ‘romantic’ in relation to irony is a later usage. Although the term ‘romantic irony’ does appear four times in Schlegel's notebooks, it was not used to refer to this specific type of irony until popularized by Herman Hettner in 1850 in his book *Die Romantische Schule in Irhem Zusammenhang mit Göethe und Schiller*. Thus, Schlegel, Hegel, and Kierkegaard refer to the concept under the more general rubric of irony in their works (Furst 30). But Kierkegaard also distinguishes between ‘Socratic’ irony—a more rhetorical type of irony—and the Schlegelian form of irony.

¹¹³ In his study of Schlegel, Hans Eichner catalogues many Schlegelian instances of the paradox of art, which have been “defined by Schlegel in hundreds of ways – dialectic fusion of not one pair of opposites, but of many pairs, all of which shading off into each other in subtle nuances: playfulness and seriousness, intuition and circumspection, self-intoxication of genius and and critical detachment, sentimental metaphysical content and fantastic ... different aspects of the same phenomenon, the essential ‘duplicity of art’ which reflected the ‘duplicity’ of man and the duplicity – the infinite plenitude and infinite unity – of the world itself. But in order to produce such art, the artist himself must be both detached and involved, deeply serious about his art, and yet capable of treating it as a mere game, trustful of his deepest impulses” (70).

engages in the perpetual dialectical process of “constant alternation of self-creation and self-destruction” (qtd. in Eichner 71), a process ultimately leading to self-transcendence, for it is only through the workings of the “absolutely necessary” application of irony that “one transcends oneself” (156). Thus, for Schlegel, romantic irony is a fundamentally positive force, the essential condition for transcending the finite limitations of the self and representing a universe teeming with incessant ambiguity. The romantic ironist exercises and announces his complete artistic freedom, celebrating the dialectical progression of a self engaged in the spiraling ascent of a rising consciousness.¹¹⁴ As a result, Schlegel defines romantic poetry as a process that is itself “eternally becoming,” an interminable dialectic amalgamation of opposing forces that never resolve themselves in a final synthesis and remain forever open-ended, resisting closure and finality.¹¹⁵

The romantic ironist achieves his artistic effect through techniques that contribute to an overall effect of what Schlegel calls permanent parabasis. Parabasis is a dramatic device from Greek old comedy in which the chorus, speaking on behalf of the author, interrupts the action of the play to deliver an address filled with overt references to the author. The effect of parabasis is to lift the veil of illusion to reveal the play’s fictional nature by reminding the audience about the ubiquitous presence of the author. The concept of a “permanent parabasis,” however, is in itself highly paradoxical: how can a momentary gesture, such as a character’s emerging to speak, be permanent? Thus, for Schlegel, parabasis is not simply a transitory moment in the narrative, but rather a fundamental aspect

¹¹⁴ Lukacs, in his *Theory of the Novel*, similarly characterizes irony as “the self-surmounting of a subjectivity that has gone as far as it is possible to go . . . the highest freedom that can be achieved in a world without God” (92-93).

¹¹⁵ Schlegel makes this claim in the midst of his *Athenaums-Fragment 116* in which he defines romantic poetry as “a progressive, universal poetry.” Its synthesizing power consists of its ability to “fuse” seemingly disparate elements such as “poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature, and life and society poetical; poeticize wit and fill and saturate the forms of art with every kind of good solid matter for instruction, and animate them with the pulsations of humor” (175).

of the work's structure, a pervading and consistent dialectic tension comprised of the work's illusiveness and the artist's awareness of its illusiveness. Formally, parabasis performs itself through the character of the intrusive author or a self-conscious narrator whose presence tends to disrupt the narrative. In Shelley's prefaced poems, for instance, the sense of parabasis derives in part from the prefatory figure's insertion of himself into the poem; the prefacing figure becomes a hovering presence who, even when prefacing a third-person narrative poem or a drama, always lingers in the margins of the text.

Critics of Schlegel's concept of romantic irony have pinpointed this perceived all-pervasive subjectivism as a fatal flaw in his worldview. Hegel, for instance, takes Schlegel to task for promoting an "ironic consciousness" (*Philosophy of Right* 149), the form of which is a "subjective" or a "contentless void" that is "substitute[d] . . . for the whole content of ethics, right, duties and laws" (149). In this context, the absolute artistic freedom Schlegel grants to the artist, along with the capricious and playful spirit with which the artist is supposed to approach his work, contributes to an ironic stance that subsumes all objective reality under the artist's sovereign subjectivity. More than simply a misguided or false consciousness, this ironic stance is for Hegel "evil . . . inherently and quite universally evil" (149). Kierkegaard picks up on Hegel's critique of romantic irony, famously appropriating the Hegelian phrasing of irony as "infinite absolute negativity" (278), resulting from the confrontation between one's subjectivity and the "given actuality" giving rise to the subject's sense of power over actuality. But Kierkegaard deviates from Hegel as he concedes some positive potential for irony. The poet's ability to achieve what Kierkegaard calls the "mastered moment" (340) of irony depends on his relation to his given actuality: "the poet only lives poetically when oriented and thus assimilated into the age in which he lives, when he is positively free within the actuality to which he belongs" (338). Whether the poet is in control of his irony or not

depends on the extent to which he is integrated within his given historical moment.

Properly aligned with his given actuality, the poet can then exercise his mastery over irony, which becomes a method for discerning truth.¹¹⁶

What, then, is Shelley's relation to his "given actuality"? This is the crux of the question concerning Shelley's relation to irony, a question that might be partially answered by the following remarks from Shelley's prose fragment "On Love":

I know not the internal constitution of other men, nor even thine, whom I now address. I see that in some external attributes they resemble me, but when, misled by that appearance, I have thought to appeal to something in common, and unburthen my inmost soul to them, I have found my language misunderstood, like one in a distant and savage land. The more opportunities they have afforded me for experience, the wider has appeared the interval between us, and to a greater distance have the points of sympathy been withdrawn. With a spirit ill fitted to sustain such proof, trembling and feeble through its tenderness, I have everywhere sought sympathy, and have found only repulse and disappointment. (*SPP* 114)

These lines perhaps best encapsulate the sense of alienation felt by Shelley as symptomatic of his dissociation from his given actuality. The prose fragment seeks to define love in terms of corresponding breezes and epipsyches, conflating a Wordsworthian nature-love with a Platonic idealism in which love manifests itself through the meeting of ideal type and

¹¹⁶ Lilian Furst notes that Kierkegaard is "ironically ambivalent" because his position "ends closer to Schlegel than is generally supposed" (34). This ambivalence emerges as Kierkegaard begins to acknowledge the positive aspects of irony: "When irony has first been mastered it undertakes a movement directly opposed to that wherein it proclaimed its life as unmastered. Irony now limits, renders finite, defines, and thereby yields truth, actuality, and content; it chastens and punishes and thereby imparts stability, character, and consistency. Irony is a disciplinarian feared only by those who do now know it" (Kierkegaard 338-39).

antitype. Yet the “secret correspondence” (115) sought through these forms of love is born precisely of Shelley’s “repulse and disappointment,” stemming from his inability to find his soul’s antitype and the subsequent sense of dejection arising from his conscious awareness of this pervasive communicative void. This inability to communicate adequately with those whom he seeks to address—one of the constituent elements of Schlegel’s original formulation of romantic irony—of course becomes a well-known and frequent point of reference within Shelley’s poetry and prose. Thus, the *Defence of Poetry* defines the poet as “an unacknowledged legislator,” a “nightingale who sits in darkness, and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds” (*SPP* 516). Similarly, the poet of *To a Skylark* is “hidden / In the light of thought, / Singing hymns unbidden” (36-39). The primary sources of Shelley’s disenfranchisement are his insistent atheism and his general spirit of nonconformity, which resulted not only in his expulsion from Oxford and his unsuccessful attempt to retain custody of his children, but which also earned him the frequent censure of a mostly unsympathetic contemporary reading public. Wordsworth, as we have seen, partially capitulates to this necessary mediation of the public sphere through his attempts at professionalizing the poet. In so doing, Wordsworth to an extent exercises some control over his ironic situation, achieving, in Kierkegaard’s words, the “stability, character, and consistency” (339) of the mastered moment attained by the poet reconciled with his given actuality. Shelley, by contrast, absorbs the irony inherent in his situation, and negotiates the public sphere ironically in a way that causes him to instead *stage* this mediation in his prefaces.

As Shelley’s poetic career progresses, his immersion in romantic irony intensifies as his attempts to secure a readership and placate the critics become increasingly desperate. This chapter traces the development of romantic irony as manifested in the five prefaces

through which its workings are most acutely revealed. Each of these four prefaces can be located within different parts of the romantic irony spectrum. Recognizing romantic irony's protean nature, I refer to it as a spectrum rather than as a fixed concept. For the sheer range of the term's conflicting definitions emphasize its conceptual elusiveness. Encompassing extremes poles of dialectical positivity, as in Schlegel's formulation, and infinite negativity, as in Hegel's and Kierkegaard's formulations, romantic irony resists reductive elucidation. Thus my definition of Shelleyan romantic irony retains the basic elements of Schlegelian parabasis transposed into a Hegelian void through the workings of a consciousness out of step, in Kierkegaard's sense, with its given actuality. The primary symptom of this romantic irony is a repetitive, self-negating form of parabasis characterized by recurring Shelleyan self-figurations that are always defensive, reacting to the interpellations of a hostile public sphere.

The first section deals with the preface-poem relationship in *Alastor*, which, although potentially ironic in Schlegel's positive sense, ultimately descends into the Hegelian void through a combination of the preface's negative rhetoric and the poem's depiction of a subject completely at odds with his given actuality. Next, I demonstrate how the sheer range of self-figurations in *Laon and Cythna's* preface, dedication, and poem create an overwhelming sense of parabasis; experimenting with a composite of autobiographical and fictional details, Shelley begins to make a case for freedom of thought—or "literature" as conceptualized by Derrida (*On the Name* 28)—in the context of a subversive poem ostensibly advocating incest, atheism, and political radicalism. The third section analyzes the preface to the anonymously published *Epipsychidion* as the *reductio ad absurdum* of Shelleyan parabasis, in which, despite the poem's intensive subjectivism, the preface paradoxically strips away all reference to Shelley himself, and presents a more skillful case for "literature" through its explicit fictionalizing of the self and autobiography. *Epipsychidion's* preface and poem both,

through their insistent questioning of the efficacy of figural language, skeptically interrogate autonarration as linguistic illusion, anticipating Paul DeMan's linguistically-grounded definition of parabasis. Shelley's romantic irony arrives at its terminus in the preface to *Adonais*, the site within which parabasis becomes bound up with the public sphere through Shelley's antithetically elegiac conflation of poet and critic. *Adonais*, like *Epipsychidion*, self-consciously scrutinizes the workings of parabasis, but from an ontological rather than a linguistic perspective: Shelley dissects the basic elements of parabasis, oscillating between depictions of posthumous existence as self-retaining and self-diffusing. But his final preface, the Preface to *Hellas*, depicts a Shelley whose radical spirit returns with renewed energy and force, revealing a poet whose political commitment has overcome the anxious subjectivism of his previous works. Ultimately, however, Shelley must relinquish control of his own texts, a task assumed by Mary after his premature death. Through her prefaces to the *Posthumous Poems* and *Poetical Works*, Mary attempts to assimilate Shelley to the actuality of a nascent Victorian period, a process that displaces, yet does not definitively bury, the romantic irony implicit in the posthumous transmission of his poetry.

The Ironic Void: *Alastor*

In her note to *Alastor*, Mary Shelley claims that the poem "ought rather to be considered didactic rather than narrative" (*Posthumous* 65). Percy Shelley would likely disagree with Mary's assessment, given his remarks in the preface to *Prometheus Unbound* that "didactic poetry is my abhorrence" (*SPP* 209). Mary's emphasis on the poem's didactic nature likely results from the preface's influence on her reading. For the preface to *Alastor*

is the most unabashedly didactic of all Shelley's prefaces.¹¹⁷ This is not, of course, to say that it succeeds in explicating the poem or that it presents any sort of clear moral for the reader to discern. Indeed, two centuries' worth of critics have been consistently stymied by the puzzling relation between preface and poem.¹¹⁸ But despite the countless sources of confusion that have led so many critics to the inevitable *aporia* of connecting the two disparate texts, the preface, in its own convoluted way, seeks to impose a moral on the poem's narrative and then succumbs to its tendencies in the second paragraph. Written in 1815, relatively early in Shelley's publishing career, this preface reveals a Shelley whose relation with the bourgeois public sphere is still early in its developing stages. One year later, a much more public prefatory 'Shelley' will emerge in the *Laon and Cythna* preface, but the 'Shelley' of *Alastor* can still remain unselfconsciously insular enough to compose a poem that, in Mary's words, "contains an individual interest only" (*Posthumous* 64). Taken together, *Alastor's* preface and Mary's note both seek to contain the wild energies of *Alastor*, to dictate

¹¹⁷ Spencer Hall concisely points out the preface's moral-imposing intention and its disconnect from the poem: "The Preface attempts to confer on the Poet a social and ethical dimension absent from the narrative itself. Although passively chastised as 'self-centred', the Poet's solitary quest for self-transcendence is also called a 'generous error' and is morally enhanced by contrast to those vaguely defined 'meaner spirits' who lack both love and imagination. The Preface seems deliberately to misread the narrative it introduces" (11).

¹¹⁸ Paul Mueschke and Earl Griggs claim that "*Alastor* has remained an enigma to Shelley's critics. A century of criticism has done little to throw light on the mystery" (229). Protracted critical debate over the application of *Alastor's* preface demonstrates how this enigma can be primarily attributed not just to the poem itself, but to the convoluted connection between the two texts. Since its original publication in 1816, the preface to *Alastor* has been problematic. One of the first journals to review the poem, the *Eclectic Review*, begins its critique by quoting the preface's first paragraph and the beginning of the second paragraph. Despite the preface's attempt to explicate the poem, however, the reviewer remarks that "not even this commentary will enable ordinary readers to decipher the import of the greater part of Mr. Shelley's allegory. All is wild and specious, untangible and incoherent as a dream. We should be utterly at a loss to convey any distinct idea of the plan or purpose of the poem" (*UH* 107). Even a later, favourable 1819 review from *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, believed to have been written by Walter Scott, points out how the preface fails to shed any light on the poem's meaning: "In a short preface, written with all the enthusiasm and much of the presumption of youth, Mr. Shelley gives a short explanation of the subject of 'Alastor; or, the Spirit of Solitude,' which we cannot say throws any very great light upon it, but without which the poem would be, we suspect, altogether unintelligible to ordinary readers" (*UH* 110). After quoting the preface's first paragraph, he describes it as a "somewhat dim enunciation" (111), which will not likely contribute to a clearer understanding of the poem. These early reactions to *Alastor's* preface set the tone for the subsequent two centuries' worth of criticism, during which time scholars have vigorously debated but failed to reach a conclusion about its relation to the poem.

a supplementary moral that controls the reader's reaction to the text. That both preface and note only further destabilize the poem's meaning despite their intention to clarify it illuminates the extent to which a poem's tendency cannot be controlled by its moral, or that the author cannot impose a meaning on a poem. Thus, the preface-poem relation in *Alastor* contains the seeds of what will develop into the primary motivating factor of the romantic irony inherent in Shelley's situation. This relation becomes allegorical of Shelley's ambivalent connection with the public sphere, in which he finds himself continuously compelled to preface his works to present a moral, yet increasingly aware of the impossibility of controlling the poem's tendencies, especially in a print marketplace whose burgeoning and fragmenting readership he cannot control. So *Alastor*—a poem narrating the demise of a poet who is completely out of step with his given actuality, who cannot communicate with others and who laments his awareness of the gulf between the ideal for which he yearns and the reality which constrains him—thematizes the conditions of romantic irony, while replicating Shelley's actual situation as a poet seeking a sympathetic readership.

