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Dark Sympathy: Desiring the Other in Godwin, Coleridge, and Shelley

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DARK SYMPATHY:
DESIRING THE OTHER IN GODWIN, COLERIDGE, AND SHELLEY

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by

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ABSTRACT

Dark Sympathy: Desiring the Other in Godwin, Coleridge, and Shelley explores
how Romantic writers took up and responded to eighteenth-century discourses of
sympathy in the context of an increasingly influential materialist epistemology and
ontology. In its formulation by David Hume and Adam Smith, sympathy plays a central
role in society, using the imagination to smooth over uncertainties about the status of the
self and its relation to the world that might otherwise paralyze human activity. Sympathy
therefore carries a twofold purpose: on the one hand, it provides a feasible substitute for
personal identity; on the other hand, it facilitates social interaction. While these ends are
not incompatible in Hume's work, given his pragmatic suspension of any overly idealistic
desire, the effect of an emerging materialist discourse upon English Romantic writing is
to widen the representational gap between the self and the external world. In its insistence
upon a hard distinction between human ideas about the world and its potentially
inaccessible true constitution, the threat of materiality conflicts with the socializing
conceit of the sympathetic imagination. If sympathy is the key vehicle for social cohesion
in the modern era, then "dark" sympathy recalls the rejected or unmanageable strands of
desire for the other. The Romantic fascination with negative affects, anti- or counter-
social thought, and limit-experiences prompts them to find means of representing these
transcendent desires.

Where the dissertation's first two chapters undertake an intellectual history of
sympathy and materialism, the last three chapters on William Godwin, Samuel Taylor
Coleridge, and Mary Shelley read their works as attempting to sublimate this conflict by
experimenting with forms of what Jean-Luc Nancy calls "community," which is the bare

relation of being-with-others uninformed by any common bond, as a substitute for the social harmony implied by sympathy. In addition to participating in the growing critical interest in the cultural and historical evolution of sympathy, *Dark Sympathy* attempts to contribute to the scholarship on ethics and literature by exploring the sources and figurations that have contributed to a more radical understanding of alterity.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

> "No man can completely put himself in the place of
> another, and conceive how he would feel, were the
> circumstances of that other his own: few can do it even in a
> superficial degree. We are so familiar with our own trains
> of thinking: we resolve them with such complacency: it
> appears to us, that there is so astonishing a perverseness in
> not seeing things as we see them!"
> — William Godwin, *Fleetwood*

> "My grandmother used to tell a story about a magnetic
> mountain: ships that sailed too close were suddenly
> stripped of all their ironwork, the nails flew to the mountain
> and the wretched travelers perished in the falling timbers."
> — Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*

In August 1806,[1] Samuel Taylor Coleridge visited the home of his friend and

correspondent, William Godwin. After supper, Coleridge recited his famous poem, *The

Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, while Godwin's young daughters, the future Mary

Wollstonecraft Shelley and her stepsister, listened in secret. Upon discovering the girls,

Godwin's wife ordered them to bed. Whether it was the hour of the recitation, the poem's

dark subject matter, or what Coleridge's presence represented more generally in terms of

Godwin's radicalism, the illicit fascination of the children in this context struck an

incongruous chord and appeared to Mary Jane Godwin as somehow inappropriate and

requiring restraint. Yet Coleridge intervened so that they could hear the rest of the poem.[2]

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[1] Anne Mellor suggests that this incident took place on August 24, 1806 (11). This is the only date in August that Godwin records Coleridge coming over for supper, which he did along with Charles and Mary Lamb. Others have speculated a much earlier date, possibly before Coleridge left England in 1804. See Martin Garrett, *Mary Shelley Chronology*. For a summary of the relationship of Godwin and Coleridge (and Shelley), see Beth Lau, 75.

[2] This scene is discussed briefly by Michelle Levy (693), who refers us to Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*, 11, and William St. Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys: The Biography of a Family*, 295. Beth Lau also describes the scene, citing both Mellor and also Emily W. Sunstein's biography of Shelley, *Mary Shelley: Romance and Reality*, 40. According to Sunstein, the story originates in Lucy Madox Brown Rossetti's 1890 biography, *Mrs. Shelley*, 25. Assuming the August date proposed by Mellor

The scene offers a somewhat definitive moment: an encounter between the two generations of Romantic writers in the context of the pervasive hospitality that so characterizes their shared idea of community. The added detail of the stepmother attempting to separate the enraptured coterie further allegorizes the tableau—a figure of the social order with its attendant duties and laws endeavouring to explode the community of poetic desire. That the poem fuelling their desire is *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is also particularly suggestive in the context of this study. The image of the solitary mariner, doomed upon his return to shore to stand always on the fringes of society, repeats in an inverted way a figure that will be central to my argument: the solitary sailor at the end of David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*, Book 1. For Hume, this figure of the solitary epitomizes the limitations of radical scepticism and necessitates the turn to sociality that he takes up in Books 2 and 3. The listeners on that night in late August, including the three authors discussed in this study, encounter in Coleridge's poem what turns out to be a major critique of Hume's strategy: the possibility that sociality would not be adequate to satisfy desire.[3]

The literary implications of this inadequacy lie at the heart of this study. Sympathy, mobilized culturally through the theoretical work of David Hume and Adam Smith, presents itself as the solution to the dangers of an excessive desire for otherness, transforming alterity into sameness, the other person into a reflection of the self.[4] Yet this

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is correct, Coleridge had just returned from Malta, arriving on August 17, "again in my native country, ill, penniless, and worse than homeless" (Letter to Josiah Wedgewood, 25 June 1807).

[3] Anya Taylor discusses the relation between Hume's reflections at the end of Book 1 and Coleridge's writings on persons and identity, noting that, in the despair of that concluding section, "Hume anticipates Frankenstein's monster and other alienated and fragmented Romantic heroes" ("Coleridge on Persons in Dialogue" 360).

[4] As the term appears in this dissertation, "otherness" or "alterity" is meant to interact with several (sometimes conflicting) theoretical frameworks. On the one hand, the ways in which the "Other" functions in the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva are helpful for uncovering the means by

excessive desire does not simply disappear. Instead, it gets provisionally displaced into objects and situations associated with the emerging discourse of materialism. Materialism and its representation over the course of the eighteenth century preserve the extreme desire for otherness by revealing the unrepresentable element of every representation. Despite their assessment of social sympathy as having failed to accommodate the scope of human desire, the Romantics attempt to reintegrate this extreme desire for the other with the sympathetic process. Sympathy, that is, continues to be taken as a vital aspect of human experience: only its theorization limits it. While most critics have recognized the resulting ambivalent semantics of sympathy that emerge at the end of the eighteenth century, a specific assessment of what that ambivalence entails for desire and its representation in literature has yet to be undertaken. In what follows, I take up the work of Romantic writers such as William Godwin (1756-1836), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), and Mary Shelley (1797-1851) to explore their attempts at managing sympathy's conflicting desires through the literary deployment of situations and characters that express both the social desire for stable, comprehensible relations with others and an absolute or transcendent desire to engage the other without mediation.

As I will explore in greater detail below, my basic argument begins from the premise that the social desire for the other, which defines the dominant character of sympathy in the work of both Hume and Smith, implies a desire for a shared frame of understanding. Alongside social desire—and generally in conflict with it—is a

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which desire orients itself towards alterity and the effects of this turning. On the other hand, the phenomenology of Emmanuel Levinas posits a radical notion of the other that in many ways resists desire, particularly as it is taken up and critiqued in deconstruction. John Lechte helpfully highlights the differences between these views as well: "Kristeva adheres to a conception of historical, material origin of society, which influences social, cultural and political life, while, for Levinas, materiality – including violence – is only one dimension of human existence, the other dimension being the realm of transcendence, the realm of the Other, infinity and difference" (86).

transcendent desire for the other that implies an absolute sharing of identity: an imagined

relational space that not only precedes, but also makes possible both self and other. If

these desires each correspond to an imaginary field characterized, respectively, either by

stability and limits or by alterity and excess, a third term—materiality, which emerges as

a site of figural inquiry during the eighteenth century—is that which eludes every

imaginary and which remains even after the exhaustion of desire. Out of the encounter of

these imaginaries and the radical otherness of materiality, an event I call "dark sympathy"

takes place. While the Romantics differ on the precise nature of this event of dark

sympathy, I will suggest more generally that it occupies an encrypted relation to

conventional sympathy. If conventional sympathy foregrounds social desire almost to the

exclusion of all other forms of desire, then dark sympathy can be said to express instead

the desire for transcendence that continues to haunt social desire even after it fails in the

wake of the experience of materiality.

The Emergence of Modern Sympathy

An underlying contention of this project is that the modern discourse of sympathy

comes into being primarily with the philosophy of David Hume (1711-1776) and

specifically his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40). While he is indisputably building

upon earlier developments in moral philosophy advanced by thinkers such as the Earl of

Shaftesbury (1671-1713) and Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), Hume is the first to make

sympathy the primary vehicle for social cohesion.[5] Where his precursors had included

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[5] See Norman Kemp Smith, Ch. 2, pp. 23-51. Kemp Smith writes of Hutcheson's influence in particular: "What chiefly influenced Hume was not, as we might too hastily assume, Hutcheson's insistence upon the merely sequential, *de facto* character of the connexion holding between subject and predicate in perceptual

sympathy as just one of several manifestations of the moral sense, Hume makes sympathy prior to such a sense, positing it centrally as "the soul or animating principle" of every human passion (*Treatise* 235).[6] Yet Hume's theorization of sympathy is also significant for its speculative character. As I show at greater length below, Hume posits sympathy as a solution to an epistemological problem, so that its initial appearance in Book 2 of the *Treatise* only comes after Hume's turn away from a radical form of scepticism and towards the stability of social life at the end of Book 1. This problem that precedes his explorations of the passions and morals corresponds to the immense scope he sets for himself: a metaphysics of human nature, beginning with the understanding. When it becomes apparent that this scope cannot be adequately addressed, Hume constrains it to concern human nature as it unfolds socially, with sympathy as the primary mechanism for facilitating the communication of this nature with others. Nevertheless, the effect of Hume's initial investigations into the understanding haunts the rest of the text, disrupting its confidence in the overall effectiveness of sympathy.

In subsequent eighteenth-century thought, sympathy's capacity for meeting the needs of the social order gets more smoothly rendered.[7] One of the key ways these later thinkers accomplish this is by omitting the metaphysical dimension, treating sympathy instead as a purely social mechanism from its inception. For instance, Edmund Burke

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and evaluating judgments, but the inversion of the roles ordinarily ascribed to passion and to reason respectively" (44). Offering a key example, Kemp Smith continues: "Accordingly Hutcheson's teaching appears in a new and revolutionary light when Hume reformulates it in his fundamental maxim that 'reason is, and *ought only to be* the slave of the passions," citing Hume's assertion in the *Treatise* 2.2.3 (emphasis original). See Ildiko Csengei for a brief discussion of Shaftesbury's contributions to the development of thinking on sympathy in the eighteenth century (34).

[6] David Fate Norton writes, "Without question, Hume and Hutcheson had different views of the role of sympathy in morals. Hume took sympathy to be centrally implicated in at least most forms of moral approbation and disapprobation, a view not shared by Hutcheson" ("Hume and Hutcheson" 254).

[7] See Eagleton, *The Trouble with Strangers: A Study of Ethics*, Chapter 3 ("Edmund Burke and Adam Smith"), esp. 67-69.

embeds his discussion of sympathy in his much broader aesthetical investigation, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). Like the moral philosophers, Burke includes sympathy as one of the many passions that serve the "variety of ends […] in the great chain of society" (40). For Burke, sympathy is "a sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another man, and affected in many respects as he is affected" (41). He connects this general view of sympathy first with its function in real society and then with the vital role it plays in aesthetic experience. As Immanuel Kant observed of Burke's discussion of the sublime, his meditations are mostly determinate, which is to say, observational and psychological in nature, rather than reflective. For example, Kant describes Burke's analysis of the sublime as an "empirical exposition" rather than a "transcendental" one (*Critique of Judgement* 108). The same can be said of his discussion of sympathy: while it serves as a good description of what seems to occur empirically during a sympathetic exchange, it does not speculate upon a possible origin or *a priori* structure.