Structurally, *Alastor's* preface can be divided into two sections: the first paragraph provides a brief summary of the poem, and the second paragraph provides the moral. The summary presents a reasonably clear-cut if not slightly abstract interpretation of the poem, one that does adequately encapsulate the poem's central motif. It outlines the youth's predicament, as one possessed with such potential for imaginative contemplation and speculation that he can be "joyous, and self-possessed" while immersed in his own reveries. However, the youth soon tires of the solitude resulting from his self-immersion; therefore, his mind "thirsts for intercourse with an intelligence similar to itself" (*SPP* 73). Here is a *précis* of the veiled maiden passage, in which Shelley clearly lays out the context of the poet's dream-vision, emphasizing the extent to which the poet seeks out an ideal prototype to

correlate with his own highly developed artistic and philosophical capabilities.

Unfortunately, he “seeks in vain” and “blasted by his disappointment, he descends to an untimely grave” (73). Taken by itself, this first paragraph provides a logical framework for the poem’s simple narrative, reducing the poem to its bare narrative elements—on the level of action and event, stripped bare of elaborate imagery and theoretical speculation, the poem is fundamentally ‘about’ a lonely youth who envisions a beautiful woman whom he loves and, realizing she was merely a figment of his imagination, descends into suicidal despair.

But even if the first paragraph does provide a succinct summary, the question of who is ‘speaking’ the preface problematizes attempts to work through its meaning. *Alastor*’s preface presents what is ostensibly a disinterested third person voice situated, paradoxically, both intra- and extradiegetically in relation to the poem. The difficulty of placing the prefatory speaker results from the difficulty of discerning his identity. Is the prefatory Voice¹¹⁹ ‘Shelley,’ providing his authoritative interpretation of the poem? Or is the speaker supposed to be the poem’s Narrator, who frames the poem with a meditation on the moral dimension of his tale? Earl Wasserman, whose influential reading situates *Alastor* within the context of Shelleyan skeptical dialogues such as *Refutation of Deism*, suggests that the preface is spoken by the poem’s Narrator. Wasserman cites the crucial phrase from the preface that claims the Poet’s “self-centred seclusion was avenged by the furies of an irresistible passion pursuing him to speedy ruin” (39) to argue his point that the Narrator’s attempt at transcending earthly existence to attain his ideal self could only be interpreted as such in the context of the Narrator’s “exclusively extroverted, world-oriented perspective” (39). He goes on to acknowledge that the “presence of the Visionary exerts considerable pressure

¹¹⁹ In my analysis of *Alastor* I distinguish between the Poet (ie. the poem’s protagonist), the Narrator (the narrator of the poem) and the prefatory Voice (as distinct from the Narrator for reasons explained below, classified as a disembodied voice because of the vagueness of his identity).

against that perspective, and that pressure generates a series of ambiguities” (39). Specifically, Wasserman identifies two passages that emphasize “irreconcilable conceptions of life” (39) as symptomatic of the ambiguity inherent in the contrasting philosophical positions of the two characters. Wasserman’s interpretation of the Narrator as prefatory speaker is persuasive, yet there is one significant incongruity that calls the speaker’s identity into question. The over-arching inconsistency pertains to the language of curses and spirits spoken by the Narrator, who, as representative Wordsworthian Nature poet, would not likely revert to the language of superstition to explain the poet’s demise. If he were simply a Wordsworthian Nature poet, it seems out of step with the Narrator’s ontology that he would not only explain the poet’s ruin in such supernatural terms, but that he would title the poem ‘Alastor,’ thus characterizing the entire text as an ordeal involving a vengeful spirit. Other critics have noticed this inconsistency: Carlos Baker, for instance, pinpoints the above-quoted phrase about the Poet’s self-centered seclusion as the origin of critical confusion over the poem’s intention. Baker’s argument, which attempts to show that the poem’s intention is to contrast a “conflict of allegiance” between love for nature and love for man, underscores the preface’s tendency to mislead readers from understanding the poem.¹²⁰ It is a well-known fact that the poem’s title was suggested to Shelley by Thomas Love Peacock *after* the poem had been written. If this curse-motif was already present in the poem, prompting Peacock’s title, it does not function in the way suggested in the preface’s second

¹²⁰ See Baker 42-47 for a thorough overview of various critical responses to Alastor’s preface, spanning the first half of the twentieth century. For instance, “Medwin, Dowden, Peacock and Peck have all passed over the problem [of discrepancies between preface and poem] as if they did not exist. But it has bothered Mrs. Campbell, who notices that ‘in the preface the youth is condemned: in the poem he is glorified’” her opinion is echoed by White, who says that ‘no one who had not read the preface would suppose that the author intended the poem as a criticism of him’; and Havens, after an extensive study of the poem, has concluded that Alastor is ‘not a unity, does not have a single impression, and was not the offspring of a single dominating purpose.’ Dissenters from the position have included Stovall, who regards as untenable Mrs. Campbell’s view that ‘Shelley, in his preface, misinterprets his own poem’ and Hoffman, who believes that Havens is wrong, and that ‘we must not abandon the attempt to discover minute connections between it [the poem] and the preface, for the Preface makes us aware that a meaning was intended” (42-43).

paragraph. The preface simply observes that the vision of the veiled maiden appears when the poet “images to himself the Being whom he loves” (73) without implying supernatural agency of any kind. And in the poem’s narration of the veiled maiden scene, the narrator claims that the “spirit of sweet human love” (203) had sent the vision to the youth because he had rejected her “choicest gifts” (205). Although in the poem the vision is attributed to a mystical spirit, there is no indication that there is anything sinister or vengeful about the vision.

If the prefatory Voice is not the poem’s Narrator, and not ‘Shelley’ in any recognizable way, he could more productively be described as a conflation of the Poet and Narrator. A dialectical composite of the poem’s primary figures, the prefatory Voice embodies the spirit of Schlegel’s emphasis on romantic poetry as existing in a constant state of becoming. From this perspective, the prefatory Voice’s identity presents itself purely as a stage in the dialectical process through which the contrasting allegiances identified by Baker—love for nature and love for man—have been worked through, but certainly not resolved. Both aspects of the binary are thus represented in the narrator, and if we recall Derrida’s reminder that prefaces are always written after the text they introduce, the prefatory voice comes into existence only after the Poet and Narrator have been realized. Thus, the prefatory Voice represents a subject-in-process, the Narrator, undergoing a profound ideological change¹²¹ as he reflects on the Poet’s influence. Having established

¹²¹ In this regard, Alastor’s preface-poem relationship could be compared to that of Shelley’s later poem, *Julian and Maddalo*. That poem, which depicts a philosophical debate between the idealistic Julian and the cynical Maddalo, also presents a prefatory speaker with no discernible identity who acts as a sort of mediator between the two positions. Notwithstanding the poem’s biographical dimension as a poeticized debate between Shelley and Byron, the antithetical relationship between the two characters stages a sort of closet drama between two aspects of Shelley’s divided self as they dialectically tease out the philosophical implications of both positions. In the Schlegel’s sense of the concept, the poem exhibits Romantic irony through its refusal to resolve the tensions between the two opposing philosophical positions. Further problematizing an understanding of the poem, however, is the preface, in which the narrator provides a brief character sketch of the dramatis personae, and which ultimately emphasizes from the outset the debate’s irresolvable nature: claims like “how far this is

himself as a spiritual seeker who in his childhood brooded among “charnels and coffins” (24), in addition to announcing his Wordsworthian affiliation as one who seeks “natural piety” (3), the Narrator’s philosophy is initially characterized by a contrasting polarity of natural and supernatural beliefs. But his attempt to assess the significance of the Poet’s life using the figure of the alastor displays a willingness to go beyond a purely naturalist conception of existence that allows for the possibility of supernatural phenomena. To be sure, he does not go nearly as far as the Poet, who will even risk death to seek reconciliation with his imagined ideal. But ultimately, the Narrator emerges as one for whom a Wordsworthian concept of nature no longer suffices; his reaction to the Poet’s death reveals a fascination with the occult, a thoroughly un-Wordsworthian attitude. Reacting to the Visionary’s death, the Narrator’s first instinct is not, as it would have been for the speaker of a Wordsworthian Lucy poem, to interpret his death as a natural phenomenon in which the body returns to the earth, “rolled round in earth’s diurnal course / With rocks and stones and trees” (“A Slumber” 7-8). Rather, the Narrator turns to myth, invoking three magical tales depicting the supernatural act of either restoring the dead to life, or the attainment of immortality. His first response is to yearn for “Medea’s wondrous alchemy” (672), an allusion to the sorceress Medea’s magic potion, which would rejuvenate Aeson. Second, he wishes that God “would / concede the chalice / Which but one living man has drained” (676-77), another of Shelley’s frequent allusions to the myth of Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew. Third, he returns to the power of alchemy, exclaiming:

O! that the dream

possible, the pious reader will determine” and “the unconnected exclamations of his [the Maniac’s] agony will perhaps be found a sufficient comment for the text of every heart” (*SPP* 121) underscore the poem’s open-endedness. As in *Alastor*, the speaker of *Julian and Maddalo*’s preface appears as a subject-in-process, a fusion of the antithetical philosophical positions within the poem, less a stable identity than a fleeting moment in a state of perpetual becoming.

Of a dark magician in his visioned cave,
Raking the cinders of a crucible
For life and power, even when his feeble hand
Shakes in its last decay, were the true law
Of this so lovely world! (681-85)

The Narrator toys with the hope that the laws of nature could be altered to incorporate the potential for supernatural phenomena. However, he goes no further with his arcane speculations, returning instead to contemplating the earthly pragmatics of how one could most appropriately mourn the Poet. But in contrast to the Narrator's preliminary invocation to the earth-mother, which is replete with natural imagery and which announces his "natural piety" (3), and in keeping with his occult fascinations, the poem closes with a Narrator whose world-view has oscillated between different ontological possibilities.

Revealed through this brief synopsis of critical speculation about the Narrator is, primarily, a fundamental inability to define his identity. Yet this inability is precisely in keeping with the poem's ironic subtext, in which reality and illusion are frequently confused and in which identities are constantly in flux.¹²² The more one attempts to pinpoint or grasp the prefatory Voice's identity, the more he resists interpretation, his figural representation unraveling. For as a subject-in-process, or a dialectical amalgamation of the poem's two primary figures, the prefatory voice indeed emerges, on the 'higher' narrative level of the preface, to pronounce his moral. But ultimately the prefatory Voice emerges from a negative

¹²² Or, rather, the 'characters'—apart from the Narrator—might not even be classified as such, given their lack of discernible humanity. Thus, Tilottama Rajan observes that the Poet is "less a person than a textual figure: a sign that has no objective referent" ("Web" 87). Elsewhere, Rajan suggests that "the Poet is not the narrator's opposite but his epipsyche, that the relationship between the narrator and the poet thus duplicates the relationship between the Poet and his epipsyche, and that both function as narrative paradigms for the relationship between poet and poem in the creative act" (*Dark Interpreter* 76).

dialectic, for just as the Poet fails in his attempt to find a corresponding epipsyche, and as the poem's Narrator fails to redeem the Poet's lost vision, so too does the prefatory Voice fail in his attempt to moralize the poem. The Voice's very language embodies this negativity.¹²³ The preface's second paragraph is replete with negative constructs: "the picture is *not* barren of instruction to actual men" (73, emphasis added). The Voice speaks of those who are "deluded by *no* generous error, instigated by *no* sacred thirst of doubtful knowledge, duped by *no* illustrious superstition, loving *nothing* on this earth, and cherishing *no* hopes beyond" (73). And the solitaries who alienate themselves from community suffer because "*none* feel with them their common nature . . . *neither* friends *nor* lovers, *nor* fathers, *nor* citizens of the world, *nor* benefactors of their country" and ultimately, the "*vacancy* of their spirit makes itself felt" (73). The pervasive negativity that characterizes the second paragraph's moral calls into question its own validity, the moral imploding through its inability or refusal to present itself in positive terms.

The very locus of *Alastor's* destabilized meaning, the preface's second paragraph substitutes infinite absolute negativity for a clearly directed moral, deploys unstable irony in place of a more definitive referentiality.¹²⁴ Here is the site of Hegel's "subjective void," especially in light of the preface's characterization of *Alastor* as "allegorical of one of the most interesting situations of the human mind" (72), a strategy of depicting the poem as a primarily subjective or idealistic vision, in which the narrative events represent states of inner consciousness. In this context, the extent to which *Alastor* chronicles the failed attempts of one who attempts to poeticize life, in the negative sense of a Hegelian or Kierkegaardian

¹²³ *Alastor* is not unique in this regard: Timothy Webb has analyzed Shelley's "extraordinary predilection for the negative" (37), a rhetorical strategy that characterizes much of his poetry and prose.

¹²⁴ For Wayne Booth, "unstable irony" denotes a type of irony that resists interpretation: with unstable irony, "since the universe (or at least the universe of discourse) is inherently absurd, all statements are subject to ironic undermining" (241).

reading of romantic irony, becomes clear. For the Poet's immersion in his own images, ideals, and reveries at the expense of forming relationships with others—best illustrated in the Poet's failure to notice the Arab maiden who tends to him—invokes the “evil” element of irony so despised by Hegel. Such all-pervasive self-absorption, assumed by Hegel and to a lesser extent by Kierkegaard to be the inevitable result of a worldview that rejects or avoids its given actuality in favour of a deceptive liberatory poetic subjectivity, leads to the ethical void within which *Alastor's* Poet eschews community to pursue instead the fleeting dream-image of the veiled maid. Indeed, even the conditions for poetic creation are negatively imaged, with a state of mental vacancy emphasized during acts of creation. During his tour of ancient civilizations, the Poet “gazed and gazed / And gazed, till meaning on his vacant mind / Flashed like strong inspiration” (125-127). And after the veiled maiden image disintegrates, “sleep, / Like a dark flood suspended in its course, / Rolled back its impulse on his vacant brain” (190-191).

But what this prefatory emphasis on the poem's subjective dimension elides, or seeks to downplay, is the unavoidable reality of the poem's quest-narrative, in which the Poet is actually depicted as a man among men. The preface's emphasis on inner vision as represented through the poem's external events threatens to distract the reader from recognizing different allegorical possibilities. The preface attempts to condition the reader to interpret the poem as allegorical of mental states. But a reading that cuts against the grain of Shelley's prefatory intention could draw out the elements of a different subtext, one that reads the poem as allegorical of Shelley's actual situation as a late-Romantic-period poet in an age of prose. In this context, the Poet “seeks in vain” (73), not for his ideal prototype, but for a sympathetic readership. The passages chronicling what little contact the Poet does have with other people can be aligned with the passages already quoted above, in which the

Poet is generally portrayed as one whose melodies are enjoyed by others at an unconscious level, yet whose presence always remains ephemeral and, at least until future generations are moved to action by his words, ineffectual. Thus, in the only section of *Alastor* in which the Poet is actually depicted among others, he is variously described as a “fleeting visitant,” a “spectral form” whose “wild eyes” frighten small children, whose presence causes young maidens to “interpret half the woe / That wasted him” (267-268). But the glaringly obvious omission from the poem is poetry itself: for an extended narrative poem elegiacally commemorating a poet’s life and death, the Poet’s actual poetic output never receives mention, in the poem or in the preface. When finally mentioned, in the poem’s final stanza, poetry is negatively classified among other art forms that prove incapable of adequately doing justice to the Poet’s memory:

Let not high verse, mourning the memory
Of that which is no more, or painting’s woe
Or sculpture, speak in feeble imagery
Their own cold powers. Art and eloquence,
And all the shews o’ the world, are frail and vain
To weep a loss that turns their lights to shade. (707-712)

This ironic devaluation of poetry in the context of a poem about a failed Poet whose works are never referred to reveals Shelley’s nervous awareness of the status of poetry in his given historical moment. The Poet’s significance is only relevant to the Narrator, himself a poet. In the Poet’s portrayal, the emphasis is on his idealistic self-absorption and his status as social outcast, not on the subject matter or the value of his poetry. In this context, the “furies” invoked in the preface who pursue the Poet to “speedy ruin” would more likely be critics than supernatural phantasms. For a year after *Alastor’s* publication, with the

composition of *Laon and Cythna*, real-life critics will take the place of imaginary furies in the space of Shelley's prefaces, a trend that will culminate in his preface to *Adonais*.

One can glimpse traces of the emergence of Shelleyan romantic irony in the preface-poem relation in *Alastor*. A more fully formed parabolic scheme will not emerge until the publication of *Laon and Cythna*, yet even at the beginning of Shelley's poetic career, one can detect the origins of an invasive ironic subtext. The antithetical co-existence of a Schlegelian potentiality for infinite transcendence and a Hegelian descent into absolute negativity polarizes the logic of the preface, undermining its moral and exposing a rift between Shelley's carefully controlled semantic intention and the vagaries of its potential reception. At this early stage, Shelley's prefatory persona reveals itself as symptomatically formless, a vague, negatively constructed figure whose identity will, over the years, develop in response to the exigencies of the print marketplace. Although the all-encompassing subjectivity characteristic of Hegelian irony has not yet manifested itself in Shelley's poetry, his prefaces will develop as sites of an increasingly anxious and ironic self-figuration through which he attempts to mediate his poetry to an amorphous public sphere.

Negative Becoming: *Laon and Cythna*

In a perfectly chiasmic reversal of Mary's note to *Alastor*, Shelley proclaims in his 1817 preface to *Laon and Cythna* that the latter poem is "narrative, not didactic" (PS 33). Clearly *Laon and Cythna's* preface is less didactic than its predecessor's, as its scope is considerably broadened beyond the moral-imposing intention of *Alastor's* preface. Moreover, the preface to *Laon and Cythna* is fundamentally public, with a much more clearly defined and outward 'Shelley' figured in its space. As Shelley emerges from the introverted reverie of *Alastor* to depict his vision of an idealized pair of sibling revolutionaries in *Laon and Cythna*, he

introduces his “first serious appeal to the public” (44) with the longest and most elaborate preface in his *corpus*. Thus, a year after *Alastor*’s publication, Shelley has already negated its significance, implicitly dismissing it as apprentice-work. In keeping with the *Laon and Cythna* preface’s tendency to announce Shelley’s entry into the public literary sphere, this rejection of *Alastor* (and the earlier *Queen Mab*) intends to disarm critics who might negatively associate Shelley with these earlier productions.¹²⁵ If, however, Shelley’s immersion in romantic irony intensifies as his poetic career progresses, then *Laon and Cythna*’s preface-poem relation bears out this intensification in two crucial ways. First, this transcendently homeless preface introduces a poem that soon ceased to exist. Immediately after its 1817 first printing, *Laon and Cythna* was suppressed by publisher Charles Ollier because of its subversive nature (Ingpen 422). Forced to revise the poem against his will, Shelley nonetheless complied with his publisher’s wishes and published the altered *Revolt of Islam*. The original preface, however, remained intact when *The Revolt of Islam* was finally published, with the exception of the cancelled last paragraph. Thus, this triangulated relation between the preface and the two disparate poems connected to it results in all texts being implicated in a permanent state of (negative) becoming.

¹²⁵ Even as early as July 1816, Shelley was already expressing embarrassment about *Alastor*: writing from Geneva to Thomas Love Peacock, he inquires about the reception of the recently published volume, noting that “I hope it has already sheltered itself in the bosom of its mother, Oblivion, from whose embraces no one could have been so barbarous to tear it except me” (*PBSL* 1: 490). Later that same year, writing to Leigh Hunt in December 1816, Shelley again concedes that “the oblivion which overtook my little attempt of ‘Alastor’ I am ready to acknowledge was sufficiently merited in *itself*; but then it was not accorded in the correct proportion considering the success of the most contemptible drivellings” (*PBSL* 1: 517). Tellingly, Shelley uses this occasion to again emphasize his dissociation from his given actuality: “I am an outcast from human society; my name is execrated by all who understand its entire import” (517). Nonetheless, Shelley still desired to sell copies of *Alastor* despite these misgivings. In December 1817 he asks publisher Charles Ollier to include an advertisement for the volume at the end of *Laon and Cythna*, hoping that “there should be a demand for a second edition of ‘Alastor’” (*PBSL* 1: 571).

Second, the *Laon and Cythna* preface, in addition to the dedication and the poem itself, introduces autonarration¹²⁶ as a significant element in the poem's structure. In the space of an otherwise fictional poem, Shelley incorporates autobiographical elements throughout all levels of the poem's narrative, creating a parabolic effect that permeates the narrative. Written, as Shelley explains in a letter to Godwin, "to leave some record of myself," as "the communications of a dying man" (*PBSL* 1: 577), the poem functions doubly as a revolutionary political allegory and an allegorized autobiography through which Shelleyan parabasis comes into being by means of the preface's excessively anxious focus on the poem's reception. In *Laon and Cythna*, Shelley becomes increasingly engaged with taking on his public in his prefaces, and he also begins to make the case for his right to "literature," in the sense defined by Derrida as the "*right to say everything*" (*On the Name* 28; his italics).¹²⁷ Thus, Shelley can experiment with the theme of incest in *Laon and Cythna* without necessarily endorsing it or engaging in the act himself. In the purely speculative realm of literature, anything is permissible, and one should not be persecuted for expressing one's beliefs. Thus, autonarration as a form of romantic irony allows Shelley to put subversive ideas into play while ironizing them and thus rendering them self-critical, building this case for "literature" with increasing confidence in the preface and paratexts.

¹²⁶ Rajan has coined the term "autonarration" to describe a narrative in which autobiographical and fictional elements intermingle in a text. Autonarration "is not autobiography because it is still fiction, but it is not just fiction because of its genesis in the life of a real individual" (*Romantic* 97). *Laon and Cythna* is autonarrational in the sense that Shelley incorporates many autobiographical elements from his own life, but these elements are presented in what is otherwise a highly wrought and idealized fictional poetic universe.

¹²⁷ Indeed, Derrida associates the very idea of democracy with this definition of "literature": "Literature is a modern invention, inscribed in conventions and institutions which, to hold on to just this trait, secure in principle its *right to say everything*. Literature just ties its destiny to a certain noncensure, to the space of democratic freedom (freedom of the press, freedom of speech, etc.). No democracy without literature; no literature without democracy. . . . And each time that a literary work is censured, democracy is in danger, as everyone agrees. The possibility of literature, the legitimation that a society gives it, the allaying of suspicion or terror with regard to it, all that goes together—politically—with the unlimited right to ask any question, to suspect all dogmatism, to analyze every presupposition, even those of the ethics or the politics of responsibility" (*On the Name* 28).

In many ways, Shelley's preface to *Laon and Cythna* is comprised of a dialectical synthesis of two prefaces already discussed in this study: it is an ironic re-working of Godwin's preface to *Political Justice*, and it also conflates elements of Wordsworth's prefaces to *Lyrical Ballads* and *Poems*. Shelley intended *Laon and Cythna* to be, as William St. Clair points out, a "successor" to *Political Justice*, an attempt to "adapt the truths of the old Enlightenment to the new post-revolutionary revolution" (*Godwins* 431). In essence, Shelley poeticizes the philosophical principles laid down in Godwin's seminal work, attempting simultaneously to actualize and to idealize these principles in the scope of the poem's narrative. That Shelley intentionally situates *Laon and Cythna* in direct relation to the first edition of *Political Justice* is made clear in the striking similarities between the prefaces.¹²⁸ For instance, where Godwin describes *Political Justice* as "the proper vehicle of a liberal morality" (*PJ* iii), Shelley describes his poem as conveying a "liberal and comprehensive morality" (*PS* 32). Godwin hoped his work would encourage "habits of sincerity, fortitude and justice" (iii) while Shelley sought to inculcate "a virtuous enthusiasm for . . . liberty and justice" (32). Like Godwin, who notes that his sixteen months spent composing *Political Justice* were spent "devoted to the purpose with unremitting ardour" (iv), Shelley's six months composing *Laon and Cythna* were also "devoted to the task with unremitting ardour" (45-46). And both writers, aware of the legal precariousness of their respective situations as subversive writers in repressive political climates, acknowledge their courageousness: Godwin notes that "it is the property of truth to be fearless" (v) and Shelley similarly writes that "I have written fearlessly" (42). This last point, however, marks the point of difference between Shelley's situation and Godwin's. For what distinguishes the fate of *Laon and Cythna* from that of *Political Justice* is how the prefaces manage their texts' interpellation. Godwin's preface

¹²⁸ William St. Clair points out these similarities, noting the extent to which Shelley had internalized Godwin's ideas to the point that he adopts many of the same phrases employed by Godwin (*Godwins* 431).

simultaneously affirmed and denied its inflammatory relation to the revolutionary moment of its publication, while emphasizing the work's speculative nature and the unlikelihood of its ever being circulated widely enough to influence the general public. Godwin was thus able to get away with publishing the treatise uncensored, despite its sustained, powerful, and rational indictment of established institutions. Shelley, on the other hand, notwithstanding his prefatory attempt to deploy these Godwinian strategies, cannot save his work from censorship even despite his claim in the preface that the poem is directed to an "enlightened and refined" readership.¹²⁹

The second half of *Laon and Cythna's* preface reads like a more condensed, updated version of Wordsworth's preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. For Shelley reveals an intense preoccupation not only with his vocational development, outlined through a Wordsworthian poetic 'resumé' briefly chronicling the circumstances of his poetic development, but with his anxious attempt to situate himself in the public sphere. He begins, like Wordsworth in his preface, by emphasizing his stylistic originality: he neither presumes to compete with "our greatest contemporary Poets" nor is he willing to "tread in the footsteps" of his predecessors (38). Yet even as he presents an essentially Wordsworthian argument, he attempts to distance himself from Wordsworth with a statement denouncing Wordsworth's systemizing tendency: "Nor have I permitted any system relating to mere words, to divert the attention of the reader from whatever interest I may have succeeded in creating, to my own ingenuity in contriving to disgust them according to the rules of criticism" (38-39). Shelley's use of the word "system" here recalls the term most commonly used to denigrate Wordsworth's poetics. As Scott Hess has shown, critics, especially Francis Jeffrey, repeatedly expressed

¹²⁹ Shelley's situation in 1817, however, is far different from Godwin's was in the mid-1790s: Godwin is writing in a first spirit of political enlightenment and progress, however much he also has to backtrack; his son-in-law is writing post-Treason Trials, post-Gagging Acts, and post-Napoleon, so the necessity of his political irony is that much more urgent.

their hostility towards Wordsworth's "system" of poetic style and content, which was primarily conveyed through the *Lyrical Ballads*' preface (473). Shelley professes no such system, and he brings up the widely debated topic of poetic style only to cursorily dismiss it. Whereas Wordsworth's entire poetics is founded on an elaborately delineated stylistic proclamation that posits the "real" language of men as the ideal poetic language, Shelley merely states that "I have simply clothed my thoughts in what appeared to me the most obvious and appropriate language" (39). In the case of *Laon and Cythna*, the most appropriate language is the Spenserian stanza, a complex stylistic choice that suggests Shelley's intended audience is not the reading public at large, but rather those "enlightened and refined" (32) readers identified in the preface's first paragraph. Thus, like Godwin with *Political Justice*, Shelley has targeted a more elite readership—like Wordsworth's "people," or Coleridge's clerisy—to convey his revolutionary ideals, rather than directing his poem to a radical, working-class audience or a mass audience.

Also like Wordsworth in his preface to *Poems*, Shelley assumes an antagonistic tone: yet whereas Wordsworth rails generally against the "public," Shelley hones in on the literary critics, whose judgment so significantly influences a writer's success or failure in the marketplace. This is the first of numerous Shelleyan tirades against the critical establishment, and it reveals a somewhat naïve and reductive understanding of the potentially symbiotic relationship between artist and critic. Providing a brief and hostile sketch of the history of literary criticism, Shelley suggests "this system of criticism sprang up in that torpid interval when Poetry was not" (43). Having already denied his own involvement with a system, Shelley's second use of the term here is also likely intended to function in the derogatory sense defined above. He defines criticism as "the art which professes to regulate and limits its [poetry's] powers" (43). Criticism and poetry, he claims,

“cannot subsist together” (43). And criticism can never attain the status of “true science” (43) because, unlike science, it follows rather than leads the opinions of mankind.

Ultimately, the professional critics perform a disservice to literature because they force poets to “impose gratuitous fetters” on their imaginations, forcing them to become “accomplices” in the “daily murder of all genius” (43).¹³⁰ To this end, Shelley chides his contemporaries who, “thoughtless of immortality, are exquisitely sensible to temporary praise or blame.

They write with the fear of Reviews before their eyes” (43). By contrast, however, Shelley assures the public that he, like Homer, Shakespeare, and Milton, has sought to write with an “utter disregard of anonymous censure” (245). By the very act of calling attention to the anxieties experienced by writers fearful of critical censure, Shelley implicates himself: his persistent hostility towards critics belies his feigned indifference to critical judgment. The prefatory space of the poem is thus occupied by the figure of a radically divided subject: a figure emblematic of the necessary and profound internal schism suffered by the idealist seeking not only to reach a sympathetic reading public in a prosaic age, but somehow seeking to bypass the ubiquitous critical machinery of consecration and devaluation.

Shelley’s poetic ideal is generated, like Wordsworth’s ideal in the 1815 Preface to *Poems*, by the desire to escape the bounds of his own historicity, a desire perpetuated by his belief in the judgments of futurity. Both writers fantasize about joining the exalted ranks of consecrated “great” writers, far away from the “misfortune of this age” Shelley laments in

¹³⁰ Shelley’s view of criticism here is similar to that of Wordsworth, whom Arnold cites in his essay “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” as claiming that the critical power is “infinitely” lower than the “inventive” power (2). Arnold acknowledges that the critical power is “of lower rank than the creative.” But to justify the critic’s necessity, he distinguishes between epochs of expansion and epochs of concentration. To create the conditions for an epoch of expansion, within which the artist can thrive, there must first be a period of concentration when the critic creates “an intellectual situation” (4) through his capacity for “analysis and discovery” (4). Once the critic has generated new ideas, then follows the age of expansion, within which the artist, characterized by his capacity for “synthesis and exposition” (4), can take advantage of the intellectual energy of his historical moment. Thus, for Arnold, and contrary to Shelley, criticism and creation co-exist in a symbiotic relationship.

the *Revolt's* preface. This prefatory wish-fulfillment, predicated on the very economic literary system from which it seeks to disengage itself, will form the foundation of Shelley's romantic irony as a primary symptom of his dissociation from his given actuality.