Like Hume, Adam Smith locates sympathy at the core of his argument: after all, his analysis of sympathy begins on the first page of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759; sixth edition, 1790). As I will explore at greater length in Chapter 1, Smith appears throughout to be acutely aware of the artificial nature of sympathy. He refuses to entertain the idea of a primordial nature for sympathy that might continue to affect its social mobilization. Knud Haakonssen notes: "Smith sees art, technology, science, deistic religion, including natural providence, as parts of the explanatory web that the *imagination* creates to satisfy its desire for order. Such desire for order is in many ways more urgent in our dealings with people" (xiii; emphasis mine). On the one hand, Smith's

theorization of sympathy is thus much more comprehensive than Hume's. The process by which sympathy becomes possible and its foundational relevance to the proper functioning of society are taken up at length. Nevertheless, on the other hand, as we see in Haakonssen's explanation, Smith understands sympathy fundamentally as only an expression of *social* desire—a desire for order (within and without the self) for the sake of society as a whole.

In Hume, by contrast, the desire for order arises primarily from our reliance upon habit or custom for understanding the world around us and is therefore distinct from desire in its more expansive (and problematic) senses. This latter form of desire appears pervasively in Book 1 of Hume's *Treatise* as the radical scepticism he enacts in response to a Cartesian method of doubt that fails to go far enough. As I argue in Chapter 1, Hume's scepticism elaborates a transcendent desire, yet it is of necessity only negatively expressed. Thus it appears as a kind of apophasis in so far as scepticism reveals how all objects of desire fail to satisfy desire itself, disclosing the void at the centre of desire through an articulation of what it is not, similar to the apophatic rhetoric of negative theology.[8] To delineate in more positive terms the scope and character of the excessive desire that Hume's social turn represses will require recourse to theories more explicitly concerned with the nature of desire.

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[8] For example, Hent de Vries describes the "scepticism" of Emmanuel Levinas in terms of a project of negative theology (499), arguing that "[s]kepticism bears witness to 'the rupture, failure, impotence or impossibility of discourse' ([Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*] *OB* 168 / 214), that is to say, of the said. […] Language, including even prophetic speech, is incapable of comprehending in its own terms its own origin and goal, that is to say, of presenting them without revoking and contradicting them at the same time" (504-505).

Desire in Sympathy

Describing how desire functions in Hegel, Jean Hyppolite writes: "During the course of this experience [of desire], I discover that desire is never exhausted and that its reflected intention leads me to an essential otherness" (163). Although desire does aim at "the unity of the I with itself" (160), this unity is always ultimately deferred because of the discovery that self-consciousness (the "I" itself) requires an object of desire so that it "can negate it" (162). From one perspective, Hyppolite writes, the otherness that is being desired "appears to be merely provisional in the case of this or that particular desire" (162), yet, he continues, "its essentiality results from the succession of desires" (162). Sympathy contains a similar ambiguity. As Jacques Khalip suggests about sympathy's implications in the eighteenth century, "sympathy supports ethical models of intersubjectivity that solicit alterity through mutual recognition or likeness, while keeping the self intact" (99). In Godwin's reflections on sympathy, which I will explore in Chapter 3, this general movement towards unity is part of what makes sympathy so amenable to social ends. In sympathy, there is a tension between the aim of overcoming differences in favour of that which is held in common and the aim of maintaining the differences that comprise self and other. If the former desire to collapse the gap between self and other forms the basis of society, then the latter desire to keep it intact derives from the need for desire to be perpetuated.[9]

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[9] Peter Singer exposits desire in Hegel's writing similarly: "Desire appeared as the expression of the fact that self-consciousness needs an external object, and yet finds itself limited by anything that is outside itself. But to desire something is to be unsatisfied; so desire is—to make a typically Hegelian play on words—an unsatisfactory state for self-consciousness. Worse still, self-consciousness seems doomed to be permanently unsatisfied, for if the object of desire is done away with as an independent object, self-consciousness will have destroyed what it needed for its own existence" (76).

In sympathetic discourse, this tension is expressed in at least two forms of desire analogous to the modalities of the signifying process in language that the post-Lacanian psychoanalysis of Julia Kristeva distinguishes. Hume's *Treatise*, for example, implicates the communication of sentiments in the dominating structures of eighteenth-century society and presents such communication as a universal language—a common tongue for human nature. The result, as Adela Pinch remarks, is that "Humean sympathy communicates feelings along well-worn paths: it causes us to admire the rich and powerful; […] it strengthens our ties to our fathers and loosens our ties to our mothers" (25). Pinch's observation about the classist and patriarchal framing of modern sympathy encourages a correlation between Hume's desire for society at the beginning of the *Treatise*, Book 2, and Kristeva's deployment in *Revolution in Poetic Language* of the Lacanian concept of "the symbolic".[10] Kristeva describes the symbolic as "a social effect of the relation to the other, established through the objective constraints of biological (including sexual) differences and concrete, historical family structures" (29). As we will see, language in Kristeva's schema differs from how it appears in most "modern linguistic theories," which, she argues, "consider language a strictly 'formal' object" (21).

Recovering a more fleshed-out subject of enunciation that is lacking from Lacan's model, Kristeva shows that these formal approaches only touch upon the linguistic categories that correspond to the symbolic. The result of this kind of deployment of language is what she calls a "phenotext," which "obeys rules of communication and presupposes a subject of enunciation and an addressee" (87). Hume's suggestion of an

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[10] Kristeva borrows much of her terminology from Lacan, whose three categories of the psyche (the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic) also correspond to three elements in a topology of psychological development.

individual-to-individual regulative communication model for sympathy resembles such a phenotext, particularly as it underscores the symbolic's organization according to what Lacan named the Law of the Father. The Law of the Father demands that the diffuse or chaotic energies that precede and accompany more structured forms of desire submit themselves to the authority of a powerful social agent—in Hume's picture, for instance, towards fathers and away from mothers.

To the extent that sympathy does function for Hume as a social mechanism, the description above is largely unproblematic. Nevertheless, for Kristeva, the symbolic is always in the process of covering over a movement of dispositions that she calls the "semiotic *chora*" (25). She writes that the semiotic *chora* is "articulated by flows and marks: facilitation, energy transfers, the cutting up of the corporeal and social continuum as well as that of signifying material" (40). I have shown how Kristeva's idea of the symbolic modality of language describes the regulative and stabilizing desire that shapes the social order and how the idea serves as a suitable analogy for the primary form of desire Hume identifies with sympathy; that Kristeva perceives a larger scope for signification, therefore, also invites a further investigation of Hume's system. In a similar way to how Kristeva's *chora* provides the agitated ground out of which the subject may emerge into the context of the social order, Hume's discussion of sympathy follows his famous extended meditation in Book 1 on the understanding, specifically as it relates to the limits of selfhood. My reading of Hume's epistemology traces its trajectories of desire by juxtaposing its radical conclusions about the impossibility of self-coherence with Hume's repeated attempts to find a solution to this problem of the self. While I would agree with the warning against making Hume into a "deconstructor of the self" (Potkay

53), the affective "remains of [his] former disposition" (*Treatise* 175) continue to haunt Hume's exploration of the social program of sympathy in Books 2 and 3. The concept of the semiotic *chora* offers itself, therefore, as a possible response to the unanswered question posed by Hume's failure to contain the "bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement" (165) within the bounds of a theoretically legitimated Self.[11]

We can read sympathy as it is articulated in the *Treatise* as a set of symbolic positions and the underlying struggle over the impossibility of a unified selfhood as the semiotic ground informing those positions. Yet, between the semiotic ground and its symbolic positions lies an additional threshold. Kristeva writes that "establishing the *identification* of the subject and its object as preconditions of propositionality" requires "a break in the signifying process," which she calls "the thetic phase" (43). The thetic phase coincides with the point at which the body's semiotic *chora* posits itself as the image it beholds in what Lacan calls the mirror stage.[12] In the context of Humean sympathy, a thetic-like phase occurs when one encounters another in sympathy and sees in that other person an image of someone so wholly similar to oneself as to make the process of sympathy with him or her an exercise in repetition, or what Hume would call

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[11] See Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, Ch. 5, where he writes: "We thought that we had located the essence of empiricism in the specific problem of subjectivity. But, first of all, we should ask how subjectivity is defined. The subject is defined by the movement through which it is developed. Subject is that which develops itself. The only content that we can give to the idea of subjectivity is that of mediation and transcendence. But we note that the movement of self-development and of becoming-other is double: the subject transcends itself, but it is also reflected upon" (85). As Constantin V. Boundas writes of the major influence Hume has upon Deleuze: "the intensity named 'Hume' has not ceased to resonate throughout Deleuze's writings" (2).

[12] In *Trouble With Strangers*, Terry Eagleton also makes this connection between the Lacanian Imaginary and eighteenth-century sympathy. See Chapter 1, especially, "Sentiment and Sensibility."

"custom."[13] This sympathetic identification with the other, which involves using the other as a stand-in for the self in order to organize and symbolize the self's manifold dimensions and energies, obviously retains many of its affective—semiotic—dispositions. Indeed, Kristeva emphasizes that, while "[t]he thetic phase marks a threshold between two heterogeneous realms: the semiotic and the symbolic," "[t]he second includes part of the first" (48). In other words, the symbolic order made possible for Hume by means of sympathy continues to be haunted by the afterlife of a semiotic dimension that prompted the desire for the other in the first place. Nevertheless, this semiotic dimension only ever inflects the symbolic: the systematization of sympathy in Hume's *Treatise* has compressed the spontaneity of the sympathetic interaction into the form of a principle, which he notes "is nothing but the conversion of an idea into an impression by the force of imagination" (273). No longer operating at a level of sheer unconscious affectivity via an older theory of sympathy understood as cosmic attunement,[14] Hume's revision of sympathy for the modern era mostly abandons an

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[13] Hume famously writes in the Abstract of his *Treatise*: "'Tis not, therefore, reason which is the guide of life, but custom. That alone determines the mind, in all instances, to suppose the future conformable to the past. However easy this step may seem, reason would never, to all eternity, be able to make it" (411).

[14] The longer provenance of sympathy, stretching back into ancient times with the Stoical concept of *sympatheia*, plays an important role in continuing to shape its meaning even after the modern social turn. See Jeremy Adler who suggests that the idea of "a hitherto unexplained, because insufficiently researched, universal order, stretching from chemical matter to the stars," which appeared for instance in Goethe's 1809 novel, *Effective Affinities*, "can in fact be traced from the pre-Socratics to the Stoa and to Plotinus, and thence to the Renaissance theory of a universal *sympathia* [*sic*] linking all parts of the cosmos" (265). Ernest Gilman discusses this early modern usage in greater depth, specifically as it was put to use by Sir Kenelm Digby in his famous Powder of Sympathy, "with its dubious ability to effect cures at a distance by the action of 'sympathy'" (270). Digby is important because he represents an early experimentation in the idea of a *material* sympathy. As Gilman writes, "In his defense of the working of his Powder, Digby wants, above all, to preserve a view of the world in which sympathetic connections are possible, a world in which things are held together and work their influence on each other and yearn to return to their source […] he must secure this vision on a material basis if it is to be credible" (276-77). Ildiko Csengei also discusses at length the magnetic and mechanistic associations with sympathy during the eighteenth century (40-44) and directs us to Patricia Fara's *Sympathetic Attractions: Magnetic Practices, Beliefs, and Symbolism in Eighteenth-Century England* for additional information.

intuitive response to the other (i.e., one prompted by a transcendent desire for relation) in favour of a response prompted by social convention.

I have introduced these structures of psychical development (particularly as Kristeva redeploys them along the register of language) in order to interrogate the consequences of sympathy's social program as it first develops in Hume. This analysis of the semiological implications of sympathy articulates two important questions. First, what is the character of that "semiotic" form of desire that sympathy's over-determination of sociality has displaced? Second, what is the nature of the force that compels this displacement? Kristeva suggests that there is a "principle of negativity" (131) operating within the symbolic order that itself draws upon the semiotic. This principle foreshadows the kinds of creative "transgressions" by the semiotic within the symbolic that occur because of the liminal position of the thetic. To draw upon examples from subsequent chapters, we might mention the social disruptions caused by Casmir Fleetwood's madness in William Godwin's novel, *Fleetwood*, the female body in Coleridge's "Christabel," or the materialization of death in the depiction of the plague appearing in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*. In each of these events, the "thetic" appears as an unspoken determination about the subject and his or her place in the larger society—and the semiotic re-appears in the unsettling of that determination.

For instance, in Godwin's novel, Fleetwood has fled England, where he believes his wife has cuckolded him. While he has confirmed this identity legally by divorcing her, his ongoing (and ultimately ineffable) desire for his wife profoundly complicates his desire to reject her and rejoin society in the marginal role that he best fits—that of the misanthrope. In the ensuing scene of madness, where Fleetwood destroys wax effigies of

his wife and her reputed lover, the inexpressible form of (transcendent) desire acts upon the dominant and coherent form of (social) desire according to a "principle of negativity," transgressing that desire to exist within society (even if only on the margins) in order to express a more transcendent desire for an unmediated relation. At the peak of Fleetwood's madness, he momentarily believes he sees the wax figure of his wife move. As I will argue in Chapter 3, the event constitutes an example of dark sympathy because it puts the subject's imaginative faculties in service *not* of his social desire, but rather of his repressed transcendent desire. Importantly, Godwin's representative strategies here (and in other depictions of an excessive desire for the other) rely upon images, processes, and analogies that attempt to point towards what I call, after Paul de Man, "materiality." Materiality, as I use it in this study, aligns with what Jacques Derrida describes as "all that resists appropriation" ("Typewriter Ribbon" 353), including bodily responses, involuntary reactions, and other expressions of sensibility; natural events without a human influence, producing both form and chaos; animalistic or non-signifying interactions; and other attenuated forms of expression. As I explore in Chapter 2, materiality develops as a constellation of cultural presuppositions about the world alongside the emergence of materialist discourse. In the work of all the authors I read below, there is recourse to it as a symbolic placeholder that emphasizes above all the failure of representation to reflect certain categories of meaning.

If Romantic writers seek to create conditions out of which that repressed transcendent desire can find at least provisional expression, then eighteenth-century thinkers of sympathy work to escape its demands. As I explore below, their turn to the social extends earlier movements in the paradigm shift of modernity, which Charles

Taylor describes as "the massive subjective turn of modern culture" (*The Ethics of Authenticity* 26). For instance, Annette Baier describes the significance of Hume's *Treatise* as residing in its reorientation of philosophy "towards human persons, instead of towards God and the universe" (25). In the course of this reorientation, however, this emphasis upon the shared humanity of people (i.e., as social others) appears unequal to the desires that had hitherto been directed towards such expansive, cosmic objects. The promise that Hume finally offers, therefore, is not, as in the epigraph for the *Treatise,* "[t]he rare good fortune of an age in which we may feel what we wish and say what we feel" (423). Instead, the freedom made possible by sympathy is a paradoxical and mitigated freedom to "yield to the current of nature, in submitting to my senses and understanding" (175), which he reminds us are *formed* through custom and habit. Still, that desire to "feel what we wish and say what we feel"—in other words, the desire for an utterly unencumbered and transparent relation with others—lingers throughout Hume's work and into the next century.

Framing Sympathy

Over the last twenty-five years, intellectual historians and literary critics have considered sympathy within a number of frameworks: as a vehicle for sensibility, as a mechanism for facilitating the operations of the public sphere, and—more recently—as a discourse for exploring the representation of alterity. Read as an agent of sensibility, sympathy expresses the intersection of feeling subjects in society. Arguing that the sympathetic process gained influence because of its ability to establish communities, Janet Todd writes: "The most potent force for community is emotional ritual or the

display of sensibility, where the tearful master or mistress may show inferior spectators a posture of sympathy or a gesture that provokes responsive tears" (*Sensibility* 83). This generous, positive reading of sympathy is the perspective taken by the majority of sympathy's proponents in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Instead of a society grounded upon law and reason, sympathy as a functional sensibility-for-others appeals to the feelings, moods, and bodily senses for confirmation and direction in forming human relations.[15]

Drawing upon the term's inherent polysemy, advocates of sympathy also attempt to move beyond the sentimental register, distinguishing it from the sentimentalism that had otherwise shaped it in the modern era. Todd describes how, by the end of the eighteenth century, sentimental literature comes to be accused of "selfishness, irrationality and amorality" (144). Yet, despite this critique, sensibility's primary vehicle, sympathy, remains pervasive in the culture's ethical imagination. As Ildiko Csengei writes: "The term sympathy was used widely in the literature of science, medicine, and philosophy, and, in fact, surfaces in all areas of eighteenth-century life, including market reports, music, and even contemporary calculations of longitude" (31). As a lubricant for the newly inaugurated public sphere, sympathy established networks of shared benevolent feeling along which reasoned conversation and debate could run freely. If sensibility ultimately failed to facilitate this process, eighteenth-century notions of sociality could still be rendered distinct from sensibility. Indeed, by disconnecting sympathy from the overly excessive discourse of feeling, it could be implemented as a mechanism in the service of reinforcing purely social bonds.

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[15] More recently, Jerome McGann has attempted a similar reading of the social potential of sensibility. See also Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility*, who notes, "The ideas associated with the concept of sensibility in the eighteenth century were a powerful force in the development of art, philosophy, and social thinking" (1).

For those critics that narrow their focus to the intersection of sympathy with late-eighteenth-century thought, the result is most often a telling discovery of sympathy's failure. Nearly all of the recent work with a particular focus on sympathy shares this recognition of its failure or impossibility. Amit Rai describes how "[i]n a specific sense, sympathy produces the very inequalities it decries and seeks to bridge" (6). Jacques Khalip notes that "[s]ympathy […] is a profoundly dissimulating and specular process" (119). Csengei writes of sympathy's paradoxical "self-interest, cruelty, solipsism, social disruption" and notes that "the boundaries of sympathy are fragile, and the reaction that a certain stimulus is meant to elicit is often hard to control" (12). This shared recognition may be traced in part to David Marshall's 1988 monograph, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy*. In his analysis of *Frankenstein*, Marshall writes: "Sympathy appears to be impossible because both impressions and expressions will be misconstrued" (216). He offers an encounter between the monstrous creature and the blind man, De Lacey, in the novel as a case-in-point, suggesting that "the imaginative transport that might convey his beholder [i.e., De Lacey's vision of the Creature] across the epistemological void that separates even fellow beings, carrying him beyond or across the purport of appearances, will be blocked by the insurmountable barrier of the human senses" (216). This recognition of the epistemological impasse is nothing new for sympathetic discourse, as I will show in my reading of David Hume. Yet, unlike the Romantics, Hume attempts to overcome this impasse provisionally by means of an appeal to the social realm itself. Over the second half of the eighteenth century, intellectual exigencies (the most predominant of which—materialism—I investigate at length in Chapter 2) undermine the adequacy of Hume's solution.

For Marshall and also for many others, sympathy gets its fullest treatment in the work of Adam Smith.[16] While I will explore in greater detail the relationship between Smith and Hume in Chapter 1, I want to emphasize my agreement with this view to the extent that Smith is the key representative of the *dominant mode* of social sympathy. Yet, as I have already suggested briefly, I also want to position Hume as the philosopher responsible for what we might describe as the *aporia* of sympathy that will trouble all of its later iterations, including Smith's. The intent behind this critical move is to emphasize Hume's unique connection to the Romantics and his singular contribution to what amounts to their deconstruction of sympathy in the period—the subject of the study that follows.[17] As I will analyze at length in Chapter 1, Hume's initial positing of social sympathy at the beginning of Book 2 of his *Treatise* is meant to stave off the failure of a more transcendent, immediate desire for otherness that he raises in Book 1. Critics have thus tended to focus on the way writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries sought to reorient and recover sympathy for society in the face of its impossibility. For instance, Rai notes this tendency when defining the so-called "rules of sympathy," which in fact amount to a series of paradoxes: "[c]ircular and tangential, awkward and unreliable […] if these rules of possibility for the sympathetic operation are strictly speaking impossible, this does not mean that sympathy doesn't 'exist,' or that there is no sympathy, or that for Burke, Smith, or Hume sympathy was a sham that we have now finally unmasked" (59).

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[16] Miranda Burgess summarizes the critical camps: "There are scholars, like David Marshall (1988) and Julie Ellison (1999), who take Adam Smith's heavily individuated and volitional understanding of sympathy in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) as exemplary of the period. Others, like [Adela] Pinch, argue instead for an account of late-eighteenth-century and Romantic sympathy more closely associated with David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740), in which sympathy appeared as an inescapably contagious form of affective migrancy" (297).

[17] Burgess offers a useful breakdown of the differences between Adam Smith's unique deployment of sympathy and David Hume's. Centrally, Smith's distinction lies in the role of "the mediating imagination," which Burgess notes plays little or no part in Hume's treatment of sympathy as "both inescapably social and entirely unmediated" (298).

This critical approach of considering how writers attempt to make sympathetic community "operative" again is common, except in a handful of cases.

The Romantic era offers some support for critics that resist this redemptive approach. For instance, Khalip notes that "what is at stake" in P. B. Shelley's work on the subject "is a reconceptualization of basic assumptions about what sympathy is" (115). Against eighteenth-century models that might posit it as "an anxious reiteration of subjective power *over* the other" (115), Shelley's recognition of this inexorable tendency of sympathy presses him to "refus[e] entirely the kind of linkage between sympathy and the mimetic principle that moralizing aesthetics install" (117). By mobilizing the concept of anonymity as a solution to the problems of representation encountered in the period, Khalip suggests a unique response to sympathy's failure on the part of Romantics: namely, that it be understood as "the experience of an otherness that (mis)represents itself to the subject—it is an *obligation* to otherness that cannot be properly defined, but to which the subject remains critically open" (132). Csengei's exploration of the "magnetic-mechanistic notion of sympathy" points to a similar unmanageability, as it "conveyed anxieties related to the disruptive – and politically threatening – force of excessive feeling which would spread from person to person like an infection" (31-32). This turn in criticism about sympathy to questions surrounding alterity and its representation signals an important shift that is producing a more nuanced historical and philosophical portrait of the Romantic period.[18] My aim here is to take up not only this necessary issue

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[18] For example, Robert Mitchell argues that "theories of sympathy and identification emerged around period of financial crisis […], for it was precisely during periods of financial panic that state finance became visible *as* a 'system' that connected people to one another through affective bonds of belief, 'Opinion,' and desire" (5). In response, Romantic writers mobilized "affect," which he defines as "experiences of intensity that seem to demand the invention of new systems of communication" (20). Where Mitchell uncovers the complex social structures that lead to the development of modern sympathetic desire and beyond, I want to explore the conditions under which such sympathy comes undone.

regarding the way sympathy introduces otherness to thought, mobilizing a repressed

transcendent desire, but also the implications of the persisting social desires that

dominate sympathy.[19]

Towards a Theory of Dark Sympathy

Throughout this study, I will employ several specific terms that participate

centrally in my reading of the breakdown of sympathy. At the most basic level, I assess

sympathy as giving expression to two general categories of desiring the other: social

desire and transcendent desire. Social desire is a desire to be with the other or to

understand the other under the relatively stable conditions established by "society." As I

show below, society—or, to borrow Hannah Arendt's term, "the social"—includes all

political, cultural, educational, and moral institutions and value-systems that guide or

shape human action.[20] William Godwin, for instance, would align the social with systems

and institutions, which he defines antagonistically as "the powers of man as they have

modified, or may hereafter modify his social state of existence" (PJ3 1:2). I have

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[19] Recently, Mary Fairclough has argued that "during the Romantic period the association between collective behaviour and the physiological processes of sympathy leads almost inevitably to denunciation of the crowd on the grounds of its instinctive, unthinking and potentially violent qualities" (226-27). This presents an intriguing situation in which the transcendent desire that accompanies sympathy is seen as invalidating the social desire sympathy ostensibly facilitates and might otherwise encourage.

[20] For Arendt, the Greek public sphere, or *polis*, was the place where individuality appeared in that culture. She writes: "it was the only place where men could show who they really and inexchangeably were" (41); in other words, it was the realm of freedom. Underpinning the possibility of this public realm was the private realm of the household economy. The private realm was organized around meeting the conditions necessary for survival. As Arendt notes, "force and violence are justified in this sphere because they are the only means to master necessity […] and to become free" (31). The *social* appears when the life-and-death concerns belonging to the private realm emerge "from the shadowy interior of the household into the light of the public sphere" (38). Once the state takes on the responsibility for keeping its citizens alive, the social supplants the public realm. It accomplishes this in at least two ways: first, through the "early substitution of behaviour for action" and, second, by means of the "eventual substitution of bureaucracy, the rule of nobody, for personal rulership" (45). The result, according to Arendt, is "to reduce man as a whole, in all his activities, to the level of a conditioned and behaving animal" (45).

suggested that the social itself is characterized by the psycholinguistic realm of the

Symbolic; to borrow another term from Lacan, our relation to the social might therefore

be understood along the lines of "the imaginary," which is the underlying set of

representations, images, narratives, and other symbolic orderings that determine how the

world seems to be. It is an inescapable dimension of human experience, though much of

the Romantic effort consisted in attempting such an escape or at least a radical

revisioning.