Although the poem was originally published before being censored, few original versions circulated: of the original printing of *Laon and Cythna's* first edition, only three copies were released to the public, one of which ended up at the *Quarterly Review*, where it was harshly criticized for its author's unorthodox opinions.¹³¹ Shelley was forced—against his will—to revise the poem for publication, and after extensive revision it was finally published in 1818 as *The Revolt of Islam*.¹³² Dejected, Shelley claimed the poem was “spoiled” (qtd. in Forman 75), feeling that the revisions diluted the intensity of his original poetic vision. The preface's first line depicts a self-deprecating yet subtly confident Shelley who acknowledges the unlikeliness of *Laon and Cythna's* success: “The poem which I now present to the world, is an attempt from which I scarcely dare to expect success, and in which a

¹³¹ The extent to which Shelley's prefaces directly engage the circumstances of their historical moment is evident in the intertextual relationship between Shelley's preface to *Prometheus Unbound* and the *Quarterly Review's* April 1819 review of *Laon and Cythna*. John Taylor Coleridge, the anonymous *Quarterly* reviewer, accuses Shelley of imitating Wordsworth's style, yet possessing neither “heart nor principle to comprehend its import, or follow its application” (UH 135). Halfway through the composition of *Prometheus Unbound's* preface, Shelley then added an additional five paragraphs as a response to Coleridge's charges of imitation (Zillman 24). Directly acknowledging the inevitability of formal similarity in a given historical period, of the artist's participation in the spirit of the age, Shelley points out that “it is impossible that any one who inhabits the same age with such writers as those who stand in the foremost ranks of our own, can conscientiously assure himself, that his language and tone of thought may not have been modified by the study of the productions of those extraordinary intellects. . . Poets are in one sense the creators and in another the creations of their age” (SPP 207).

¹³² Charles Ollier, Shelley's publisher, demanded Shelley make the revisions after having been informed by early purchasers of the poem's first edition that its contents were incestuous and blasphemous. Ollier was particularly sensitive because of the repressive political climate of late 1817. As reform protests intensified, Habeas Corpus had been suspended since March, and there had been recent arrests of publishers and booksellers accused of distributing seditious publications. William Hone, journalist and publisher, had been arrested for publishing scriptural parodies and was standing trial for blasphemy and seditious at the time of *Laon and Cythna's* publication (PS 15). In a December 1817 letter to Ollier, Shelley urges the publisher to ignore “the murmurs of a few bigots,” arguing that because the poem was targeted to a refined readership, prosecution would be unlikely: “I don't believe that if the book was quietly and regularly published the Government would touch anything of a character so refined and so remote from the conceptions of the vulgar. They would hesitate before they invaded a member of the higher circles of the republic of letters. But if they see us tremble, they will make no distinctions” (PBSL 1: 579).

writer of established fame might fail without disgrace” (32). In keeping with what has become a Romantic preface-writing commonplace also used by Godwin, Hays, and Wordsworth, Shelley classifies his work as an “experiment” (32). Shelley’s preface is doubly elusive here: not only does he explicitly classify the poem’s contents as experimental, thus emphasizing its speculative nature, but the *humilitas* characterizing his opening remarks obscures the confidence with which he asserts, through the prefatory *insinuatio*, his right to literature. Like Mary Hays, whose figure of Eusebia conceals the rhetorical force through which she asserts her right to philosophy, so too does Shelley’s prefatory figure perform a similar function.

But Shelley’s choice of the verb “present” to introduce the poem ironically emphasizes the futility of his situation. As Genette notes, the function of a paratext is to “present” the text it supplements, not only in the sense that one offers or gives something, but also in the “strongest sense: to *make present*, to ensure the text’s presence in the world, its ‘reception’ and consumption in form . . . of a book” (1). In both senses of the word, Shelley’s preface is ultimately detached from the poem to which it should have been affixed. Shelley is not presenting *Laon and Cythna*, nor is he ensuring the text’s presence in the world. Rather, the preface, remnant of a poem that no longer exists, emphasizes the *absence* of the original poem. *The Revolt of Islam*, the poem that *is* presented in *Laon and Cythna*’s place, is instead made present by the preface. This situation crystallizes one crucial aspect of Shelley’s relation to the public sphere. Relinquishing control over his own text, Shelley must conform to the demands of censorship as proscribed by the very reading public whose ideologies he seeks to change. How Shelley manages this forced censorship reveals that he was less deft than Godwin in turning censorship against itself; in this regard, Shelley’s dilemma could also be compared not only to Godwin’s publication of *Political Justice*, but also to Godwin’s

situation in 1794, when the original preface to *Caleb Williams* was suppressed. But whereas Godwin's 1796 second edition featured a revised preface informing the reader of original preface's fate, Shelley does not take the opportunity to revise his preface to account for the forced changes in the poem's content, failing to capitalize on an opportunity to illustrate a real-life instance of the tyranny explored imaginatively in the poem. As I argued in Chapter One, the Preface to Godwin's second edition of *Caleb Williams* augments the novel's political dimension by showing how censorship infiltrated his novel, forcing him to excise a portion of the text. A revised preface exposing the repressive climate surrounding *Laon and Cythna's* publication could similarly have strengthened Shelley's thematization of government oppression *vis à vis* recounting the process of how *Laon and Cythna* became *The Revolt of Islam*.

The one significant prefatory revision Shelley was forced to make for the *Revolt of Islam* was the cancellation of the preface's final paragraph. This excised paragraph—an explanation or apology for the poem's incestuous content—becomes irrelevant in the context of the revised poem because Laon and Cythna are no longer brother and sister in the *Revolt of Islam*; instead, in the revised poem, Cythna becomes an orphan entrusted to the care of Laon's parents.¹³³ The cancellation of the preface's culminating paragraph symbolizes the

¹³³ Of the sixty-three lines of *Laon and Cythna* altered during the revisions, thirteen were changed or cancelled because of their incestuous content. Shelley attempts to downplay these changes in a letter to Thomas Moore in which he explains that he made "some alterations which consist in little else than the substitution of the words *friend* or *lover* for that of *brother & sister*" (PBSL 1: 582). But Shelley's apparent *laissez-faire* attitude here belies the frustration he felt at having to dilute one of the poem's fundamental thematic elements. Some examples of the alterations made to eliminate the incest motif include the following: When Cythna is first introduced, she is originally described as "a little sister" (847); this is changed in the *Revolt* to "An orphan with my parents lived" (847). "This sister sweet" (884) becomes "my playmate sweet" (884); "What thoughts held sway over my sister's slumber" (1108) becomes "o'er Cythna's lonely slumber" (1108); "'twas her brother's face" (1680) becomes "her lover's face"; "I had a brother once but he was dead" (2138) becomes "I had a dear friend once" (2138); "My own sweet sister looked" (2549) becomes "my own sweet Cythna looked" (2549); "the common blood which ran within our frames" (2610) becomes "the blood itself" (2610); "With such close sympathies, for to each other / Had high and solemn hopes, the gentle might / Of earliest love, and all the thoughts which smother / Cold Evil's power, now linked a sister and a brother" (2682-5) becomes "With such close sympathies, for they had sprung / From linked youth, and from the gentle might / Of earliest love, delayed and cherished long, / Which common hopes and fears made, like a tempest, strong" (2682-5). Other

destruction of the poem's central motif, for Shelley elaborates the thematic necessity for depicting Laon and Cythna as incestuous lovers:

In the personal conduct of my Hero and Heroine, there is one circumstance which was intended to startle the reader from the trance of ordinary life. It was my object to break through the crust of those outworn opinions on which established institutions depend. I have appealed therefore to the most universal of all feelings, and have endeavoured to strengthen the moral sense, by forbidding it to waste its energies in seeking to avoid actions which are only crimes of convention. It is because there is so great a multitude of artificial vices, that there are so few real virtues. . . The circumstance of which I speak [incest], was introduced, however, merely to accustom men to that charity and toleration which the exhibition of a practice so widely differing from their own, has a tendency to promote. (PS 47)

This canceled paragraph provides the preface's most explicit moral. It highlights not only the symbolic significance of the incest motif, but it also makes a case for the ameliorative potential of its application. Shelley's intention is to expose his readers to worldviews that challenge the limits of conventionality. Thus exposed, readers can sympathize with the differences of others, all the while discovering that their moral opposition to otherwise 'natural' practices such as incest has in fact been internalized as ideology. This is how Shelley seeks to "strengthen the moral sense." Like his attempted moral to *Alastor*, however, this attempt is also a failure, as the moral finds itself excised from the final version. But incest functions much more comprehensively in *Laon and Cythna*. For Shelley seeks to depict the "most universal of all feelings," a sentiment already stated in the preface's first

alterations are generally made to change lines feared by Ollier to be blasphemous, containing references to atheism, or God, Hell, and Christ.

paragraph, when he describes *Laon and Cythna* as depicting “human passion in its most universal character” (32). Indeed the brother-sister relationship between Laon and Cythna is structurally necessary for enacting the poem’s overall thematic message, for symbolically the two represent the amalgamation of the feminine and masculine spirit, a universal correlative of the fusion of type and antitype imagined in the prose fragment “On Love.” And the incest taboo, in the context of the poem’s backlash against the “stubborn minds” (1647) of outworn custom, is yet another arbitrary social custom to be railed against. Laon and Cythna’s relationship is not a *natural* aberration; it is a *social* aberration, and as the love portrayed between the two characters is pure and unforced, both parties have consented to a bond that cannot be deemed immoral merely because of the imposed rule of ancient strictures. Moreover, in light of the poem’s feminist tendency, it is crucial for Shelley’s purpose that the two main characters are brother and sister: her being a sister puts her in a situation of equality. Laon describes her as “my second self,” his “sole associate” (886), and observes the absolute intellectual synthesis between their minds: “hers too were all my thoughts” (940). The depth of their shared history, the very “common blood” (2610) that unites them, has created a bond vastly more powerful and equitable than that which might exist between lovers who have not been together since their infancy¹³⁴ as “those / Who grow together cannot choose but love, / If faith or custom do not interpose” (2687-89). Ultimately, however, this crucial aspect of the poem is erased from the preface and the poem: even the poem’s changed title downplays the importance of the protagonists’ relationship, emphasizing instead its political dimension.

¹³⁴ The relative equality of the brother-sister bond as compared to the marriage bond can be understood more clearly in light of Shelley’s argument about the institution of marriage in his prose fragment “On Marriage.” Here he classifies the “original spirit of marriage” as a debasement of women, who become “the property of men, because they are the materials of usefulness or pleasure . . . valuable to them [men] in the same manner as their flocks and herds were valuable” (*SP* 119).

The idea of incest, however, had even more wide-ranging significance for Shelley than as an overarching element of *Laon and Cythna's* symbology. The original preface ended with a terse footnote distancing the real-life Shelley's practices from the ideas propagated in *Laon and Cythna*: "The sentiments connected with and characteristic of this circumstance [incest] have no personal reference to the writer" (47). In this early phase of Shelley's attempt to make a case for his right to literature, he is impelled to demarcate the boundaries separating his real-life self from the ideas speculatively worked through in the poem. This footnote marks the moment when Shelley abandons the character of public orator he has assumed in the preface to refer explicitly and frankly to his real-life public persona. For at the time of *Laon and Cythna's* publication, he was better known as a member of the Byronic 'League of Incest' than as a revolutionary poet. This he articulates in a letter to Teresa Guiccioli where he details the "monstrous" calumnies leveled against him and Byron:¹³⁵ "They had said that we had formed a pact to outrage all that is regarded as most sacred in human society. Allow me, madam, to spare you the details. I will only tell you that atheism, incest, and many other things—sometimes ridiculous and sometimes terrible—were imputed to us" (*PBSL* 2: 328). Thus, Shelley's provocation straddles the gap between the aesthetic realm and his personal life. On the one hand, incest was a topical motif, having been explored in several other contemporary works;¹³⁶ thus, its depiction in *Laon and Cythna* was in no way anomalous. If Shelley was concerned about the likelihood of the inevitable *ad hominem* attacks that would result from his poem's publication, his decision to include a

¹³⁵ Rumours abounded about various incestuous affairs, such as Byron's relationship with his half sister, Augusta Leigh (Brown 214), and tales circulated that Shelley had fathered a child with his sister-in-law Claire Clairmont and Leigh Hunt was also believed to have been infatuated with his sister-in-law (St. Clair, *Godwins* 420-21).

¹³⁶ For instance, Byron's *Manfred*, Hunt's *Story of Rimini*, and Wieland's *History of Agathon* all contained incestuous subject matter (Brown 212-214).

footnote acknowledging his sordid reputation is, at best, a poorly calculated gamble. For even alluding, however vaguely, to these allegations, he provides his detractors with that much more fodder, especially in the context of a poem so fervently celebrating the forbidden practice. If Shelley intends to dispel the rumours that have plagued his reputation, *not* dwelling on the topic of incest would likely have been a more effective precautionary strategy. This prefatory footnote marks the precise moment at which Shelley's preface becomes parabolic. But this is not parabasis in the playful, detached sense envisioned by Schlegel; rather, this peculiarly Shelleyan instance of parabasis bears the weight of the pressure exerted by a hostile public sphere. An ambivalently defensive maneuver, the note draws attention to aspects of Shelley's character that he really intends to erase from public memory.¹³⁷ So parabasis in this instance performs itself negatively, figuring a Shelley reacting to public interpellation, nervously constructing a self-protecting cover to curb the onslaught of public denigration that has already plagued him throughout his brief poetic career. That parabasis first appears in such an obscure and unlikely place—the undefined zone of a note to a paragraph of a preface soon canceled in its revised form—makes its appeal all the more ironic, for its erasure highlights the fragility of a figure bracing itself against the powerful machinations of a partisan literary system bent on destroying ideologically wayward voices.

¹³⁷ Nonetheless, even two years after the *Revolt of Islam*'s publication, and despite its alterations, the conservative *Quarterly Review* published a review based on the original *Laon and Cythna*, yet acknowledging that the revisions merely “reproduced the same poisons” as the original. The reviewer, John Taylor Coleridge, singles out the incestuous relationship between Laon and Cythna as especially detestable, while failing to inform the reader that in the revised *Revolt of Islam*, the two protagonists are no longer brother and sister. “We all groan under a multiplied burthen of crime *merely conventional*,” writes Coleridge in a summary of Shelley's view of the nature of vice, “among which Mr. Shelley specifies with great *sang froid* the commission of *incest!*” (UH 136; Coleridge's italics). The ethics of reviewing a poem withdrawn from circulation notwithstanding, Coleridge's critique ultimately descends into *ad hominem* slander, ending with cryptic hints of dark secrets from Shelley's personal life: “if we might withdraw the veil of private life, and tell what we *now* know about him, it would be indeed a disgusting picture that we should exhibit” (142). Coleridge does not elaborate, and it is not exactly clear what sordid personal details he is referring to; nonetheless, the review's slanderous spirit is typical of conservative attacks on Shelley's character based on spurious accounts of his iconoclastic personal life.

The prefatory note is but one element of a much larger parabolic scheme. For even the revised preface to the *Revolt of Islam* ends with a paragraph that similarly seeks to distinguish between the empirical Shelley and the ideas contained within the poem: “I trust that the reader will carefully distinguish between those opinions which have a dramatic propriety in reference to the characters which they are designed to elucidate and those which are properly my own” (46). Thus, despite the revisions, Shelley still anticipates the censure of particular aspects of *Laon and Cythna* pertaining to its blasphemous subject matter: he carefully distances his own view of the existence of a “Supreme Being” from the “degrading idea which men have conceived of” it, and he also denounces the views of those who espouse the “cruelty and malevolence of God” (46) in contrast to his own view of a benevolent God. Shelley’s approach here recalls Mary Hays’s cautionary warning in her preface to *Emma Courtney* in which she seeks to distance her own self from the conduct and opinions of her characters. Hays, like Shelley, also attempted to assert her right to literature in *Emma Courtney*’s preface. But for those calumniators who seek to vilify subversive authors for their ideological waywardness, such warnings are ultimately futile: just as Hays was attacked for the views of Emma Courtney, so too was Shelley attacked for the blasphemous content in *Laon and Cythna* despite his efforts to distinguish himself from his characters.