Terry Eagleton describes the imaginary (following Lacan) as "a realm in which

things give us back ourselves, if only we had a determinate enough self to appreciate it"

(3). It is "a matter of unity, stasis, resemblance, correspondence, autonomy, mimesis,

representation, harmony, plenitude and totality" (5). Unlike Eagleton, however, who

maintains the distinctions between Lacan's psychic categories of the Imaginary, the

Symbolic, and the Real, I want to appropriate the term "imaginary" in particular and use

it to mark out the field of phenomenality in general.[21] An imaginary, thought in these

terms, is a kind of narrativization or representation emerging within a particular social

space and providing the interpretive lens through which perception at an individual level

becomes possible. As Eagleton writes, "The imaginary, in short, is a kind of ideology"

(10). This alignment of the imaginary with ideology will become most obvious with

Mary Shelley, whose work recognizes the persistent thread of what Paul de Man calls

aesthetic ideology in the Romantic writing both of her generation and the one that

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[21] In some ways, my use of the term is also close to that of Charles Taylor. For Taylor, "Our social imaginary at any given time is complex. It incorporates a sense of the normal expectations we have of each other, the kind of common understanding that enables us to carry out the collective practices that make up our social life. This incorporates some sense of how we all fit together in carrying out the common practice" (*Modern Social Imaginaries* 24). Taylor uses it in distinction from "theory," which he argues corresponds to "explicit doctrines" (25). I retain the term's Lacanian inflections, however, in order to underscore what I take to be its specific connection with desire.

preceded it. At this point, I want to introduce the idea of the imaginary as an interpersonal space in which desire may become "properly" managed. This social management of desire ultimately runs up against the excessive forms of desire that I will theorize beginning later in this chapter, but also at greater length in Chapter 2. Such desire is excessive precisely because its scope extends beyond any possible object, tending ultimately towards the Real. Where the imaginary tends to be mediated and contained by representation as it is deployed socially, transcendent desire – which is itself also a part of the imaginary – inherently strives to exceed such bounds.

I describe this conflicting category of desire as "transcendent" in order to signal its vertical orientation towards the absolute. This desire to understand the other without mediation and in absolute proximity has also been called "metaphysical desire" by Emmanuel Levinas (*TI* 33). In *Totality and Infinity,* he writes, "The metaphysical desire does not long to return, for it is desire for a land not of our birth, for a land foreign to every nature, which has not been our fatherland and to which we shall never betake ourselves. [...] It is a desire that can not be satisfied" (33-34). Where social desire begins from an existing sense of the self that the self wishes to preserve in its dealings with the other and follows the circuitous trajectory that Levinas describes as "long[ing] to return," transcendent desire begins with the other. As I indicate above, closely aligned with transcendent desire, at least as it gets represented by Romantic writers, is the concept of materiality. The recognition made in part via the burgeoning scientific discourse of the period that representation always leaves a gap between our knowledge of others (and otherness) and things as they are not only marks that Real as the true other to be desired,

but also promotes increasingly primal and anti-social modes of expression that aim at spanning that gap.

Although I explore a number of these materialist expressions in the texts that I read below, the majority of these may be subsumed under the key term I deploy throughout, "dark sympathy," which also serves as my study's title. The term does not appear in the writings of the English Romantics, yet it gestures towards the paradox I am most interested in exploring: namely, how the Romantics use the failed framework of a social sympathy to express forms of transcendent desire that exceed that framework (and are even partly responsible for its failure). Dark sympathy refers to the way the more extreme forms of relational desire at work in sympathy continue to operate even after they cease to function socially.[22] Levinas discusses "darkness," noting that "[t]o see is hence always to see on the horizon. The vision that apprehends on the horizon does not encounter a being out of what is beyond all being. Vision is a forgetting of the *there is* because of the essential satisfaction, the agreeableness [*agrément*] of sensibility, enjoyment, contentment with the finite without concern for the infinite" (*TI* 191). If (social) sympathy relies upon the horizon of sight and finite vision, then dark sympathy entertains the infinite from within the constricting limits of things as they appear to be.

On the other hand, dark sympathy also highlights the illusiveness of sympathy itself, pointing to desires and impulses that precede these constricting limits of the social. Despite "dark sympathy" never appearing as a phrase in English Romantic writing, the American Romantic, Nathaniel Hawthorne, uses it once in his novella, *The Marble Faun*,

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[22] As may be gleaned from the examples in the chapters that follow, dark sympathy is accompanied by an intense set of conflicting emotions. Levinas's earlier definition of emotion as that which "puts into question not the existence, but the subjectivity of the subject" and "prevent[s] the subject from gathering itself up, reacting, being someone" (*EE* 68).

to describe the shared exhilaration of transgression. He writes: "The foremost result of a broken law is ever an ecstatic sense of freedom. And thus there exhaled upward (out of their dark sympathy, at the base of which lay a human corpse) a bliss, or an insanity, which the unhappy pair imagined to be well worth the sleepy innocence that was forever lost to them" (207). Transgression is an important element of dark sympathy that will accompany the majority of its appearances in Romantic writing. As Michel Foucault writes, "Transgression is an action which involves the limit, that narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage, but perhaps also its entire trajectory, even its origin; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line it crosses" ("Preface to Transgression" 34). Dark sympathy, likewise, generally takes the form of an event, rather than anything extended. It is not purely oppositional in the sense that transgression is sometimes understood, but rather it can be understood as a moment of passing across the bounds set down by the social in an attempt to contain the transcendent desire that is working to escape from it. Thus, although this project attempts to trace the origins and paradoxes of the modern understanding of sympathy, it is not strictly concerned with the work of sympathy itself. Instead, it proposes, on the one hand, a description of how sympathy helps to establish the modern social imaginary along with its concomitant anxieties, and, on the other, an exploration of sympathy's breakdown.

The dissertation is thus composed of two parts: first, I trace the entwined intellectual histories of sympathy and materialism; second, I turn my attention to three Romantic authors, William Godwin, S. T. Coleridge, and Mary Shelley, each of whom approaches the conflict in desire I call "dark sympathy" through the deployment of counter-social dispositions that capture the expressive content of a repressed transcendent

desire for the other. In Chapter 1, I focus upon the conflict in desire located at the heart of modern sympathy. This conflict, as I have already indicated above, is between desire implying a stable hierarchy of the self over the other person (i.e., a social relation) and desire understood as an immediate relation of the self and the other (i.e., a transcendent relation). These two forms of desire in fact emerge much earlier in the epistemological and political reflections of René Descartes and Thomas Hobbes. The contradicting inheritance of these impulses about the ideal character of human relations comes to a head in eighteenth-century moral philosophy. Beginning with David Hume, sympathy starts to be treated as an exclusively social mechanism, though it continues to be haunted by a certain transcendent desire even in Hume's own reflections. The work of Adam Smith and others in the latter half of the eighteenth century reinforces Hume's elision of sympathy's transcendent content. This transcendent potential for sympathy remains encrypted in the idea of sympathy until after the world-disrupting events of the 1790s, which helped to usher in the Romantic era of literature and thought in Britain. As I will argue in closing this first chapter, the theorization of sympathy in the eighteenth century harbours a psychosocial anxiety over the repression of transcendent desire, leading to a renewed exploration into sympathy's limits and possibilities by Romantic writers.

Chapter 2 continues this history of thought by tracing more closely the dislocation of transcendent desire from its central position in the imaginary of pre-modern sympathy to its inflective position in the radical materialism of post-Epicurean thought. With the dawn of the materialist imagination, transcendent desire receives a new vocabulary and representational framework, which I trace through the work of Descartes, Hobbes, and, more recently, Paul de Man. The result is a series of attempts to imagine materiality—a

paradoxical endeavour that I explore through three examples: Joseph Priestley's "immaterial" materialism, the scientific varieties of vitalism, and the emerging discourse of sensibility. In all cases, I suggest that these attempts to imagine materiality lend it a transcendent tone, which the Romantics attempt to extend. In closing, I test this historical investigation with close readings of P. B. Shelley's early materialist poem, *Queen Mab*, and his Gothic novella, *St. Irvyne*.

Chapter 3 takes up the work of William Godwin (1756-1836). I argue that Godwin's utopian vision of a just social order, outlined in the three successive editions of *Enquiry concerning Political Justice*, encounters a profound (and compelling) resistance in the spectral figure of the misanthrope in his fiction. If sympathy represents the central vehicle for social harmony, then misanthropy corresponds to a miscarriage of such relational desire. Specifically, misanthropy suggests itself as a conduit for the repressed desires of modern sympathy in its response to the narrative vehicle of sympathy: namely, its reactive expressions of madness. As a good Humean, Godwin believes firmly in the necessity of social desire, though he loses much of his optimism about it as his career progresses. Instead, transcendent desire must express itself within the social, which is a framing that ultimately gives way to counter-social forms of desire like misanthropy.

In Chapter 4, I turn to the politics and poetry of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834). Coleridge is partly influenced by Godwin's social vision, but also continues to hold on to a sense of community that he explores iteratively over the course of his life. Focusing first on his Pantisocratic schema and literary experimentation in his conversation poems, I will argue that these experiments repeatedly fail to articulate the transcendent desire he wants to express because of his ambiguous relation to the

otherness of materiality throughout. With his unfinished poem "Christabel," however, Coleridge is able to encounter this materiality—especially as it expresses itself in the body—with less resistance, uncovering the many effects it has upon desire itself. If Christabel's encounter with the materiality of Geraldine's body leaves her horribly connected in a "forc'd unconscious sympathy" from which she cannot extract herself, Coleridge's poetry in light of his growing awareness of the implications of materiality is woven throughout with a pervasive sense of what he calls "dejection." Where transcendent desire imagines the possibility of a fundamental relation that supersedes all things, dejection is a state in which the subject maintains only an attenuated transcendent desire for the other by mobilizing the bare and singular potentiality of hope.

Finally, Chapter 5 explores three novels by Mary Shelley (1797-1851). For Shelley, dark sympathy both accompanies the desire encrypted within sympathy and emerges under the influence of an encounter with the threat of materiality; however, it also marks the differences between such transcendent desire and materiality. Shelley emphasizes in particular the impact of materiality upon desire through her figuration of it in *Frankenstein*'s Creature, in the emotional corollary in *Matilda* of the eponymous narrator's incestuous father, and, above all, in the all-pervasive force of death in *The Last Man*'s worldwide plague. In the idea of death, she discovers not only the contours of what a transcendent desire would look like without its social enframing, but also a community that is apart from desire. In the space between transcendence and community, dark sympathy permits Shelley – as it did Godwin and Coleridge – to suspend any final judgment on the possibility or nature of desiring the other.

By way of closing, we may return to Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, where the listening wedding-guest, prevented from participating in the social exercise of the wedding, encounters one whose destruction of a supposedly transcendent object—the albatross—leads to his total expulsion from all forms of human society: "Alone, alone, all, all alone, / Alone on a wide wide sea!" (232).[23] The mariner, like Hume at the end of his epistemological investigation, destroys in an act of scepticism the promise the albatross signals for his fellow sailors: "As if it had been a Christian soul, / We hailed it in God's name" (65-66). The result is the evanishment of any ideal capable of sustaining the ship homewards. When the mariner finally arrives on shore, he learns the "penance of life" that he must now fulfill:

> I pass, like night, from land to land;
> I have strange power of speech;
> That moment that his face I see,
> I know the man that must hear me:
> To him my tale I teach. (586-90)

This "strange power," which the wedding-guest discovers also "holds him with his glittering eye" (13), forms a relation that stands apart from the social order, a dark sympathy that works against the socializing efforts of conventional sympathy. Assuring the wedding-guest, who (Coleridge's gloss tells us) initially "feareth that a spirit is talking to him," the mariner declares that the desire that informs their irresistible relation is profoundly material: "This body dropt not down […] The many men, so beautiful! / And they all dead did lie: / And a thousand thousand slimy things / Lived on; and so did I" (231, 235-38). The oppressive materiality of the mariner's bodily presence and relentless proximity contrasts with the ceremony of the wedding so that, when the guest finally "[t]urn[s] from the bridegroom's door" (621), the tale has made him "[a] sadder

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[23] Tellingly, Shelley also cites this stanza in one of her later journal entries (April 1841).

and a wiser man" (624) because it has subjected his social desire (to participate in the wedding) to a transcendent desire (to hear the mariner speak) and found the former lacking.