In addition to the preface, *Laon and Cythna* is replete with autonarrational elements elsewhere in the poem. The fourteen-stanza Dedication, for instance, presents the poem to “Mary --- ---”¹³⁸ to whom he has returned after his “summer task” (1). Mary herself is ideally figured as the “child of love and light” (9) with a “beloved name,” a reference to her illustrious surname and parentage. Godwin and Wollstonecraft are again referred to later in the dedication: “They say that thou wert lovely from thy birth, / Of glorious parents” (100-

¹³⁸ The fair copy reads “Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley,” but by the time it was published, Shelley had omitted her surnames (48), revealing Shelley’s ambivalence about how explicit his autobiographical details should be.

101), with Wollstonecraft described as “One [who] then left this earth / Whose life was like a setting planet mild” (102-103); and Godwin is depicted as “a voice [who] came forth from many a mighty spirit, / Which was the echo of three thousand years; / And the tumultuous world stood mute to hear it” (101-111). But the dedication does not focus exclusively on those to whom Shelley dedicates the work. Shelley figures himself as well, devoting three stanzas to an account of a ‘conversion’ experience from his boyhood during which he has a sort of auditory hallucination while walking to school. The sounds of the boys in the schoolhouse strike him as “one echo from a world of woes – / The harsh and grating strife of tyrants and of foes” (26-27). Seized with a sudden epiphany, “I clasped my hands and looked around . . . I will be wise, / And just, and free, and mild, if in me lies / Such power, for I grow weary to behold / The selfish and the strong still tyrannise / Without reproach or check” (28, 31-35). Shelley identifies this moment as the primal scene of his intellectual development, the precise moment from which he devotes himself to the task of championing the oppressed against the tyranny of power. Thematically, Shelley’s narration of this experience certainly is not superfluous, as it aligns the empirical Shelley with the poem’s protagonists Laon and Cythna, both of whom similarly give up their lives to support liberation in its various forms. And within the poem, there are other characters who also recount similar revelations. But the space of the dedication is a curious interzone, neither part of the poem’s narrative, nor part of the preface. In terms of content, the dedication aligns itself more closely with the preface than the poem as it extends the preface’s autobiographical dimension; stylistically, however, the dedication veers closer to the poem because of its versified arrangement in Spenserian stanzas. The speaker of the dedication is a more obvious version of Shelley than the poem’s narrator, Laon, who despite his Shellyan characteristics has been figured as a distinct character. The poem’s autonarrational element

reveals itself through the gradual emergence of a gap between the poem's highly wrought literariness and the figures of an empirical Shelley circle. Rajan argues that autonarration "raises the question of the relationship between experience and its narrativization" (96), and in the case of a poeticized, idealized fantasy poem such as *Laon and Cythna*, the question becomes especially vexed as the 'characters' appear in the poem as etherealized phantasms of their real-life referents.

Thus, the effect of parabasis has been heightened through the dedication: 'Shelley' has appeared in two separate guises within two narrative levels, as the speaker of the prose preface and the speaker of the verse dedication. For a work intended to portray, according to its title, "a vision of the nineteenth century" dealing with lofty political and philosophical themes, *Laon and Cythna's* preface and dedication surround the poem with a highly subjective frame. Thus, by the time the reader finally enters the poem and encounters its first-person narrator, significant confusion arises about his identity. Assuming the narrator to be the same "I" as the dedication's speaker, the reader intuitively reads him as such, as no other textual markers clarify his identity. But other details about the narrator are clouded in obscurity until Canto Second, the first time he obliquely announces his name in the midst of narrating a conversion experience similar to the one 'Shelley' has already recounted in the dedication:

It must be so – I will arise and waken
The multitude, and like a sulphurous hill,
Which on a sudden from its snows has shaken
The swoon of ages, it shall burst and fill
The world with cleansing fire: it must, it will –
It may not be restrained! -- and who shall stand

Amid the rocking earthquake steadfast still,
But Laon? on high Freedom's desert land

A tower whose marble walls the leagued storms withstand. (784-92)

This stanza depicts the moment when Laon dedicates his life to revolutionary action, expressing his Shelleyan desire to effect radical social change. Through contrasting imagery of snow and fire and evoking the vast unleashed energies of natural disaster as a metaphor for the power of collective revolt, this stanza fully encapsulates Shelley's revolutionary agenda: the megalomaniacal desire to singularly rouse the "multitude" to action along with the desire to break the bonds of custom through shaking the "swoon of ages."¹³⁹

Overall, the process through which *Laon and Cythna* becomes *The Revolt of Islam* signals the first crisis in Shelley's poetic career. In this context, the parabasis already generated in the poem through its lengthy preface, dedication, and pervasive autonarration cannot but position itself defensively against the public sphere's moral onslaught. The omnipresence of a 'Shelley' who infuses all levels of the poem's structure assumes the guise of a figure whose identity constructs itself negatively, always aware of its dissonant relation to its given actuality. Ultimately, what Shelley identified in his letter to Godwin as the subjective motivating factor for the poem's composition—"to leave some record of myself . . . the communications of a dying man" (*PBSL* 1: 577) becomes a scene of wish-fulfillment enacted through the poem's narrative situation. The reader learns at the end of the poem that Laon and Cythna have both died. Laon's story has therefore been posthumously

¹³⁹ The OED cites this line from *The Revolt of Islam* as representative of the definition "a fainting-fit." However, it would make more sense as representative of another definition, the obsolete/rare "(a deep or sound) sleep." The OED cites only one example of the latter definition, a line from Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Given Shelley's philological debt to Spenser, and the relevance of the line's context, it would make more sense that Laon seeks to shake the sleep of ages than to shake the fainting-fit of ages, especially given the associations of outworn custom and conventions that Laon seeks to supersede.

narrated, after he has been transported to the Temple of the Spirit. Infused with the spirit of its revolutionary martyrs, the poem's narrative enacts the very intention Shelley seeks to convey according to his letter to Godwin. As the intended communication of a dying man, narrated by the fictional persona of a spectral presence, *Laon and Cythna* introduces elements of what one might call posthumous parabasis, a concept to be further explored in *Adonais*.

Unstable Irony: *Epipsychidion*

Shelley likewise characterizes *Epipsychidion* in terms that emphasize his mortality: in a letter to Charles Ollier, he writes that the poem “is a production of a portion of me already dead; and in this sense the advertisement is no fiction” (*PBSL* 2: 262-63).¹⁴⁰ But the pervasive subjectivity of *Epipsychidion* is more germane to its lyrical exploration of romantic love than to *Laon and Cythna*'s portrayal of revolutionary upheaval. *Epipsychidion*, in many fundamental ways, conflates aspects of *Alastor* and *Laon and Cythna*. Like *Alastor*, it chronicles the poet's search for his antitype, what he calls the “soul out of my soul,” the source of *Epipsychidion*'s title. In the later poem, Teresa Viviani—incribed as “Lady, Emilia V---” in the poem's dedication—replaces *Alastor*'s veiled maiden as the antitype's fleshly figure. And as in *Laon and Cythna*, autobiographical elements co-exist alongside fictionalized constructs, making *Epipsychidion* a fundamentally autonarrational narrative as well. Shelley makes his autobiographical intentions explicit both in the poem and in his letter to John Gisborne in which he admits the poem is an “idealized history of my life and feelings”

¹⁴⁰ Elsewhere in this letter to Ollier, Shelley expands on his desire to publish anonymously and his intended audience: “It is to be published simply for the esoteric few; and I make its author a secret, to avoid the malignity of those who turn sweet food into poison; transforming all they touch into the corruption of their own natures. My wish with respect to it is, that it should be printed immediately in the simplest form, and merely one hundred copies: those who are capable of judging and feeling rightly with respect to a composition of so abstruse a nature, certainly do not arrive at that number—among those, at least, who would ever be excited to read an obscure and anonymous production; and it would give me no pleasure that the vulgar should read it” (*PBSL* 2: 263).

(*PBSL* 2: 434). Certainly Mary treated the poem as autobiographical: of all Shelley's major verse edited by Mary, *Epipsychidion* alone received no explanatory notes from her. One could plausibly conclude that she was offended by a poem that expressed her husband's deep longing for Teresa Viviani; in which he denounced marriage as "the dreariest and the longest journey" suffered by "poor slaves" with "one chained friend, perhaps a jealous foe" (148-159); which represented Mary as the "cold moon" (281) with whom he shares a "cold chaste bed" (299). Its prefatory Advertisement, however, avoids direct autobiographical reference, instead indulging in what Gerard Genette calls the crypto-authorial preface, a type of preface in which the author writes under an assumed guise, often as the editor of a work supposedly written by its narrator (*Paratexts* 185). Thus, Shelley in the preface announces his deployment of this convention: he frames the poem as a found artifact, a poetic fragment believed to be the "dedication to some longer one" (392).

Indeed, here we find the first instance of a purely *fictional* preface in Shelley's *oeuvre*, a maneuver that appears self-contradictory in such a highly subjective poem. Yet Shelley's changed prefatory tactic counterbalances the preface against the poem in a nervous attempt to obscure or contain the poem's dominant autobiographical strain. In contrast to *Laon and Cythna's* preface, the preface to *Epipsychidion* seeks to evade its parabolic tendencies, simultaneously to announce and to deflect the poem's autobiographical content. Also in contrast to *Laon and Cythna*, Shelley asserts his right to literature in a more skillful way, explicitly fictionalizing the self and autobiography. Shelley is again experimenting with radical ideas that he may or may not share, thus leaving the poem open for further speculation rather than allowing for dogmatic readings that take the equation of Shelley with the poem's character too literally. But overall, the preface-poem relationship in *Epipsychidion* generates what is perhaps the most acute example of unstable irony in Shelley's corpus,

through which parabasis repeatedly calls into question the authenticity of the poem's figural representations. The preface enacts what Angela Leighton calls "an authorial self-deconstruction" (225), through which Shelley, publishing anonymously, seeks to erase any connection between himself and the published text. Yet an analysis of the three draft prefaces highlights the extent to which Shelley explored various modes of self-representation before settling on the published version.

As Paul de Man claims, autobiography does not reveal reliable self-knowledge; rather, it demonstrates the "impossibility of closure and totalization . . . of all textual systems made up of tropological substitutions" ("Autobiography" 71). If *Epipsychidion* promises to provide insight into Shelley's private life, it also simultaneously foregrounds the inadequacy (or impossibility) of figurative language to represent the events it seeks to immortalize. Shelley's anxiety about the frustrations inherent in any attempt at tropological autobiography is made explicit in the poem's Advertisement, in which the poem's fictional editor makes the following observation about figurative language: "great would be his shame who should rhyme anything under the garb of metaphor or rhetorical figure; and, being requested, could not strip his words of this dress so that they might have a true meaning" (392). Significantly, Shelley writes this statement in Italian, rendering it unintelligible to the average English reader. This Italian phrasing performs the very act of linguistic instability it seeks to describe. Just as the English reader will search in vain for the meaning of the foreign words, so too will the reader potentially search in vain for the meaning of the poem's figural language when stripped of its "dress." But what, exactly, is the "true meaning" to which Shelley refers? In the poem's autonarrational context, the "true meaning" would seem to imply actual events or characters, the real-life referents figuratively represented in the poem. So Shelley, before the poem has even begun, has already revealed a degree of self-conscious

skepticism about his verses' ability to convey the situations they are supposed to represent. Elsewhere in the poem's advertisement, Shelley claims that "the present Poem, like the *Vita Nuova* of Dante, is sufficiently intelligible to a certain class of readers without a matter-of-fact history of the circumstances to which it relates" (392). Anticipating the potential variety of interpretations (or misinterpretations) of his poem, Shelley attempts to downplay its autobiographical element, perhaps to deter critics from the sort of gossipy speculation that it has inevitably engendered. When the poem was originally published in 1821, it was published anonymously. However, it was soon withdrawn from publication because, according to a pseudonymous letter from *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* believed to be written by Shelley's publisher Charles Ollier, "people began to apply it to a certain individual, and make their own inferences" (SPP 391). Therefore, the poem's readers could not simply read the poem for its own sake: compelled to locate a referent for its autobiographical content, readers speculated about the true identity of the anonymous author.

In addition to the published preface to *Epipsychidion*, there are three extant draft versions of the preface, each of which takes a different approach to introducing the poem. The variation among the three drafts suggests that Shelley carefully approached their composition, intending to incorporate the preface as an important element of the poem. In all cases, the prefaces depict a fictional situation, some version of how the preface's speaker (referred to, in draft preface 1, as The Editor) obtained the poem, along with some brief ruminations on the poet's life. But what is most striking about the three drafts is how the preface-writer's identity becomes increasingly elusive with each successive revision. The first draft preface, the most fully realized of the three draft versions, figures the poet as a "young Englishman" (WPS 2: 375) with whom the Editor formed a brief friendship while living in Florence. This draft suggests that the two engaged in a "transitory intimacy" (375) until the

poet's death, when the Editor was charged with the task of "consigning the body of my poor friend to the grave" (375). The first draft preface thematizes the poet-narrator relationship in the same way that *Alastor* does, with some crucial differences. Whereas *Alastor's* preface and poem chronicle the Visionary's life without reference to his actual poetic output, *Epipsychidion's* preface takes the opposite approach, introducing the poem of a recently deceased poet while only briefly alluding to the circumstances of his life. The first draft also wryly comments on the quality of the verse, acknowledging that "the literary merit of the Poem in question may not be considerable; but worse verses are printed every day" (375). Like the preface to the published version, the first draft preface emphasizes the theme of miscommunication: the poet is described as one whose accumulated "Babel" of opinions has collapsed under their own weight and whose thoughts, as a result, "became unintelligible one to the other, as men upon whom confusion of tongues has fallen" (375). Also like the published preface, this draft slyly taunts the reader with hints of autobiographical conjecture: "The circumstances to which [they] the poem allude, may easily be understood by those to whom [the] spirit of the poem itself is intelligible" (375). This is a direct appeal to the esoteric audience whom Shelley targets in the preface. The cryptic nature of the autobiographical references reads like a challenge for readers to decipher the riddle of *Epipsychidion's* authorship.

The first draft preface trails off with an unfinished account of how the editor buried the poet's body, an abandoned attempt to expand the prefatory narrative of the editor and poet's relationship. The second draft preface, however, depicts an altogether different scenario, one which closely relates to the poem's closing stanzas. Its narrative, in keeping with the poem's critique of marriage and an impassioned defense of free love, introduces the

poem's author as a young Englishman who had bought one of the Sporades and who was seemingly involved in a *ménage-à-trois* relationship:

He was accompanied by a lady [who might have been] supposed to be his wife, & an effeminate looking youth, to whom he shewed an [attachment] so [singular] expressive an attachment as to give rise to the suspicion, that she was a woman—At his death, this suspicion was confirmed; object speedily [sic] found a refuge both from the taunts of the brute multitude, and from the [. . .] of her grief in the same grave that contained her lover. (376)

Although sketchy, this suggestive draft reinforces how seriously Shelley took his prefaces and how well he understood their ability to control a reading of the poem. Toying with the idea of opening the preface with a portrayal of the poet as traveling with his wife and mistress, Shelley dares to frame the poem with a provocative preface, just as he attempted in *Laon and Cythna's* preface with his defense of incest and his cryptic allusion to his own alleged involvement with the forbidden practice. Again, Shelley seeks to exercise his right to literature, in this case exploring alternative forms of co-habitation through the fictionalized relationship depicted in the draft preface. This draft closely aligns itself with the poem's closing stanzas, in which the poet implores Emilia to abscond with him to a "pleasure-house" (491) on a remote Mediterranean isle. But it differs slightly from the poem: whereas in the poem, the poet has "vowed / Thee [Emilia] to be lady of the solitude" (514-15), the second draft preface suggests that poet, wife and Emilia will move to the island together. In draft preface two, the preface's depiction of a poet cohabitating with two women would provide yet more fodder for critics determined to unleash *ad hominem* attacks against Shelley. Thus, just as Laon and Cythna's incestuous relationship makes sense thematically in the poem's context, so too does the relationship depicted in draft preface two resonate

thematically; however, both would prove too controversial for their contemporary audiences, which is likely why Shelley self-censored this aspect of the draft preface. That Shelley's nervous awareness of the consequences of his prefatory revelations motivates him to expunge what could be a crucial thematic element suggests that he has internalized the censorship compulsion he endured during *Laon and Cythna's* publication process.