Whether or not the suggestive scene at Godwin's house actually occurred as posterity claims, the problem that Coleridge's poem explores was one that troubled all the Romantics. If the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the rise of the social and its attendant mechanisms, then the Romantic period emerges out of a crisis in the possibility of the social to attend to desire. This crisis recalled a form of desire that had become incompatible with the view of the social as a natural good. As Hume notes in a passage that is particularly telling for its overdetermination of the value of the social,

> 'Tis by society alone he is able to supply his defects, and raise himself up to an equality with his fellow-creatures, and even acquire a superiority above them. By society all his infirmities are compensated; and tho' in that situation his wants multiply every moment upon him, yet his abilities are still more augmented, and leave him in every respect more satisfied and happy, than 'tis possible for him, in his savage and solitary condition, ever to become. (312)

The attempt to recover this transcendent desire and the consistent failure to do so within modern society are the defining features of what I am calling dark sympathy. Sympathy, according to Hume, assumes a sameness between individuals that permitted society to flourish. To desire the other *as* other would mean moving beyond such observable similarities into the darkness of what Emmanuel Levinas calls the "face of the Other" (*TI* 50-51).[24] This study will explore the ambivalent roots of such a radical notion of alterity as it emerges during this fraught period in the intellectual history of sympathy.

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[24] Levinas writes: "The face of the Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me, the idea existing to my own measure and to the measure of its *ideatum*—the adequate idea" (*TI* 50-51).

CHAPTER ONE
The Dark Side of Sympathy

 "The real threat is that faced with the impenetrable aspects
of others, faced with the impossibility of knowing other
people's sentiments except through acts of imagination,
sympathy itself might be impossible"
— David Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy*

"Thus a longing felt in the dark is transformed into a fear of
the dark."
— Sigmund Freud, "Anxiety"

Sympathy has conventionally been thought of as a vehicle for social cohesion.

Through a focalized operation of the imagination, sympathy promises to fortify existing

social relations. Yet this social orientation is also accompanied by a repressed desire that

extends beyond the mere wish for personal or civic stability. Following the upheavals in

thought and culture of the latter part of the eighteenth century, Romantic writers take up

the disclosed limits of social desire and investigate the possibility of other forms of

relation. These alternative communities would continue to draw upon the discourse of

sympathy while attempting better to account for the transcendent desire sympathy had

repressed. As I will demonstrate in the exploration of individual authors that follow, the

results of these attempts were mixed. For instance, in July 1814, Percy Bysshe Shelley

told his wife, Harriet, that he had fallen in love with the sixteen-year-old daughter of his

mentor William Godwin. He explains in a letter a few months later:

> I shall never cease to interest myself in your welfare—you were my wife,
> you are the mother of my child: you will bear another to me. But these are
> ties which only bind to worldly matters where sympathy in the great
> questions of human happiness is wanting. They produce mutual kindness,
> compassion & consideration […] but the sacrafice [*sic*] & self devotion of
> an elevated friendship cannot exist when the causes have ceased to act.
> (*Letters* 1:404)

Employing the term, "sympathy," in a sense opposite to the one intended by eighteenth-century philosophers for whom it was explicitly a function for strengthening such "[bonds] to worldly matters," Shelley insists that there is more than one way to desire the other. He does express a social desire for Harriet, an "interest […] in [her] welfare," which Shelley attempted to maintain throughout the remainder of Harriet's short life.[1] This social desire "produce[s] mutual kindness, compassion & consideration," which parallel the kinds of virtues writers like David Hume associate with sympathy:

> 'Twill be easy to explain the passion of *pity*, from the precedent reasoning concerning *sympathy*. We have a lively idea of every thing related to us. All human creatures are related to us by resemblance. Their persons, therefore, their interests, their passions, their pains and pleasures must strike upon us in a lively manner, and produce an emotion similar to the original one… (238)

Yet Shelley is unsatisfied with this "worldly" sympathy and seeks another form of relation: "sympathy in the great questions of human happiness." In an earlier letter to Harriet, he writes: "It is no reproach to me that you have never filled my heart with an all-sufficing passion—perhaps, you are even yourself a stranger to these impulses" (*Letters* 1:389-90). Setting aside the fact that Harriet's impassioned, tragic response of suicide two years later disputes his speculation, we may perceive at the root of Shelley's contention his belief in a deeper form of desire than mere kinship or duty—a desire possessing the impossible scope of "an all-sufficing passion."

In the study that follows, I will show how this belief stretches the limits of the Romantic imagination to include a plurality of expressions of desiring the other—both positive and negative. Indeed, if social sympathy serves as one of the organizing

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[1] For instance, after securing £1000 per annum from his father, Shelley allocated £200 to Harriet. He also attempted to keep abreast of her circumstances, as we see tragically in his letter to Thomas Hookham of November 1816, which came too late to intercept her suicide the following month.

mechanisms for eighteenth-century sociality and its attendant public sphere,[2] then

sympathy's breakdown may serve as the quaking grounds of what Jean-Luc Nancy calls

"community." For Nancy, community is a radical inversion of the sympathetic

projection-mechanism, which only seeks out the self in others, eradicating all differences.

Instead,

> community is a matter of […] existence inasmuch as it is *in* common, but without letting itself be absorbed into a common substance. Being *in* common has nothing to do with communion, with fusion into a body, into a unique and ultimate identity that would no longer be exposed. […] [It] means, to the contrary, *no longer having, in any form, in any empirical or ideal place, such a substantial identity, and sharing this* (narcissistic) *"lack of identity."* (*Inoperative* xxxviii)[3]

This sharing, I will argue in this chapter, is the ultimate object of a transcendent desire for

otherness or the other that orients much Romantic writing. To understand the way

transcendent desire appears and then is repressed within the discourse of sympathy, I

want to trace the categories of desire that inform the work of modern sympathy's first

great proponent, David Hume. Hume, I argue, plants the seed of an anxiety that will

blossom in the counter-social experiments of the Romantics. This anxiety works against

the established primacy of the social and of sympathetic identification within the culture

of the latter half of the eighteenth century in England. In order to prepare for my analysis

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[2] Describing the influence of the novel and epistolary fiction upon the rise of the public sphere in the eighteenth century, Jürgen Habermas writes of how "[t]he relations between author, work, and public changed. They became intimate mutual relationships between privatized individuals who were psychologically interested in what was 'human,' in self-knowledge, and in empathy" (50). Likewise, Marc Redfield notes, "Sentimentalism, which here denotes not just the era of Sterne, Rousseau, and Klopstock, but also, more generally, a certain focus on and valorization of affect that remains a recognizable literary idiom until the First World War, may be distinguished from earlier discourses of the passions by its implicit or explicit claim to universality" (135-36).

[3] Nancy's definition of community (one of several throughout his corpus) sounds initially like a shorthand for social sympathy, in which the self discovers itself in the other. Yet the phrasing is much more careful than this, as the other and the same are identified with a third term, "le semblable," which is itself not an identity. Instead, he points here to what he calls, in *Being Singular Plural*, "being-with": "Therefore, it is not the case that the 'with' is an addition to some prior Being"—as it seems to be in conventional sympathy—"instead, the 'with' is at the heart of Being" (*BSP* 30).

of Hume and my reading of how Hume's ultimate social turn and attempt to seal off this anxiety gets taken up and expanded by Adam Smith, I will therefore begin with two philosophers whose divergent views greatly influenced Hume's thought: René Descartes (1596-1650) and Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679). In these thinkers, we find important early reflections on how the other might be desired: on the one hand, according to a transcendent desire for an unmediated relation to the Real, as I noted in the Preface, or, on the other, according to a social desire for day-to-day stability.

Sources of the Conflict in Sympathy

Descartes and Hobbes each framed questions that are representative of the initial crisis in the discourses of human experience, which may be said to give birth to, or at least be coextensive with, what is called the Enlightenment. Moreover, the ideas advanced by these writers—specifically pertaining, in the case of Descartes, to the organization of the passions, and, in Hobbes, to the role of the state—help to explain the nature of the argumentative path Hume takes in the *Treatise*. My introduction of these seventeenth-century writers, often identified as diametrically opposed thinkers, stems in part from the observation that "any attempt to understand the philosophical parameters of modernity must go back to its source in Hobbes and in Descartes" (Hoffman vii); however, insofar as my reading of sympathy attempts to account for the ways its modern development contradicts or unsettles itself, my use of these writers focuses particularly upon the way their philosophical inquiries reflect conflicting responses to similar trajectories of desire.

Broadly considered, these "founding fathers of modern philosophy" (vii) both seek to proceed along what Piotr Hoffman describes, with an eye to Horkheimer and Adorno, as "the road of total mastery of the conditions of [human] existence" (187). Yet, as I hope to indicate in my brief survey of their contributions to modern thinking on the human condition, the major qualitative differences between each writer set the stage for a theoretical incoherence in Hume that gets further exacerbated and drawn out in the subsequent literary experiments of Romantic writers. What Horkheimer and Adorno identify as the "triumphant calamity" of "the wholly enlightened earth" (1) starts down its destructive path with a methodological conflict: on the one hand, Cartesian scepticism's attempt to uncover a kernel of identity impervious to the alterity of the passions because of its fundamental position; on the other, the empiricist drive for an assertive and secure social system capable of regulating and directing the internal flux of human desires, such as Hobbes evokes. In each case, the philosopher advances a distinct strategy for making the relation to the other or to others possible: either by positing the soul as the foundation of all experience or by positing the state as the primary condition for securing peace. Yet, in both cases, the desiring subject they describe fails to be made whole by the imaginary they propose. In the chapters that follow, this internally divided self will appear again and again.

Descartes: Controlling the Outside

Much of Descartes's concern derives from the nature of our relation with the outside. Passions, for instance, originate with the other. Indeed, Descartes begins from a traditional understanding of the passions as the inverse of actions. As he notes in a

somewhat sophisticated elaboration of these definitions in the context of a description of

the soul:

> The ones I call its [the soul's] actions are all of our volitions, because we find by experience that they come directly from our soul and seem to depend only on it; as, on the other hand, all the sorts of cases of perception or knowledge to be found in us can generally be called its passions, because it is not our soul that makes them such as they are, and because it always receives them from things that are represented by them. (*Passions* 28)

Thus we may conceive of actions as centrifugal movements that seek to orient the desire

of the soul out towards an external object, while the passions operate according to a

centripetal force, moving inwards. As signals of alterity, the passions are fundamentally

affective in constitution, which means that they can be understood to a certain extent only

retrospectively, once the force of their unfolding has been felt upon the soul. This

definition underscores the involuntary character of the passions and emphasizes what an

enormous shift has taken place in Descartes's adaptation of earlier notions of the work of

the passions.

In the first place, Cartesian passions, understood as "intermediaries of mind-body

union" (Brown 28), have a different relationship with the will than they do within the

prior contexts of Aristotelianism or Stoicism, out of which Descartes's thought emerges.

In the case of the recovered Aristotelianism of seventeenth-century Christian thought,

"the passions were connected with the Fall of humanity, and strict control by reason and

the will was required for them to be compatible with virtue" (31). This subordination of

involuntary tendencies to a more self-consciously directed set of behaviours is not an

attempt to negate or neutralize such urges, but rather to convert them by means of their

rational organization into forms that reflect existing Christian ideals. The result, however,

is an attempt to transform the other into the same, repudiating the alterity inherent in the passions. A similar repudiation occurs in the Stoical legacy, which aims at "a state of complete freedom from (bodily) passions (*apatheia*)" (32). For the Stoics, the problem of the passions lies in their ability to make people do things involuntarily—that is, in their "othering" of the centre of one's identity, the will. Deborah Brown explains the Stoical position: "By exercising direct control over one side of a passion, we may gain control over the whole, and by extension, over our actions" (34). This control is interpretative in nature rather than functional as in Aristotelianism. The involuntariness of the passions can be brought into contact with the will through an act of interpretation, with the result that the passion's conventional value is reassessed in light of a higher value. As Martha Nussbaum writes regarding Stoical values, "only virtue is worth choosing for its own sake; and virtue all by itself suffices for a completely good human life [...] Virtue is something unaffected by external contingency—both (apparently) as to its acquisition and as to its maintenance once acquired" (359).[4] If Aristotelianism attempts to transform negative passions into positive activity, Stoicism closes off the self from all exteriority in an asceticism of negated desire.

Drawing upon these two influences, Cartesian moral philosophy enjoins us "to use our reason to discriminate what is and what is not within our control, and to regulate desires accordingly, so that our contentment of mind does not depend on what is beyond our power to control" (Brown 34). In this definition, we see both the functional,

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[4] Brown directs us to Nussbaum's *The Therapy of Desire*, Ch. 10, for an overview of Stoic detachment (33n.9). Nussbaum writes: "Not only traditional 'external goods' like wealth and honor, not only 'relational goods' like having children, having friends, having political rights and privileges, but also individual forms of virtuous activity, such as acting courageously, justly, and moderately, are held to be, strictly speaking, worthless, on the grounds that they can, as Aristotle has argued and as anyone knows, be cut off or impeded by accidents beyond our control" (362).

Aristotelian vision of the passions, which would subordinate passions within a hierarchy of faculties as tools by which reason may achieve its ends, and the interpretative, Stoical vision, which seeks, by way of a kind of "everlasting No," to extirpate the influence of externally derived forces upon direct experience.[5] While these influences seem at odds, given their contrasting understanding of the passions (as, on the one hand, salvageable, and, on the other, corrupting), an idea of the self emerges in the course of what Charles Taylor describes as "[t]he internalization wrought by the modern age" (*Sources* 143) that permits these contradicting positions to subsist in a dynamic tension. Moreover, following a third influence, which Taylor identifies as Augustine, Descartes facilitates "a transposition by which we no longer see ourselves as related to moral sources outside of us, or at least not at all in the same way" (143). That is, instead of grounding identity in conformity to an ideal set of behaviours, as in Aristotle, or through "accept[ance] and rejoic[ing] in whatever happens *qua* event in this providential order" (Taylor 147), as in Stoicism, Descartes posits a rational kernel of identity as an organizational (and hence relational) agent influencing the body's diverse modulating energies, which he calls the passions.

This kernel of identity is what I have generally called "the self," but it appears under several subtly different terms in Descartes's work: in particular, as soul or as *cogito*. Against the relaxed attitude he displays in his advice on how to deal with the passions, I want to suggest that Descartes's uneven sense of what constitutes the desiring subject – that subject who is supposed to "regulate [its] desires accordingly" – sets the

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[5] Cf. Geneviève Rodis-Lewis's description of Descartes as "the adversary of the Stoics when they condemn all passion," but also as "borrow[ing] practical counsel from them when they stress the risk of accelerating disorder: to strive to destroy by reason fallacious opinions that perturb the soul, but also to temporize when the disturbance is too violent" (xxii).

stage for a return of these repressed passions in later writers such as Hume. Thus, in *The Passions of the Soul* (1649), Descartes does not use the term *cogito*; instead, he posits "the soul" itself as something "joined to the whole body" (345). He goes on to assert that "even those who have the feeblest souls can acquire a very absolute dominion over all their passions if sufficient industry is applied in training and guiding them" (356). By contrast, although the *cogito* has also been aligned with "soul," this earlier sense of it in his *Meditations* (1641) is far more limited: "I do not now admit anything which is not necessarily true: to speak accurately I am not more than a thing which thinks, that is, to say a mind or a soul, or an understanding, or a reason" (152). Indeed, as opposed to the soul of the *Passions* that is connected to the "whole body," the *cogito* is explicitly connected only to the pineal gland, which makes it appear far less a pervasive guide like the Holy Spirit, and more the Father God, directing from a single point.

In both cases, soul and *cogito*, Descartes is positing an ordering dimension (either as a force or element) able to bring all of these conflicting urges under its sovereignty as in a kind of court, as Jonathan Lamb suggests, "as if it were Versailles in fact" (19).[6] In the face of what Judith Butler describes as the world of desire, "a world characterized by radical particularism and arbitrary objects, delectable but disarmingly displaced" (1-2), this "self" promises a form of stability against that which would invade and disturb it – for example, the passions. The effect of this internalization is somewhat different from the inward-looking tendency of Augustine from which it derives, since that view sought not to arrive at "the Self," but rather to move through the self in order to discover beyond

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[6] Lamb elaborates on the image of the *cogito* in particular: "Fetched by the animal spirits to where the soul is seated on the throne of the pineal gland are images, pictures, and representations of objects of the senses, all presented for its inspection" (19).

it the transcendent mind of God.[7] Instead, as Taylor suggests, Descartes advances a

conception of knowledge in which a "representation of reality now has to be constructed.

As the notion of 'idea' migrates from its ontic sense to apply henceforth to intra-psychic

contents, to things 'in the mind', so the order of ideas ceases to be something we *find* and

becomes something we *build*" (144).

Nevertheless, both the general unevenness of the terms Descartes uses to denote

this kernel of identity (which I am disingenuously covering up with the term, "self") and

his later fascination with these inward-moving elements of alterity, the passions, suggest

that the rational method by which he has proceeded has not been entirely successful. Leo

Bersani writes, "Perhaps the indeterminacy of the Cartesian subject (the I in the *sum*)—

[…]—has to do with its being a divided subject. There is the I that is searching, and there

are 'the things within [him] which [the thinking thing has] not yet noticed'" (4). This

division stems partly from Descartes's sense that "[t]he ultimate goal is the mastery of

nature, but knowledge of the world might also be considered […] as an afterthought" (4-

5). More fundamentally, however, it stems from the modern development that "the mind

has become a secret object to itself" (6).[8] The desire for certainty, at the end of which

Descartes hopes to discover a thinking self adequate to the task of mastering the world,

encounters a pressure in the transcendent desire to know all. He suppresses this

encounter, Bersani notes, by "making explicit to his readers the procedures of

investigation" (16); however, the division at the heart of Descartes's desiring subject –

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[7] Charles Taylor describes Augustine's position at length in Chapter 7, "In Interiore Homine," *Sources of the Self*, 127-42.

[8] Bersani's essay aligns Descartes, Proust, and Freud in order to make this seemingly anachronistic claim; however, this reading against the grain is precisely at the heart of the argument: "It is as if, in removing himself from all human company in order to become modernity's master athlete of self-exploration, Descartes intuited the reality of a divided self articulated two and a half centuries later as the psychoanalytic distinction between consciousness and an unconscious that is anything but a certainty of being or of knowledge" (7).

particularly a subject who claims such a transcendent position – will reverberate into the

eighteenth century and Hume's response to Cartesian scepticism in Book 1 of the

Treatise.

Hobbes: Desiring Stability

Like Descartes, Thomas Hobbes sees the passions as originating externally, in this

case, as functions of nature; however, for Hobbes, human nature is *also* part of this

exteriority. For, where Descartes attempts to manage the threat of alterity as something

that moves inwards and unsettles the thinking self, Hobbes sees both the passions and the

subject who is defined by these in a state of nature as needing to be wholly suppressed by

the State. "All passions," writes Arnold Green, "are finally reduced by Hobbes to the

involuntary drive to power after power" (76). This drive to power derives from and is

accelerated by the so-called "right of nature," which F. S. McNeilly describes in the

context of Hobbes's thought as "the absence of external impediments to the use of a

man's power, as he wills, for the preservation of his own nature (that is, his life), and to

his doing whatever reason tells him is the best means of achieving that" (175). Because

this natural right has no real limitations, its corresponding natural law, which interdicts

anything that might lead to self-destruction, articulates a fundamental relationship in the

state of nature: the individual and death. The resistance to death orients human beings

towards a desire for peace, which redirects our egoism towards the social contract, which

would guarantee our self-preservation in exchange for a certain loss of liberty. While the

state of nature does not comprehend self-preservation as synonymous with a resistance to

death, under the first law of nature, which forbids humans from "omit[ting], that, by

which he thinketh it [i.e., his life] may be best preserved" (*Leviathan* 189), Hobbes

demands that human nature assume a divided consciousness not unlike that which

Descartes implicitly advances. This kind of mind would be able to include in its

negotiation of natural rights and law the possibility that a better strategy for survival

might be discovered in a consideration of the needs of others rather than in unmitigated

aggression.

Yet this phrasing puts it all too optimistically: the point is that such an assumption

cannot be sustained by the will of a solitary individual, but must instead be imposed upon

the individual. Without the limitations imposed by the state, Hobbes argues, the human

condition appears as a struggle between people that arises from the fundamental equality

of their situations. The Commonwealth to which the individual must submit its

independence is neither the *polis* of the Greeks, which was "their guarantee against the

futility of individual life, the space protected against this futility and reserved for the

relative permanence, if not immortality, of mortals" (Arendt 56), nor the *corpus Christi* in

which the members "have been all made to drink into one Spirit" so that "the body is not

one member, but many" (1 Corinthians xii.12). Rather, on the one hand, the "guarantee"

of Leviathan is a security that is also a loss, and, on the other, its manifold unity does not

originate in the spirit, but in the law. What are lost are the passions, and this loss occurs

under the influence of law. Although, as he writes, "[t]he desires, and other passions of

man, are in themselves no sin," this moral neutrality pertains only until "they know a

Law that forbids them: which till Lawes be made they cannot know: nor can any Law be

made till they have agreed upon the Person that shall make it" (*Leviathan* 187). To end

the inevitable "warre of every man against every man" (*Leviathan* 188) will require "the

introduction of that restraint upon themselves, [*sic*] (in which wee see them live in Common-wealths)" (*Leviathan* 223). Significantly, this introduction is only possible via the very elements of human nature requiring suppression: specifically, "[t]he passions that incline men to peace," which he lists as "fear of death; desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living; and a hope by their industry to obtain them" (*Leviathan* 188). This paradox of social desire desiring too much emerges repeatedly, as we shall see, in Hume's social turn, in Godwin's just society, Coleridge's Pantisocracy, and Shelley's Creature seeking sympathy from the De Lacey family.

A reading of the figure of Leviathan itself may offer more insight into Hobbes's psychology of the inwardly fragmented subject, which, as I have noted, emerges almost passively out of the state of nature rather than through an exertion of agency. Thus the famous frontispiece to *Leviathan* (1651), with its image of a looming, crowned giant, inwardly populated with its subjects, pictures the ramifications of this argument. Along these lines, Hobbes writes in his introductory description of Leviathan:

> For by Art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMON-WEALTH, or STATE, (in latine CIVITAS) which is but an Artificiall Man; [...] and in which the *Soveraignty* is an Artificiall *Soul*, as giving life and motion to the whole body; The *Magistrates*, and other *Officers* of Judicature and Execution, artificiall *Joynts*; *Reward* and *Punishment* [...] are the *Nerves*, that do the same in the Body Naturall; The *Wealth* and *Riches* of all the particular members, are the *Strength*; *Salus Populi* (the *peoples safety*) its *Businesse*; *Counsellors*, by whom all things needfull for it to know are suggested unto it, are the *Memory*; *Equity* and *Lawes*, an artificiall *Reason* and *Will*; *Concord*, *Health*; *Sedition*, *Sicknesse*; and *Civill war*, *Death*. Lastly, the *Pacts* and *Covenants* by which the parts of this Body Politique were at first made, set together, and united, resemble that *Fiat*, or the *Let us make man*, pronounced by God in the Creation. (81-82)

The effect of this description, like that produced by the frontispiece, is to imply that this body in pieces is held together by the force of analogy. Or, as the final comparison

between the covenants of the body politic and the *Fiat* suggests, the unity is wrought by language itself, represented in the design by the tenuous outline identifying the monarch's body. The unity implied for this social subject is neither equal to the transcendent desire displayed by the self in nature, which is a desire to enter into the alterity of the passions (a kind of death drive), nor is it sufficiently stable to justify itself as a suitable if impoverished alternative. Nancy Yousef argues that the suggestion of man's originary incompatibility with society is part of an early modern theory of the understanding in which the individual appears "as the self-begotten, self-sufficient hero of a narrative of coming into knowledge of the world around him, proceeding from sensation to the construction of ideas and eventually to reasoned and nuanced judgement" (20). For Hobbes, it is precisely this originary mode of a free relation to the otherness beyond the self that must be set aside to assure individual security and peace.

The Conflict of Sympathetic Desire in Hume and Smith

We can use the contexts provided by Descartes and Hobbes to frame the narrative constructed by Hume. Although he has been labelled an anti-Cartesianist for his empirical turn, which could not support something like the *cogito*, Hume's thinking displays a similar desire for subjective coherence. Indeed, as I will show, Hume pursues this objective throughout the *Treatise*, despite his ultimate inability to discover the conditions for such a coherence. Likewise, although he rejects completely Hobbes's claim regarding mankind's originary incompatibility with society, insisting instead upon our natural sociability, Hume predicates his social vision on the necessity of artifice in all matters of belief, relation, and even knowledge. As I have suggested, both Descartes and

Hobbes seek for ways to contain what Hume will posit as the major feature of human

nature: the passions. Yet even Hume recognizes that the passions must be mobilized—put

into a cycle of communication via sympathy—in order that they might be transformed

from impressions, which are "[t]hose perceptions, which enter [into our consciousness]

with most force and violence" (7), into ideas, which are abstractions and therefore subject

to measures of control.