Anonymous publication alone will not guarantee protection from calumniators: hence Shelley's acute sensitivity to revealing too much of himself in the preface. What the final preface does ultimately achieve is a fine balance between suggestive hints about its author's identity and a sense of elusiveness, which allows the argument for free love to remain speculative; indeed, free love itself functions as an experimental metaphor for something greater than itself, just as incest functions in *Laon and Cythna* as a way of questioning supposedly 'unnatural' practices that have been dogmatically internalized.

Common to all three draft prefaces and the published preface is their connection to the most explicitly 'autobiographical' section of *Epipsychidion*, which is embedded in the middle of the poem. This section serves as an idealized account of Shelley's search for the "soul out of [his] soul," chronicling his attempts to find the physical incarnation of his antitype. Shelley structures the autobiographical section in the form of a quest, beginning with the speaker's youth, when he encountered a female "Being" whom his spirit often met on its "visioned wanderings" (191). He beheld her shadowy figure amid "enchanted mountains" and caves of "divine sleep," (195) on the "air-like waves / of wonder-level dream" (196). These "air-like waves" of dream constitute the mood and the mode of the poem as a whole. On the level of sexual fantasy, the poem is an extended work of airy nothingness conjured out of the poet's imagination, abruptly dissolving at the moment of climax. Even on the level of 'factual' autobiography, the poem undulates atop the "air-like"

waves of referentiality. In fact, this strangely constructed simile-adjective “air-like waves” can be read as an over-arching figure for the poem’s autobiographical project as a whole. To describe a dream, itself a fleeting fragment of individual consciousness, accessible only to the dreamer and impossible to convey through the medium of language, as “air-like” is, essentially, to negate a negative. Indeed, as observed in an 1821 review from *The Gossip*:

Its animate beings are inanimate things, and its local habitations have no existence. It is a system of poetry made up of adjectives, broken metaphors, and indiscriminate personifications. In this poetry everything must live, and move, and have a being, and they must live and move with intensity of action and passion, though they have their origin and their end in nothing. (qtd. in Redpath 315)

Furthermore, when the speaker depicts an early encounter with this Being on “an imagined shore,” he describes her using a clothing metaphor similar to the one previously alluded to in the advertisement: “She met me, robed in such exceeding glory, / That I beheld her not” (199-200). Just as the prefatory speaker reveals an anxiety about the possibility of figural language proving meaningless when stripped of its “garb,” the Being sought by the poem’s speaker is, in her figural representation, so ornately adorned that she herself disappears. Here we have the essence of Shelley’s poetic dilemma in *Epipsychidion*: his awareness that to figure is to disfigure. As the metaphors increase in number and elaboration, the persons represented fade into the background. In the 190 lines that have preceded this section, Shelley has already unleashed a plethora of metaphors and similes with which to represent her. To give but a few of many possible examples, he compares her to a “seraph,” (21) a “Moon” (27), a “living Form / Among the dead” (27-28), a “star above the storm”(28) a “smile amid dark frowns” (62), a “gentle tone among rude voices” (62-63), a

“lute” (65), a “buried treasure” (67), and a “violet-shrouded grave of woe” (68) Yet Shelley realizes the potential absurdity of his endeavour. In the midst of this figural barrage, he makes explicit the capacity of language to conceal rather than to reveal: “Aye, even the dim words which obscure thee now / Flash, lightning-like, with unaccustomed glow” (32-3). Despite his most determined efforts to charge the poem with a relentless surge of poetic energy, Shelley is frustrated by the feebleness of his words and their inability to convey the beauty he seeks to portray for the reader. Aware of his failure, he nonetheless pushes forward, until the tropes degenerate to a level of banality almost comic in their flimsiness: she is called “a Metaphor of Spring and Youth and Morning” (120). Again the entire tropological structure collapses, and the speaker emits the heavy sigh of “ah, woe is me! / What have I dared? Where am I lifted?” The ultimate effect of this tropological degeneration serves, in Thomas Pfau’s words, to “erode the telos on behalf of which the poem’s quest initially originated” (“Tropes” 123).

Overall, *Epipsychidion*’s Advertisement mischievously complicates a reading of the poem it introduces. For not only does it call attention to its own shortcomings, but it also both invites and deflects autobiographical speculation. For example, the poem’s dedication directly refers to its subject: “Verses Addressed to the Noble and Unfortunate Lady, Emilia V—, Now Imprisoned in the Convent of —.” This dedication in fact encapsulates the advertisement’s peculiarities: even when announcing Teresa Viviani, the poem’s subject, it shrouds her identity through nickname and omission. Emilia was the nickname given to her by the Shelleys because her marital situation so closely resembled that of the character of Emilia from Boccaccio’s *Teseida* (*SPP* 390). Thus, Teresa’s figure becomes primarily intertextual, her real identity conflated with the fictional identity of a literary character. Similarly, the identity of both preface-writer and poet is obscured as well. No clue is given

to the preface-writer's identity, except for the initial "S.," placed at the end of the Advertisement. The only biographical information given about the poet is that he "died at Florence" while preparing a visit to the Sporades where he had "fitted up the ruins of an old building, and where it was his hope to have realized a scheme of life, suited perhaps to that happier and better world of which he is now an inhabitant, but hardly practical in this" (392). Also, the poet's life is described as "singular; less on account of the ideal tinge which it received from his own character and feelings" (392). Those familiar with the character of Shelley would likely have put together the advertisement's clues to speculate on his authorship: the signatory S., the Italian setting, and references to the poet's idealism all contribute to a fairly obvious portrait of Shelley. Nonetheless, the advertisement's cryptic nature reflects the enigmatic connection between autobiography and its figural representation.

In the spectrum of romantic irony, the preface-poem relationship in *Epipsychidion* formulates itself as a radical instance, aligned with de Man's definition of irony as "the permanent parabasis of the allegory of tropes" ("Concept" 178). Offering what he calls a "slight extension of Friedrich Schlegel's formulation" (*Allegories* 300-1) of permanent parabasis, de Man transposes Schlegel's concept—which subjectively emphasizes the author's pervasive omnipresence—into a linguistic register. Thus, for de Man, irony becomes "the systematic undoing of understanding" (301). Shelley's recognition of the figural nebulosity of his attempt to poeticize his actuality stresses in a very specific way the connection between the subjective and linguistic elements of parabasis. For it is in the very context of questioning the ontological status of the link between figural representation and empirical subjectivity that Shelley—in the final preface, preface drafts, and in the poem—articulates this linguistically-inflected skepticism. *Epipsychidion* marks a breaking-

point in which Shelley becomes especially self-conscious about the way autobiography functions in a text. The sheer number of defensive maneuvers he deploys in his composition of *Epipsychidion*, from its anonymous publication to the wavering, often contradictory deployment of autonarrational and counter-autonarrational strategies, highlights his ambivalence about revealing aspects of himself in the public sphere. But again, parabasis, even in de Man's topological sense of the term, structures itself in relation to a public sphere of which Shelley always remains acutely conscious. For Shelley's fixation with his tropes' truth-value arises not from a playful desire to toy flippantly with language, but from a sincerely pragmatic experiment to explore the limits of self-representation in a public forum. From Shelley's perspective, a poem's publication always sets into motion an unpredictable chain of events linked with his personal reputation. Always susceptible to personal attack, and having learned from critical reaction to his previous poems, Shelley, through his obstinate linguistic questioning, perpetually experiments with self-figuration. In *Epipsychidion*, self-figuration becomes self-effacement, partially through anonymity and partially through the collapse of an unstable topological structure weakened by self-doubt about its own efficacy. And its preface—like *Alastor's*, but in an even more radical way—serves to complicate rather than clarify one's reading of the poem.

Posthumous Parabasis and a Radical Return: *Adonais* and *Hellas*

Like *Epipsychidion's* preface, the preface to *Adonais* was carefully drafted and revised by Shelley, and the contents of the large portion of text excised from the published version reveal as much about the poem's context as the published version does. Both *Epipsychidion* and *Adonais* are also highly occasional poems; as Stuart Sperry observes, the two poems have “much more to say about Shelley himself than about the subject or circumstances that

provide the occasion for the poem” (158). But this is where the similarities end between the two poems, at least in the context of a reading that focuses on the prefaces. For Shelley, having reached the limits of figural representation in *Epipsychidion* and having erased his identity through anonymous publication and a fictional preface, assumes once again in his Preface to *Adonais* a more distinctly ‘Shelleyan’ persona, a return to the oratorical speaker of *Laon and Cythna*’s preface, along with a continuation of *Laon and Cythna*’s disdain for literary critics. But *Adonais* stages a particularly extreme response of the “Poet,” a deliberately hysterical, histrionic performance, in which the Poet of Wordsworth’s 1815 Preface to *Poems* is depicted in a highly conventionalized, classicized way.

One could also read the preface to *Adonais* as a symptom of Shelley’s awareness of his inability to fully assert his right to literature, as both the published and the draft preface preoccupy themselves with frustrated accounts of the continued *ad hominem* attacks against Shelley. With the publication of *Adonais*, published five months after *Epipsychidion* in July 1821, Shelley returns full-circle to the didactic prefatory tactics of *Alastor*, but with significant differences reflecting the changes he has undergone in the intervening six years. The *Adonais* preface crystallizes certain elements of *Alastor*’s preface, transposing the latter’s depiction of the “furies” who pursue the poet “to speedy ruin” into a contemporary register, with Keats as the poet and the furies as the critics whose negativity resulted in Keats’s death. The object of *Adonais*’s didacticism is the critical establishment, and the moral of its preface—and much of the poem—emphasizes the antithetical co-existence of poets and critics. In the spectrum of Shelleyan romantic irony, *Adonais* is the climactic site of its peak and its dissolution. For parabasis in *Adonais* becomes intricately bound up with the critical establishment to an unprecedented degree. Yet the apotheosis of the poet works through a progression within which posthumous parabasis is figured in cosmic terms, with the poet’s

identity pervading not just a literary work, but disseminated throughout and within the entirety of nature and the cosmos. Ultimately, however, the basic precondition of parabasis—the individualized self—calls itself into question in an ontological framework within which Shelley ambivalently figures posthumous existence in conflicting terms of individuated selfhood and the transcendent neoplatonic “One.”

The canceled excerpt from *Adonais*'s preface depicts a Shelley whose alienation from his given actuality has intensified to an almost unbearable degree. In the chronological progression from *Alastor* to *Adonais*, the same negativity that characterized *Alastor*'s poet and prefatory voice also afflicts the speaker of the canceled passage. That Shelley was made aware of the preface's excessively remonstrative rhetoric is clear from his letter to John Taffe, in which he acknowledges the necessity of canceling the offensive passage:

Accept also my thanks for your strictures on *Adonais*. The first I have adopted, by cancelling in the preface the whole passage relating to my private wrongs.—You are right: I ought not to shew my teeth before I can bite, or when I cannot bite. I am afraid that I must allow the obnoxious expressions if such they are, to which you so kindly advert, in the Poem itself, to stand as they are. (*PBSL* 2: 306)

An examination of the preface's draft version reveals the difficulty Shelley had in reconciling his poetic vision with his feelings of bitterness stemming from his and Keats's poor reception. That cancelled passage is perhaps the most venomous diatribe in Shelley's entire *oeuvre*, a volcanic eruption of frustration, which, in ten rage-choked, sputtering sentences, chronicles not only Shelley's failure to reach a wide reading audience, but also the wider implications of his infamy, including allusions to the chancery suit that deprived him of

custody of his first-born child.¹⁴¹ Ultimately, Shelley's decision to excise the preface's autobiographical portion is based, as he notes in the letter, on the fact that the poem itself already contains enough "obnoxious expressions" to convey adequately his contempt for his calumniators. Furthermore, the poem also already contains veiled autobiographical elements, as the "one frail Form" (271) introduced in Stanza 31, and whose plight is described throughout Stanzas 31-34, elaborates yet another figure of Shelley. This self-figuration parallels the figure of the poet in *Alastor*; like that poet-figure, the one frail Form of *Adonais* is described as "a phantom among men; companionless / As the last cloud of an expiring storm / Whose thunder is its knell" (272-74). But the images and metaphors used to describe this Form are significantly more subdued than the language from the preface's cancelled passage. The Form is more a figure of pathos than anger, in stark contrast even to the 'Shelley' of the preface whose histrionic tone shrieks out against the "wretched men" (410) responsible for Keats' death. Shelley compares the Form to Cain and Christ,¹⁴² continuing a pattern of biblical imagery already established in the preface: "He answered not,

¹⁴¹ "Since however this notice has been wrested [from me by my sympathy and indignation] and my pity, I will allow myself a first and last word on the subject of calumny as it relates to me [and now all further public discussion must be closed]. As an author I have dared and invited censure; [my opinions] if I understand myself I have written neither for profit nor fame. I have [sought to erect a sympathy between my species and myself] employed my poetical compositions simply as the instruments of that sympathy between myself and others which the ardent and unbounded love I [felt] cherished for my kind incited me to acquire. I expected all sorts of stupidity and insolent contempt from these . . . These compositions (excepting the tragedy of the Cenci which was written in a hurry rather to try my powers than to unburden my full heart) are [wretchedly inadequate] insufficiently . . . commendation than perhaps they deserve; even from their bitterest enemies; but they have not attained any corresponding popularity. As a man, I shrink from notice and regard; the ceaseless ebb and flow of the world vexes me; my habits are simple I know. I desire to be left in peace. I have been the victim of a monstrous and unheard of tyranny. I am the victim of a despotic power which has violated in my home the rights of nature and has The bigot will say it was the recompense of my errors, the man of the world will call it the result of my imprudence [but never was calumny heaped in so profuse a measure upon any head as upon mine]. Persecution, contumely, and calumny have been heaped upon me in profuse measure. I have [been made the victim of a tyranny . . .] domestic conspiracy and legal oppression combined have violated in my person the most sacred rights of nature and humanity . . . [my health . . .] and the chastening of my spirit." (*WPS* 2: 407-8)

¹⁴² Contemporary reviewers seized on this blasphemous conflation of Biblical figures to emphasize Shelley's atheism. As noted by the unsigned *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* reviewer, who has taken the allusion out of context, "He is the only verseman of the day, who has dared, in a Christian country, to work out for himself the character of direct ATHEISM!" (*UH* 294).

but with a sudden hand / Made bare his branded and ensanguined brow, / Which was like Cain's or Christ's" (304-306). Doomed to wander the earth in solitude for eternity like Cain and condemned to suffer as a sacrificial victim like Christ, the Form emerges as decontextualized, a more general outcast figure who can represent any victim of "persecution, contumely, and calumny" (Ingpen 408). In contrast, the cancelled prefatory passage posits a significantly different figure, given the obvious and direct association of Shelley with the preface's narrator, and the directness of its language. Had Shelley kept the canceled passage intact, *Adonais* would have been a radically different poem.