What Descartes and Hobbes have put before the modern era are two possibilities

not only for managing these dangerous passions, symptoms of alterity, but also for

conceiving of the character of the self. In Descartes, the self appears often as the *cogito*,

which—like Hopkins's "immortal diamond" surviving the "Heraclitean fire" of Nature—

emerges out of Descartes's radical program of doubt as the final unassailable point of

existence. From the perspective of that point, the self discovers its absolute authority over

the rest of subjective existence. Hobbes's pre-social self as an ideal of freedom remains

similarly an unattainable object, whose impossibility must be maintained via submission

to the State for the sake of preserving life and securing at least a degree of private agency.

While Hume rejects the feasibility of the *cogito* in what Annette Baier calls Book 1's

"*reductio ad absurdum* of Cartesian intellect" (21), the effect of his maintenance of

something like the promise of the *cogito* in his section on personal identity and also in the

Treatise's Appendix is to give place to the idea of the self without defining its limits.

This promise concerns the idea of a stable point at the centre of selfhood around which

the manifold energies of our passions may orbit in relative gravitational certainty. The

rejection of that central kernel of identity at the end of Book 1, without a similar rejection

of the possibility it holds out for organizing the passions, suggests that Hume's original

introduction of the epistemological problem of the understanding was intended to put

forward the promise of the passions' organization, but to link it with something other

than the *cogito*: namely, the social. Hobbes's description of the unity made possible by a

mutual submission to a common point apart from the self illustrates in some ways the

logic of the social as it appeals to Hume, though its implications for Hobbes are far more

bleak. The Hobbesian contract necessary for society represents a strategy of displacement

in which the social comes to stand in for the self. Yet this substitution is explicitly

flawed, as the self-sufficient—though likely short-lived—individual in a state of nature

gives up its holistic freedom in favour of the Sovereign. Hume's argument for sociability

performs a similar displacement, yet instead of making explicit the necessity of

sacrificing transcendent desire, as Hobbes does, he calls this sociability itself "natural"

and emphasizes the fluid aspects of the principle of sympathy that facilitates it.

In the following sections, I want to cast this displaced transcendent desire in

Hume in sharper relief. I argue that we may uncover it partly in Hume's turn from an

extreme, Pyrrhonic scepticism to the empiricist outlook of Books 2 and 3 of the *Treatise*

of Human Nature. To better understand this turn to the social, I then take up Adam

Smith's reading of sympathy, which amplifies the role of the imagination in making

sympathy possible.[9] Having distinguished Smith in this way and identified him as the

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[9] In the decades following its publication, Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* was widely read; however, this influence seems to have declined in the following century. Amartya Sen writes in an article in the *New Statesman*: "On 12 April, Smith heard from his friend David Hume in London about how the book was doing. If Smith was, Hume told him, prepared for 'the worst', then he must now be given 'the melancholy news' that unfortunately 'the public seem disposed to applaud [your book] extremely'. 'It was looked for by the foolish people with some impatience; and the mob of literati are beginning already to be very loud in its praises.' This light-hearted intimation of the early success of Smith's first book was followed by serious critical acclaim for what is one of the truly outstanding books in the intellectual history of the world […] After its immediate success, *Moral Sentiments* went into something of an eclipse from the beginning of the 19th century" ("The economist manifesto" para. 1-2). The six editions that the book went through during Smith's lifetime – from its first appearance in 1759 to 1790 – also testify to this initial popularity. Also see

theorist of the dominant view of sympathy in the period, I will prepare for my final section on anxiety by suggesting that what Smith underscores is the simulatedness of modern sympathy. Hume, by contrast, continues to oscillate between an earlier commitment to the work of representation (in custom, habit, etc.) and this all-pervasive simulation advanced by the social. As Jean Baudrillard writes: "Whereas representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as false representation, simulation absorbs the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum" (173). Hume's ambivalence stems from his desire for a relation prior to what can emerge via the imagination and represents the key object of interest taken up by subsequent Romantic writers.

The Transcendent Impulse in David Hume

Gilles Deleuze understands transcendence in Hume's thought specifically in relation to the Humean concept of knowledge. He writes: "What is the fact of knowledge? It is transcendence or going beyond. I affirm more than I know; my judgment goes beyond the idea" (28). This exercise of affirmation—the result of custom—resides on the other side of scepticism, which appears in Hume's early reflections as the negative revelation of this transcendent character of knowledge. Following the resurgence of scepticism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially as formulated in the methodology of Descartes, Hume introduces in Book 1 of the *Treatise* a recovered form of Pyrrhonic scepticism described in the work of Sextus

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Charles Griswold's Introduction to *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment* for a lengthier discussion of Smith's "influence and fame" (8). James Engell notes that Smith's book "opened the floodgate to a rising tide of interest in the sympathetic imagination. His book became hugely influential. Many authors, among them Hazlitt, Thomas Brown, and Shelley, built their arguments with an eye to his" (149-50).

Empiricus.[10] Although he will also come to modify its extreme claims, Pyrrhonism

represents for Hume a total scepticism that provides him with the grounds for levying a

critique against the rationalism that allows Descartes to start and halt his systematic doubt

at will.[11] As I will describe in greater detail below, Cartesian scepticism imagines a form

of selfhood (i.e., the *cogito*) that Hume—via his Pyrrhonic approach—argues to be

impossible. Yet the sheer boundlessness of the sceptical venture leads Hume by the end

of the first book to repress the transcendent desire reflected in scepticism. Angela

Coventry describes this shift as one in which, ultimately, "Hume recommends mitigated

scepticism" (164). This mitigated scepticism, on the one hand, "deflates the pretensions

of the arrogant intellectuals, revealing the emptiness of their metaphysical inquiries," and,

on the other hand, ensures that we "limit ourselves to the narrow capacities of human

understanding and to such subjects that fall under daily practice and experience" (164-

65)—in other words, the knowledge that derives from empiricism, which is to say as

sensory experience. In this way, Hume reclaims scepticism from Cartesian rationalism

for British empiricism by means of a more radical (Pyrrhonic) scepticism that ultimately

disappears from view.[12]

     Over the course of his initial inquiry into the understanding, Hume takes the

Cartesian sceptical project further by submitting even identity itself to interrogation. As

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[10] Peter Fosl (after Richard Popkin) notes that "the 1718 Fabricius edition" of Sextus Empiricus's *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* is "the most likely source of Hume's direct understanding of skeptical thought" (266).
[11] Richard Popkin writes that Hume "agreed with the Pyrrhonian theory of the inability to find any rational and certain basis for our judgments to the extent that an epistemological analysis of the nature and grounds of human knowledge would reveal that there are no rational or certain grounds for our judgments, and that we have no ultimate criterion for determining which of our conflicting judgments in certain fundamental areas of human knowledge are true, or to be preferred" (106).
[12] Coventry notes: "Much debate remains, however, as to what his scepticism amounts to and how his scepticism is related to other more positive parts of his philosophical project. In fact, balancing Hume's scepticism with his constructive enterprise of establishing a science of human nature is said to be the central task facing every Hume scholar" (139).

Levinas writes: "In the Cartesian *cogito*, […] there is an arbitrary halt which is not justified of itself" (92-93). Hume presses upon the *cogito* in order to show that the sense of self-unity it implies in its claims about the one-who-thinks fails to account for the larger desire to be with others. Again, Levinas articulates this limitation in Descartes (though without reference to Hume): "Descartes seeks a certitude, and stops at the first change of level in this vertiginous descent; in fact he possesses the idea of infinity, and can gauge in advance the return of affirmation behind the negation. But to possess the idea of infinity is to have already welcomed the Other" (93). Admittedly, Levinas here idealizes the relation to the other in a way that Hume would not. To "welcome" is to in some ways already have the upper hand. My contention in this section is that, rather than "welcoming," Hume inadvertently initiates this opening towards the Other in his discussion of personal identity in the penultimate section of the *Treatise*, Book 1. As we will see in his eventual return to the question of the self in the Appendix, the idea of identity that he raises is similarly "infinite" and can no more be closed off with a sceptic's rejection than it can with a rationalist's deduction.

Hume opens the section on personal identity with a discussion of "some philosophers, who imagine we are every moment intimately conscious of what we call SELF" (164). Not only does he reject these metaphysicians, he also disclaims the validity of any rationally derived proof for the self: "It cannot, therefore, be from any of these impressions, or from any other, that the idea of self is deriv'd; and consequently there is no such idea" (164). The mind (as the host of those perceptions that purportedly make up "the self") appears to Hume more like a "theatre, where several perceptions make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and

situations" (165). Yet he adds to this analogy a further caveat that the mind is still in no way as coherent as a theatre, noting that "[t]hey are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind" (165). Thus, against the metaphysicians, he argues that the mind is characterized by artifice and, moreover, that such artifice can never turn over into reality. This analysis emerges from Hume's Pyrrhonic scepticism, which refuses throughout the first book to substitute any unacknowledged fiction for the Real despite its ultimate inscrutability. His rejection of the argument of "some philosophers" has mainly to do with their ascription of ontological status to a selfhood of their own description—the confusion of their *representation* of reality with reality itself. Levinas describes this effort on the part of Western philosophy as the "reduction of the other to the same by interposition of a middle and neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being" (43). The "Self" as a term introduces a common understanding of being that reduces the manifold of human experience to a single universal category. Hume admits the reality of the experience of a *sense* of self: "What then gives us so great a propension [*sic*] to ascribe an identity to these successive perceptions, and to suppose ourselves possesst of an invariable and uninterrupted existence thro' the whole course of our lives?" (165). The error of these philosophers is to mistake this "sense" for the thing itself. His speculation that "we add a *sympathy* of parts to their *common end*" (168; emphasis original) in order to "feign a principle of union" (171) represents his initial attempt at explaining the feeling of the self that we appear to have.

This reliance on "feigning" or "fiction" builds on a principle Hume introduces earlier in the *Treatise* that posits, instead of knowledge, belief as the "vivacity of our ideas," in which "[t]he memory, senses, and understanding are, therefore, all of them

founded on the imagination" (173). The imagination, for Hume, allows us to pass smoothly between ostensibly discrete phenomena (whether these be the phenomena of causation or those which make up what we call "the self"), relying upon custom and habit in order to circumvent the "manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason" (175), if only for long enough to permit us to act. In everyday life, "all reasonings are nothing but the effects of custom; and custom has no influence, but by enlivening the imagination, and giving us a strong conception of any object" (101). Thus the imagination fills in the spaces between perceptions, which might otherwise be dismissed as chance events or unrelated, by supercharging our observations with "vivacity" thereby moving them from the level of mere thought to the level of belief (66). For Hume, our "reasonings," by which he means "all reasonings from experience" (465 n.11), do not begin and end in an abstract vacuum of logical processing; rather, "[t]he custom," which attracts and facilitates the imagination's work, "operates *before* we have time for reflection" (72; emphasis mine).[13]

When transcendent desire resurfaces, it begins to break down the universality of the imaginary that social desire attempts to maintain. In the Appendix to the *Treatise* published with Book 3 in 1740, which appeared a year after the first two books were published, Hume returns to the discussion on personal identity.[14] Initially, the solution he posited to the problem of the self appears to have sufficed as a way to suspend the question altogether. Yet the renewal of his uncertainty in the Appendix suggests otherwise, as he remarks: "I find myself involv'd in such a labyrinth, that, I must confess, I neither know how to correct my former opinions, nor how to render them consistent"

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[13] Throughout, I refer to this realm of custom and feigned phenomenal union as the imaginary.

[14] See Don Garnett, especially Chapter 8, where he explores the many theories that have been proposed for Hume's dissatisfaction with his earlier account of personal identity.

(399). The original solution relied upon a fiction to "feign" the holism of the self—that rhetorical appeal to an imaginary, which he also employs throughout Books 2 and 3 where he depends upon the imagination for simulating stable conditions where reality refuses to provide them. This dependence undermines the radical scepticism he mobilizes throughout Book 1. In Kristevan terms, it fails to account for the principle of negativity that moves restlessly through the symbolic order. Aiming to "give to this science" of human nature the "solid foundation" of "experience and observation" (4), Hume submits every aspect of the understanding to a vigorous interrogation. In other words, Hume combines his scepticism with an empiricism that takes literally the claim that the senses alone demarcate the scope of what we might be able to know. Such a methodology frees Hume from narratives about existence that contradict our everyday experience of the world—his particular target, Cartesian rationalism, is just one major example.