But the Form is not the only figure in *Adonais* compared to Cain: the *Quarterly Review* critic identified in the preface as the "base and unprincipled calumniator" (410) responsible for Keats's death appears in the poem. Shelley invokes "the curse of Cain" to "Light on his head who pierced thy [Keats's] innocent breast, / And scared the angel soul that was its earthly breast" (151-53). Thematically, the connection of the critic and Cain makes more sense than that of Cain and the Form because Shelley has figured the critic as a Cain-like murderer. However, that both Form and critic are mutually connected to Cain, despite their antagonistic relationship in the poem's moral universe, points to a wider thematic disjunction in the poem that implicates poet(s) and critic(s) even as it argues for their antithetical co-existence. This conflation bears directly on the poem's parabolic scheme, for it symptomatically projects Shelley's troubled sense of self as a terminally suspended moment in a dialectic between self and other. Put differently, *Adonais* reveals the workings of Shelley's most concerted attempt to resolve the dialectic between the aesthetic and public spheres that has for so long vexed him, an attempt manifested through the poem's imaginative conflict between poets and critics in which the poets emerge victorious. In *Adonais's* thematic scheme, poetry and poets are always yoked adversarially with critics.

Tellingly, in his letter to Charles Ollier announcing the completion of “Adonais,” Shelley describes the poem as “a lament on the death of poor Keats, with some interposed stabs on the assassins of his peace and fame” (*PBSL* 2: 297). This description concisely encapsulates *Adonais*’s dualistic nature. On the one hand, the poem strains for transcendence, its intricate interplay of mythological allusion and elegiac formality a vehicle for Shelley to imaginatively immortalize Keats. On the other hand, the “interposed stabs” at the critics whom Shelley blames for Keats’s death ground the poem in its historical moment of critical squabbling. The poem itself works through the tension between the temporal moment of poetic reception and Keats’s entry into the eternal pantheon. Directly before the poem’s climactic apotheosis in stanza 38, the critics are disposed of, not to be heard from again. Shelley contrasts their temporality with the poet’s immortality:

Thou canst not soar where he is sitting now.—
Dust to the dust! But the pure spirit shall flow
Back to the burning fountain whence it came,
A portion of the Eternal, which must glow
Through time and change, unquenchably the same,
Whilst thy cold embers choke the sordid hearth of shame. (337-342)

The critics here are associated with dust and embers, whereas the poet is imaged as pure spirit, fire and energy. Significantly, from stanza 38 onward, Shelley makes no further reference to critics, instead staging the elaborate transfigurative process through which the poet “is made one with Nature” (369). The bulk of the poem has been predicated on the dynamic between anti-hero critic and hero poet, and Shelley’s epithets are especially virulent when he refers to the critics: they are variously referred to as “herded wolves” (243), “obscene ravens” (244), “vultures” (245), and “carrion kites” (335). In the poem, critics are

figured as scavengers who feed off the genius of poets, a sentiment in keeping with Shelley's usual characterization of critics as failed artists,¹⁴³ first articulated in *Laon and Cythna's* preface and repeatedly emphasized throughout Shelley's life.

The preface's treatment of the critics is as hostile as the poem's. The preface's third and fourth paragraphs—which comprise more than half of the preface—at length admonish the “cankerworms” (410), those anonymous *Quarterly Review* critics responsible for harsh criticisms of *Endymion*. Shelley held the reviewers personally responsible for Keats's death; such accusations in the preface seem merely hyperbolic, but in a May 1821 letter to Byron, Shelley makes the same accusation as though it were literally true: “Hunt tells me that in the first paroxysms of his disappointment he [Keats] burst a blood-vessel; and thus laid the foundation of a rapid consumption” (*PBSL* 2: 289-90). But regardless of the actual cause-and-effect relationship between review and death, Shelley's intent is to characterize Keats's death as a symptom of a much wider social problem—the control of partisan literary magazines over the reading public's literary tastes. Shelley's contempt for the critic-artist opposition is partly a manifestation of his general disdain for power structures characterized by a master-slave dynamic. For Shelley, the critic-artist relationship is never dialectical; rather, he tends to portray the critic as antithetical to the artist, a critique of a long tradition in British criticism as I have pointed out in this study's Introduction. Artists and critics do not engage in a productive dialogue, but instead the critic tends to slander or defame the artist in a purely mean-spirited way. This portrayal of the reviewing system is of course largely predicated on Shelley's own negative experiences as a publishing author. So the contents of the preface are certainly in keeping with Shelley's thematic concern with tyranny

¹⁴³ In the letter to Byron quoted above, Shelley states this sentiment clearly: “nor has ill-success yet turned me into an unfeeling, and malignant critic; that second degree in the descending scale of the Academy of Disappointed Authors” (*PBSL* 2: 289-90).

and oppression. But this prefatory scheme does paradoxically produce the opposite of its intended effect. One of the preface's lesser ironies involves the immortalization of those very poetasters whose names Shelley invokes to demonstrate the poor taste of the reviewers:

As to *Endymion*, was it a poem, whatever might be its defects, to be treated contemptuously by those who had celebrated, with various degrees of panegyric, *Paris*, and *Woman*, and a *Syrian Tale*, and Mrs. Lefanu, and Mr. Barrett, and Mr. Howard Payne, and a long list of the illustrious obscure? Are these the men, who in their venal good nature, presumed to draw a parallel between the Rev. Mr. Millman and Lord Byron? (*SPP* 410)

These “illustrious obscure,” through their appearance in *Adonais*'s preface, are no longer obscure, as they have been monumentalized along with Keats, Byron and the other great poets alluded to in the poem itself. Despite having been invoked to contrast comically with the poets deemed superior by Shelley, Mrs. Lefanu, Mr. Barrett, Mr. Payne, and Mr. Millman take their place in *Adonais*'s poetic universe. Granted, the inclusion of these names merely reinforces Shelley's point and confirms the accuracy of his aesthetic judgment: for the modern reader, those writers once praised by the *Quarterly Review* are unknown, having faded into oblivion, while the names of Keats, Shelley, and Byron have obviously stood the test of time. Thus, on the one hand, through its incorporation of all echelons of poetic fame and ability, *Adonais* comprehensively absorbs poets from past and present, weak and powerful, along with the critics whose existence is at least marginally integral to the process of determining the poets' value.

Clearly, the romantic irony in *Adonais* is generated by a complex form of parabasis through which Shelley's omnipresence within the work cannot be detached from the critics' omnipresence. Nowhere else in Shelley's *corpus* does he project a self so completely

absorbed with the presence of a hostile other. But *Adonais*'s parabolic scheme complicates itself even further through the poem's perplexed and shifting treatment of onomastic identity, a problematic first glimpsed as early as the epigraph when questions of naming first arise. The poem's second epigraph, appearing immediately after the preface heading, is taken from Moschus' "Elegy for Bion," and translated by Shelley as "Poison came, Bion, to thy mouth—poison didst thou eat. How could it come to such lips as thine and not be sweetned? What mortal was so cruel as to mix the drug for thee, or to give it to thee, who heard thy voice? He escapes [shall be nameless in] my song" (409). Not only does this epigraph place *Adonais* squarely within the pastoral tradition, making the poem's generic intentions clear from the outset; its emphasis on namelessness assumes a significant dimension in the poem's conception of its own parabasis. For the death of Keats is portrayed in terms reminiscent of Bion's death:

Our Adonais has drunk poison—oh!
 What deaf and viperous murderer could crown
 Life's early cup with such a draught of woe?
 The nameless worm would now itself disown:
 It felt, yet could escape the magic tone
 Whose prelude held all envy, hate, and wrong. (316-21)

The references to drinking poison and to the "nameless worm" who administered it can both be directly linked to the epigraph. And in the following stanza, Shelley again incorporates poison and namelessness when addressing the murderer: "be thou free / To spill the venom when thy fangs o'erflow" (329-330), calling him "a noteless blot on a remembered name" (327). In keeping with one of the poem's thematic tendencies—the desire to synchronically preserve the historical moment of Keats' striving for recognition

from his contemporaries while simultaneously imagining the young poet's place in the eternal pantheon—the allusion to Bion similarly locates *Adonais* within the time-honoured elegiac tradition in the context of a preface that attempts to capture a snapshot of Keats' relation to his contemporaries.¹⁴⁴ As made clear in the quotation from Moschus, and in the lines just quoted, Shelley intends to chastise Keats' murderers (the critics) without naming them. Rather, he refers to them indirectly through implication and innuendo. Yet it would not be a stretch to claim that the preface is almost single-handedly obsessed with the critics whom Shelley holds responsible, figuratively if not somewhat literally as well, for Keats' death. But here lies the fault line upon which the preface threatens to unsettle the poem and provides a significant structural source of the romantic irony implicit in the preface. The very transience the poem attempts to overcome—specifically, the harsh critical treatment of Keats and the vilification of all those “noteless blot[s]” whom Shelley would relegate to the dustbin of history—dominates the preface. Thus, despite Shelley's careful structuring of the preface to correlate with the poem's arrangement, and despite the preface's intricate foreshadowing of crucial motifs, the fact remains that the preface disproportionately preoccupies itself with those very critics, poetasters, and philistines. The elegiac formality of *Adonais* should have the effect of distancing or elevating the poem above the fray it seeks to surpass; however, its preface counterbalances the poem's lofty imaginative flight through the sheer weight of its obsessive concern with the mundane exigencies of the contemporary reviewing system.

¹⁴⁴ The pastoral elegy is an “ingeniously ironic form,” as Stuart Curran points out, because rather than speculating on the details of an afterlife, it rejoices in the invincibility of this world from mortal threats. Although on the surface a “lone lament,” the form is essentially social, and through its highly formal literary structure is capable of “resolving chaos into structure, demanding that the ritualized conventions of a highly refined art stand as a firm bulwark against mortality even as one acknowledges that in no individual case can they finally be said to succeed” (168).

Ultimately, *Adonais*'s complex immersion in romantic irony stems from this ambivalent inclusion of individual names in the context of the poem's reconciling of contemporary neglect and eternal poetic fame. As Kim Wheatley points out, the afterlife envisaged in *Adonais* offers an "ambiguous consolation" (159) because Shelley oscillates between depictions of an afterlife in which individual identity is retained, and a depersonalized afterlife in which souls transcend earthly existence to form a collective spiritual whole. The source of this ambiguity can be traced through a brief sketch of the poem's logic. One of the poem's primary intentions is to vindicate poets like Shelley and Keats whose achievements have not been recognized in their lifetimes. The 'heroes' of *Adonais*—Byron and Milton to be sure, but especially those "inheritors of unfulfilled renown" such as Shelley, Keats, Chatterton, Sidney, and Lucan (397)—are individuated and singled out in the poem as exemplary. In addition, other obscure poets who have not been appreciated by their contemporaries, those "whose names on Earth are dark / But whose transmitted effluence cannot die" (406-7) retain their individuality, and posthumously achieve eternal fame: they "Rose, robed in dazzling immortality" (409). Moreover, the eternal poet "is gathered to the kings of thought / Who waged contention with their time's decay, / And of the past are all that cannot pass away" (430-32). In contrast to this idea of fame and retention of one's individuality after death, however, is the claim that the poet will achieve some sort of depersonalized spiritual singularity after death. The line already quoted above—"he is made one with nature" (377)—figures posthumous existence as spiritual energy diffused throughout all of nature, rather than concentrated in a single self. After death, the poet exists as a part of all living things:

there is heard

His voice in all her music, from the moan

Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird;
He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,
Spreading itself where'er that Power may move
Which has withdrawn his being to its own. (370-75)

All varieties of earthly forms, whether animate like the bird or inanimate like the herb and stone, contain some portion of the poet's spirit. Not only has he become re-materialized, he has become a spectral "presence," seemingly disengaged from whatever earthly form he assumed while alive. Similarly, the One, imaged as "white radiance," implies through its name and the association with white light a spiritual singularity, a realm in which individual souls coalesce into a primal, nebulous form of pure energy. Along with the image of the one is the "one Spirit's plastic stress" (381), which would seemingly absorb all individual souls into a singular spiritual form(lessness). The difficulty of reconciling these two disparate modes of posthumous existence results from their fundamentally distinct ontological underpinnings. Shelley's goal of valorizing unacknowledged poetic genius depends on an afterlife in which the poets' individuality—and recognition of their works as associated with their earthly selves and names—continues to have meaning. In an afterlife where the poet's soul joins the One, it becomes more difficult to rationalize the benefits of poetic fame unless, of course, 'fame' is measured through the value of the poet's works and the extent to which they ameliorate human existence. So the very value of posthumous fame is unsettled by Shelley's ontological ambivalence. The preface's concern with individual poets and the travesties of their unrecognized talent only serves to exacerbate the difficulty of resolving these tensions.

Furthermore, a similar problem arises from the ambiguous endings of the preface and the poem. Both texts conclude with a mixture of hope and skepticism, a lingering doubt that death is a void rather than a new beginning. The poem images these conflicting emotions in its final stanza: the poem's narrator is skeptically adrift in a vast ocean, "borne darkly, fearfully, afar" (490). The poem concludes, however, with an optimistic image: "burning through the inmost veil of Heaven, / The soul of Adonais, like a star, / Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are" (493-495). So although the poem's final stanza does temper its joy with a dose of skepticism, the fact that Shelley closes the poem with an image of immortality rather than an anxiously adrift boater leaves the reader with a feeling of cautious optimism. The preface similarly ends on an optimistic note, yet its sense of hope is more tentative and ambiguous. Shelley ends the preface by referring to Joseph Severn, a young artist who selflessly attended to Keats during his final illness. Severn's virtue is praised by the prefatory speaker, who endows him with the potential to channel the spirit of Keats for artistic purposes, and ultimately to "plead against Oblivion for his name" (411). Again, like the poem's closing stanza, the preface's closing sentences combine skepticism with optimism. Alluding to *The Tempest*, Shelley claims that Severn can "dispense with a reward from 'such stuff as dreams are made of'" (411). Ending the preface with this allusion, Shelley raises the specter of human temporality, evincing his skepticism about the afterlife. Indeed, the lines from the rest of the passage quoted by Shelley correspond closely with the imagery of *Adonais*'s final stanzas. Following are the lines from the *Tempest* immediately preceding the quotation selected by Shelley:

These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air;

And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. (IV.i.165-172)

These famous lines specifically emphasize the fleetingness of dramatic productions, yet they can be applied to any artistic endeavour or to human existence generally. They are a different manifestation of the “Earth’s shadows” from *Adonais*, of the (460) “many” that “change and pass” (459) in contrast to the “One” that “remains” and “forever shines” (459-460). But whereas Shelley’s Platonic dualism redeems or justifies the otherwise futile procession of events comprising one’s existence, Shakespeare presents a more nihilistic conception of the futility of human existence imaged through processes of dissolution, melting, and fading. In either case, the work of art—drama or elegy—functions at least implicitly to stave off the possibility of nothingness, as a testament to the creative spirit in the face of always-imminent negation. Shelley has toyed with this idea elsewhere, most effectively in his sonnet “Ozymandias,” the turn of which hinges on the deeply ironic inscription, “Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!” (11) on the pedestal of a ruined desert sculpture. But in the case of *Adonais*’s preface, the burden is placed squarely on the shoulders of Severn—not only to keep alive the memory of Keats, but to mobilize his talents for the never-ending battle against “oblivion,” waged by artists in the name of humanity to monumentalize the living energy of an entire culture.

Adonais is not, however, Shelley’s final preface. His 1821 Preface to *Hellas* resuscitates a radical spirit that has been obscured by his fixation in *Adonais* with

posthumous fame and the desire for transcendence. The Preface to *Hellas* marks a curious departure from the Shelleyan parabasis characterizing the other prefaces dealt with in this study, for it reveals a Shelley whose radicalism emerges much more directly, and whose subjectivity is significantly toned down. Written to encourage British support for Greece's emancipation from Turkish rule, *Hellas*, in stark contrast to *Adonais*, grounds itself firmly in the empirical events of the unfolding Greek revolution. Shelley apologizes in the Preface for his reliance on "newspaper erudition," noting that "until the conclusion of the war, it will be impossible to obtain an account of it sufficiently authentic for historical materials" (*SPP* 431). Thus, in the context of what Milton Wilson has described as the constant dialectic between the Platonic and the radical in Shelley's *oeuvre*, *Hellas* returns, with full force, to the radical end of the spectrum. Indeed, the very historicity from which Shelley detaches the Poet of *Adonais* in his quest to idealize his posthumous survival becomes the basis of Shelley's poetic project in *Hellas*.

Like his Preface to *Laon and Cythna*, and like Godwin's Preface to *Caleb Williams*, the Preface to *Hellas* also finds itself subject to censorship, as the twelfth paragraph was cut by Ollier for fear of sedition charges prior to its 1821 publication. The offensive paragraph conveys an explicitly seditious message, characterizing Shelley's historical moment as the "age of the war of the oppressed against the oppressors" and branding European Sovereigns as "privileged gangs of murderers and swindlers" (432). Shelley prophesizes the emergence of a "new race" that has "arisen throughout Europe" to "accomplish that destiny which tyrants foresee and dread" (432). Eschewing the protection of the elusive preface, Shelley here introduces *Hellas* with a confrontational and provocative polemic that recalls the rhetorical intensity of Godwin's *Political Justice*, yet goes even further in its call for revolutionary upheaval. The Preface's closing line, in which Shelley images the

revolutionaries as having “wrest[ed] the bloody scepters” (432) from the grasp of the tyrants hints at the possibility of violence necessary for overthrow, just as Godwin had hinted in *Political Justice*. Revealed through the Preface to *Hellas*, therefore, is the emergence of a Shelley whose commitment to democratic ideals and opposition to tyranny has remained consistent, or even intensified, throughout his poetic career. One could argue that Shelley, having probed the depths of romantic irony for so many years, finds himself approaching Kierkegaard’s ideal of irony as a “mastered moment.” Having overcome the excessive subjectivity that partially obscures the radicalism of *Laon and Cythna*, Shelley’s project in *Hellas* fuses the exigencies of his historical moment—the very “newspaper erudition” that Shelley relies on to present an up-to-the-minute account of the Greek struggle for independence—with the time-honoured tradition of classical form, embodied in Shelley’s choice of Aeschylus’ *Persae* as his poetic model. *Hellas* is not Shelley’s last poem, but it contains his last preface, marking the final stage of a process through which a fully committed ‘radical’ Shelley materializes for posterity.

The Ends of Irony: Mary Shelley’s Posthumous Prefaces

Thus, to return to Schlegel’s original formulation of romantic irony, the “constant alternation of self-creation and self-destruction” characteristic of the romantic ironist infuses the spirit of *Adonais* and *Hellas*. Parabasis reaches an endpoint in the elegy: after having been skeptically interrogated in *Epipsychidion*, it reappears in *Adonais* only to be transposed into a cosmic register within which Shelley speculates on what one could call the permanent parabasis of the posthumous self. Regardless of the ontological status of Shelley’s posthumous self, however, there are material realities associated with the actual transmission of Shelley’s poetry after his death. Prefaces will play a crucial part in the survival of his

poetry into the Victorian age. But Shelley's prefaces alone will not present his conflicted, fragmented self-figuration to the Victorians: instead, Mary's prefaces to her two posthumous volumes of Shelley's poetry will subsume all of his works under her version of Shelley, figured in a very particular way in her prefaces. At this stage in the publication history of Shelley's poetry, Mary intends to destroy pre-existing prejudices of Shelley's character in order to create a Shelley more palatable to Victorian audiences. The extent to which Mary's prefaces—her preface to her 1824 *Posthumous Poems* and her 1839 preface and notes to *Poetical Works of Percy B. Shelley*—created the conditions for Shelley's posthumous reception cannot be underestimated. Neil Fraistat calls their publication the two most crucial events for “establishing his texts, textualizing his life, and securing his reputation” (410). Indeed, Shelley's ruminations on posthumous parabasis in *Adonais* are materially enacted by Mary in her prefaces. She adds yet another layer of subjectivism to Shelley's poetry, in the process intensifying the parabasis already at work in much of the poetry. To be sure, the work performed by Mary is in keeping with the specific nature of Shelleyan parabasis. For her version of Shelley performs itself as a defensive reaction to the hostile interpellations of the public sphere. Thus Mary in her prefaces crafts a Shelley whose primary characteristics counterbalance the negative public connotations typically ascribed to Shelley. Her Shelley, specifically intended as a poet who could “write without shocking anyone” (qtd. in Fraistat 411), appears in her prefaces as what Fraistat calls an “etherealized, disembodied, and virtually depoliticized poet” (410) carefully crafted to suit the tastes of a middle-class Victorian reading public.

Fraistat's critique of Mary's prefaces and notes laments the extent to which she presents a watered-down Shelley whose radical impulses have been tamed and whose ideological fervour has been muted to secure a sympathetic Victorian middle-class audience.

But Fraistat is not alone in his criticisms of Mary: since their initial publication, both *Posthumous Poems* and *Poetical Works* have drawn censure for Mary's editorial interventions. To this day, critical debate continues to weigh the merits and the faults of Mary's critical apparatus.¹⁴⁵ In this final section, I will briefly locate Mary's prefaces (and notes) to Shelley's posthumous publications within the spectrum of romantic irony developed throughout the chapter. To this end, I will position my argument in relation to Fraistat's, and in relation to Mary Favret's, who analyzes the "implicit irony" (19) of Mary Shelley's editing method. Favret predicates her critique on what she perceives as Mary's too-intrusive editing style, through which Shelley's life and poetry is diminished in comparison to the "widow's emotional story" (19) that dominates the volumes. Although the means are different, the ends of Favret's Shelley are the same as Fraistat's: he emerges as "ethereal and insubstantial" (19) in Favret's reading, not the result of Fraistat's Victorian "cultural apparatus" (410), but as the result of Mary's textual dominance.

Like the Poet of *Adonais*, the posthumous Shelley also undergoes an apotheosis, beginning with Mary's 1824 preface to *Posthumous Poems*. Mary's strategy in *Posthumous Poems* is to begin the work of assimilating Shelley through her careful omission of controversial aspects of his public persona. Thus, although she acknowledges that Shelley was "pursued by hatred and calumny" (iv), she makes no specific mention of the reasons for his infamy—his atheism, his radicalism, sordid details from his personal life. Instead, she more generally blames his fervent desire to improve mankind, morally and physically, as the "chief reason" (iv) for his notoriety. The biographical thrust of Mary's preface figures Shelley—as he has already suggested himself in his preface to *Laon and Cythna*—as a benign Wordsworthian nature lover. To this end, Mary chronicles Shelley's love for nature and his extensive

¹⁴⁵ In addition to Fraistat's and Favret's arguments, see also Wolfson, O'Neill, Fleck, and Sunstein.

botanical knowledge, along with his fondness for depicting the “loveliest scenes” (v) of nature in his poetry. Overall, this pathos-inflected preface, which repeatedly emphasizes Shelley’s ill health and gentleness, aligns itself with the volume’s contents through its focus on the aesthetic value of his poetry: Mary emphasizes the “peculiar beauty” (viii) with which every line of Shelley’s poetry is “instinct” (viii), a sentiment characterizing her selection criteria for the volume. A sizable portion of the volume consists of various fragments, brief snatches of poetry displaying flashes of Shelleyan beauty; otherwise, of the sixty-five unpublished poems, fifteen published poems and five translations, none was ‘controversial’ in the sense of containing overt atheistic, incestuous, or politically radical subject matter. Thus, both through her construction of Shelley and through her selection criteria, Mary—to borrow Kierkegaard’s words—“imparts stability, character, and consistency” (339) to her figure of Shelley, something Shelley himself was unable to achieve in his own lifetime because of his inability to conform to his given actuality. The success of Mary’s attempt reveals itself through the swiftness of *Posthumous Poems*’ sales: within a month, the volume had sold over 300 copies, until it was withdrawn when Shelley’s father, Sir Timothy Shelley, threatened to cut off Mary’s allowance if the book continued to circulate (Sunstein 261).

The Shelley constructed by Mary in the *Posthumous Poems* does ostensibly exhibit the characteristics deplored by Fraistat—the “etherealizing and disembodiment” of Shelley, which Fraistat also attributes to Victorian Shelley admirers such as J.S. Mill, Arthur Henry Hallam, and Tennyson. But Mary’s prefaces are but another stage in the process of the development of ‘Shelley’: Fraistat treats her prefaces as though they constitute a single, fixed identity, rather than one of many versions of the poet repeatedly figured throughout his own lifetime. Shelley’s *oeuvre* consists of a fluctuating plurality of potential selves continually becoming, of which Mary’s version is but another stage. But if Shelley’s own self-figurations present

themselves as transitory or tentative, they are foregrounded against a dominant backdrop that has long characterized Shelley during his lifetime. This dominant backdrop is the Satanic Shelley, reviled and detested by his calumniators for reasons already dealt with at length in this chapter. Thus, Mary's version of Shelley becomes the antithesis to the dominant version of Shelley perpetuated throughout the first two decades of the nineteenth century. As antithesis, Mary's version of Shelley draws out elements of his character unknown by or ignored by the public sphere so intent on defaming him. In short, Mary's version of Shelley is a necessary corrective: her goal as editor is to ensure a wide, sympathetic reading audience for Shelley's poetry, a goal which, she wisely realizes, cannot be achieved by perpetuating his reputation as an iconoclastic, incestuous, atheistic, radical idealist.

Fifteen years later, in 1839, Mary published a collected edition of Shelley's poems, *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Also prefaced by Mary, this collection continues the consecrating work started in the *Posthumous Poems* not only in the preface, but through the elaborate notes affixed to the volume's major poems as well, an editorial practice she originated in the volume's second edition. As in the *Posthumous Poems'* preface, Mary depicts Shelley in angelic terms, although she goes even further in the *Poetical Works* with his apotheosis: "whatever faults he had, ought to find extenuation among his fellows, since they proved him to be human; without them, the exalted nature of his soul would have raised him into something divine" (255). Also as in the *Posthumous Poems'* preface, Mary briefly alludes to, but does not engage the question of, Shelley's infamy during his lifetime: "I abstain from any remark on the occurrences of his private life; except, inasmuch as the passions which they engendered, inspired his poetry. This is not the time to tell the truth; and I should reject any colouring of the truth" (255). Mary's remarks here are somewhat disingenuous:

her preface and notes focus exclusively on the very “private life” she claims to avoid; however, she presents a romanticized version of Shelley’s “private life” devoid of any controversial aspects. That the Shelley of *Poetical Works* remains completely within the control of Mary cannot be denied: her paratextual presence takes precedence, beginning and ending the volume, filling the interstices between the poems.

For Favret, it is not simply the verbosity or the overbearing nature of Mary’s editorial interventions that problematize the volume. She takes issue with the extent to which Mary’s prose “supplant[s]” (19) the poetry. According to the logic of *Poetical Works*, Shelley’s poetry needs Mary to rescue it from the void of indecipherability. Shelley’s poetry can be more “tangible” and “accessible” (19) than some might believe, but only because Mary’s prose can “bring the poet and poetry down to earth” (19). Thus the irony identified by Favret derives from the negative dialectic between poetry and prose, through which the prose “impoverishes” the “communicative power” of the poetry. The negative implications of Favret’s implied definition of irony notwithstanding, the *Poetical Works*’ editorial apparatus certainly exhibits traces of romantic irony, enacted through a reversal or a displacement of a parabasis through which Mary takes her husband’s place as the poetry’s omnipotent subjective locus. Ironically, then, the once-dominant figure of Shelley finds itself eclipsed by Mary, whose editorial interventions become necessary to transmit his poetry to the very reading public Shelley failed to reach.

Overall, Favret’s critique of the *Poetical Works* elides two crucial factors contributing to the inevitability of Mary’s editorial strategy, factors articulated, respectively, by Hegel and Schlegel. First, implied in her critique is the assumption that the poetry should be able to communicate itself without the aid of any external—prosaic—supplements. To refute this claim, one need look no further than Shelley’s *oeuvre* itself, which is of course replete with

prosaic supplements in the forms of prefaces and explanatory notes. Thus, although Mary is credited with having originated the practice of prefacing and extensively annotating another's *corpus* for posthumous transmission, the practice is commonplace enough to draw little attention to itself. Favret's argument fails to clarify whether the general practice of prefacing and annotating poetry impoverishes the poetry's "communicative power" or whether the specific instance of the *Poetical Works* is somehow anomalous in contributing to this impoverishment. Writing on Hegel's concept of the age of prose, Erich Heller suggests that a poet writing in a prosaic age must "produce out of his own inner self, not only the poetry, but also, as it were, the climate, the temperature in which it can breathe" (8). Heller points out the "febrile" quality of works resulting from the author's attempt at this "exhausting" feat. Shelley's poetry exemplifies the feverishness described by Heller, and his sustained, life-long effort to create a suitable climate for his poetry reveals itself not only in the verses themselves, but in the chronic health problems plaguing him until his premature death. Thus, in Heller's sense, Mary continues the work begun by Shelley: intuiting the necessity of a different approach, she fleshes out the poetry with her own prosaic interventions, furthering her husband's attempts to cultivate a climate germane to the flourishing of his poetry in an alien environment. As evidenced by her emphasis on the diminishing aspect of Mary's "prose," which she specifically singles out to contrast with what is presumably the purer discursive form of poetry, Favret implies that the co-existence of Mary's prose and Percy's poetry in the same volume corrupts the reader's experience of the poetry. In an age of prose, however, within which a collective poetic mode of consciousness has been displaced by the prosaic, such a co-existence functions synecdochally as a microcosm of the two forms of consciousness dialectically interacting. Not simply competing discursive forms, poetry and prose symbiotically work together in the *Poetical Works*, not only in

depicting an amalgamation of the masculine and feminine antitypes achieved through the textual immortalization of Mary's and Percy's union, but through the necessary workings of Mary's prosaic attempt to disseminate Percy's poetry in a prosaic age.

Furthermore, the *Poetical Works* embodies the characteristics outlined by Schlegel in his definition of a universal progressive poetry, famously outlined in *Athenaeum Fragment* 116. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, what Schlegel calls "Romantic" poetry defines itself through a series of dualisms: it should "mix and fuse poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature . . . there still is no form so fit for expressing the entire spirit of an author . . . It alone can become . . . an image of the age" (31-32). Formally, Schlegel has in mind the novel as possessing these disparate characteristics, but his description can just as easily be applied to the *Poetical Works*. Through its juxtaposition of poetry and prose, its mix of poetic inspiration and prose criticism, its conflation of refined artistry and raw naturalism, the *Poetical Works* presents itself as a rich amalgamation of various artistic viewpoints and techniques. What emerges from the *Poetical Works* is both a comprehensive evocation of the spirit of the author—Mary and Percy—and a condensed, variegated snapshot of the historical moment within which the two writers lived and wrote. But as a moment in an increasingly protracted development of the Shelleys' literary reputations, the *Poetical Works* are merely a stage in a progression, perpetually ensnared in a "state of becoming" (32) always contingent on the works' reception by future readers.

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