In Books 2 and 3, however, he submits this scepticism to the system of impressions and ideas that he has established empirically in Book 1. Instead of allowing his empiricism to continue, which in its demand for sensory evidence might provide an ongoing catalyst for his "mitigated" scepticism, the event in which his Pyrrhonic scepticism encounters his empiricism and fails gets frozen as a phenomenality or imaginary that entraps the rest of his argument, becoming a kind of framing narrative for the longer excursion into the social. As Jacques Derrida reminds us, this framing is inevitable for empiricism, which he calls only the "metaphysical pretension or modesty" of "the *dream* of a purely *heterological* thought" at the source of philosophical discourse ("Violence" 151; emphasis original). For Derrida, empiricism is a dream "because it must vanish at *daybreak,* as soon as language awakens" (151; emphasis original). Hume's aim

has been to move beyond total scepticism towards a system in which empiricism undergirds the social order by affirming social experience; however, as Derrida here implies, the threat of the Real that scepticism posits undermines any easy transition. The close proximity of total scepticism and empiricism troubles Hume's text in a way that he would subsequently remedy by recasting the *Treatise* as two distinct volumes, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) and *An Enquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals* (1751). This revision also involved his omitting the discussion of personal identity altogether.[15] Recalling again Kristeva's distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic, we may thus read Hume's initial radical scepticism as a kind of semiotic methodology that cannot continue to operate within the empirical social-symbolic order that Hume introduces in Book 2. On these terms, scepticism carries a transcendent desire for otherness—a desire to allow that which is other to remain other—that drives the argument of Book 1. As Romantic writers will also discover, the difficulty of living with this scepticism can make more robust systematizing such as the theorizing of the state and society appealing.

Adam Smith and the Social Horizon of Sympathy

The difficulty (or impossibility) of managing this transcendent desire leads not only to its turning over into social desire in the *Treatise*, but ultimately to its general omission in Adam Smith's theory of sympathy as it appears in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. If Book 1 sees Hume attempt to explain his sense of the self as a kind of

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[15] In part, his rewriting of his arguments in these two volumes came about because of the utter failure of the *Treatise* to capture an audience; in his words, it "fell *dead-born from the press*" (qtd. in *Treatise*, Editor's Introduction, I97).

productive fiction that makes the social possible, the second and third books of the *Treatise* shift the terms of explanation to a society that might produce something like the self as a remainder—that is, something that comes *after* the social as a kind of delayed implication of the social encounter. Smith takes up this latter view more forcefully, excising transcendent desire altogether by simply rendering explicit sympathy's entrenched location within the imagination. He begins by noting the universality of a sympathetic tendency "which interest[s]" even the most selfish person sensibly "in the fortune of others, and render[s] their happiness necessary to him" (11). The senses, however, are inherently limited to the subject to which they belong. He notes that, "[a]s we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected" and also that "our senses will never inform us of what he suffers" (11). Such limits recall the epistemological crisis that Hume narrates in the *Treatise*, yet an important difference also appears. For Hume, scepticism's transcendent desire unravels centripetally towards the (im)possibility of self—hence, his turn to the social. For Smith, the senses are always already turned outwards; they are already themselves socially oriented. As I will also show, however, this characteristic of Smithean sympathy does not diminish its negative, even dark, elements—as many critics, including David Marshall, have indicated. Like Hume's variant, Smithean sympathy can manifest as cruelty, oppression, and excessive sensibility. Where it differs, however, is in the source of its failure: an obstructed desire in Hume; a limited imagination in Smith. A key effect of this difference is that Smith may obviate any recourse to the transcendent, retaining only the problems inherent to the social realm.

Vivasvan Soni similarly distinguishes Smith's deployment of sympathy from the more ambivalent view taken up by his predecessors, including Hume:

> It would be a mistake to think that sympathy, for Smith, is an unmediated relation to the feelings of others. Sym-pathy must not be confused with tele-pathy or affective contagion: "As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation" (9). How can we place ourselves in "the like situation"? The means by which sentiments are communicated, though it is not thematized in the *Theory* as sympathy is, and though it is called by various names such as "imagination" (9), is nothing other than narrative. (299-300)

Narrative plays an indisputably crucial role in the creation of a sympathetic bond—as the Romantics also well knew. And, as I explore in the last chapter, part of the ongoing difficulty Romantic writers have in coming to terms with sympathy is the question of whether it might be possible to relate to another without such narrative representations. For example, Coleridge's poem, "Christabel," opens with the troubled daughter of an aristocrat seeking solace and narrative self-unity through the symbolic (in Kristeva/Lacan's sense) assimilation of a stranger. Explicitly described in the chaotic terms Hume lays out for the theatre of the mind, Christabel attempts to unify her disparate desires—to discover herself as unified—through a sympathetic encounter with the mysterious Geraldine. In this manner, Christabel is undertaking a conventionally Smithean approach to sympathizing with the other. Yet Coleridge uses the poem to show the ultimate limits of this view: attempts to suspend or repress the transcendent desire for the other, which cannot but help to *disrupt* representations of selfhood, are always only provisional at best.

Along these lines, Soni counters his previous statement by asserting that sympathy nevertheless appears sometimes to function in Smith as "an affective contagion

that does not need to pass by way of narrative" (301). He argues that *this* mode of

sympathy or "tele-pathy" appears as "a correspondence of the affective state of the

sufferer with the affective state of the observer" in which our focus is turned to "the

emotional state of the other without regard for narrative. When this happens, the

spectacle of suffering, devoid of narrative contextualization, suffices to produce an

experience of sympathy" (301). Interestingly, Soni compares this instinctual sympathy to

viewing a tableau, which he suggests "is a static spectacle of the scene of suffering,

stripped of its narrative prehistory" (302). Notably, "tableau" is also the term David

Marshall uses throughout his reading of Mary Shelley, drawing particularly on Smith's

theatrical sense of tableau in the description of the Creature observing the De Lacey

family from his hiding place. There is certainly an atemporal quality to the tableau;

however, although it lacks narrative prehistory, we might also describe it as a symbol

onto which observers affix existing narratives (in this case, narratives of suffering).[16] In

this way, it epitomizes a simulacrum within which the sympathizing spectator already

desires to participate.

Nevertheless, regardless of whether the scene of sympathy is fundamentally

informed by *narrative* or not, Smith recognizes the imperative role of the *imagination* in

forming and enabling the sympathetic experience. As Soni writes, "Sympathy, then,

which promised to serve as a bridge between self and other, betrays its promise and

leaves the self embroiled in its own emotions, which it imagines to have come from the

other" (309). As I have already suggested, Hume discovers an unmanageable void in the

self that turns the subject outwards – though not entirely successfully – in the direction of

others. Smithean sympathy, by contrast, aims from the beginning at forming a social

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[16] I recount Marshall's reading of this scene in Chapter 5.

bond, yet finds itself limited by the subject's imagination. In both cases, these turns produce failure, though for different reasons. For Hume, the threat of facing the other, which he encounters in Book 1, never entirely dissipates following his social turn, as we see in its re-emergence in the Appendix. Just as Christabel discovers that Geraldine's alterity is ultimately much greater than her sympathetic narrative can manage, Hume determines that his explanation for the sense of self fails to account for the scope of his desire as it is revealed through his scepticism. For Smith, sympathy fails because of the possibility that alterity cannot be fully encompassed by the imagination. As he writes early on: "Though our brother is on the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations" (11). The central position Smith reserves for the imagination sets him apart from Hume's more ontological understanding of the origins of sympathetic desire. Indeed, it is Smith's emphasis that makes his views so amenable to that aspect of Romantic thought that holds out hope for social desire. Nevertheless, the Romantics' interest in the imagination also leads them to interrogate both its limits and its interpellation by the oppressive dimensions of Smithean sympathy.

These dimensions emerge partly as a result of Smith's methodological approach. Unlike Hume, Smith does not begin with the self, but with the sympathetic situation. This situation comprises a sympathizing spectator and a sympathetic object. He writes, "Sympathy, therefore, does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it" (15). Many critics have commented on this peculiar "theatrical, interpretative" quality of Smith's understanding of sympathy (Mitchell 78).

For Smith, the sympathetic process involves a commitment to share the terms implicit in a particular situation and then to take turns playing the role of spectator and actor. This fluidity on the part of the sympathetic subject should not be taken as an endorsement by Smith of something like Kristeva's adolescent, "a mythical figure of the imaginary that enables us to distance ourselves from some of our failings, splittings of the ego, disavowals, or mere desires, which it reifies into the figure of someone who has not yet grown up" ("The Adolescent Novel" 135). Unlike this freewheeling figure, which also "allows us to see, hear, and read these subjective fluctuations" (135), Smith's sympathetic subject continues to be held in check by the superego: that is, "an impartial spectator who considers our conduct with the same indifference with which we regard that of other people" (Smith 152 n.22). Indeed, this oppressive context represents the key source of sympathy's failure in Smith.

While at some level this impartial spectator is, as D. D. Raphael suggests, only "a creation of my imagination […] indeed myself, though in the character of an imagined spectator, not in the character of an agent" (35), it also corresponds to "[t]he voice of conscience," which is itself modulated conditionally so that instead of reflecting directly my actual actions, it only "reflects what I imagine that I, with all my knowledge of the situation, would feel *if* I were a spectator instead of an agent" (36; emphasis mine). The impartial spectator acts as another version of that "middle or neutral term that ensures the comprehension of being" in Levinas (43), creating an imaginary space in which human activity and interpretation may unfold according to a common language of feeling. The location of Hume's book on the understanding at the beginning of his investigations into human nature renders such a space, if not impossible, ultimately unbelievable. By

contrast, since Smith introduces sympathy immediately, he does not posit an idea of

alterity as anything other than generic differences between self-identical subjects, which

is to say that he elides the fact that difference has a material or empirical effect. Even the

dead are treated as different from the living only in degree, as he suggests our sympathy

with the dead derives from imagining ourselves in their place: beneath the earth in a

coffin. Charles Griswold suggests that Smith insists upon sympathy as primarily

interested in situations rather than feelings because "it allows a measure of objectivity"

(87). For Smith, the impartial spectator is at once "a judge between ourselves and those

we live with," "who has no particular relation either to ourselves, or to those whose

interests are affected by our conduct" (152 n.22), as well as a "man *within* the breast"

(252; emphasis mine). The impartial spectator, as Robert Mitchell writes, is affiliated

"with no particular person or party," but is instead a "simulacrum that represents all

people" (85).

This concept of the impartial spectator as simulacrum indicates the extent to

which Smith's vision of sympathy, having built upon Hume, has also moved beyond him.

Where Hume could only hope that an encounter with the other might confirm the interior

riches of the self, Smith simply posits the space in which self and other have always

already been exchangeable under the homogenizing gaze of the impartial spectator.

Although Hume repudiates generally the position that "expects ideas to stand for

something which cannot be constituted within experience or be given in an idea without

contradiction" (Deleuze 30), he is not consistent in this rejection when it comes to the

idea of the self. While he does not go so far as to admit the self despite its intangibility,

he retains it (for example, in the Appendix) as a placeholder for something that might

accomplish the same unifying function. This gesture marks a fundamental difference between Hume and Smith: on the one hand, Hume's suppressed belief in the ultimate impossibility of representing the self, and, on the other, Smith's acceptance of the self as a simulacrum appearing in the form of the impartial spectator.

Thus, while I agree with Deleuze's characterization of the *Treatise* as advancing a "critique of representation" (30), Hume's return to the problem of the self in the Appendix represents a kind of melancholia (a subject to which I will return) that tempers this critique and which is absent in Smith. The lost object for which Hume yearns is what Jean Baudrillard describes as the impossible wager of representation: "that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could *exchange* for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange—God, of course" (173). By the end of Book 1, Hume only allows himself to get as far as imagining the conditions that would be necessary for the first term to be possible. In positing sympathy as a response to the failure of the sign to refer to these depths, Hume finally does attempt to supplant representation with simulation, as I have suggested Smith also will do. Although Adam Potkay argues, citing Hume's description of the metaphysical relief a game of backgammon brings to him, that "[t]he social instincts prove salvational" for Hume (56), the aesthetic effect of Hume's plumbing the depths in Book 1 of his scepticism's desire for the other overwhelms these attempts. This incongruity between the books of the *Treatise* contributes to the emergence of an anxiety about the failure of desire and the insufficiency of what comes to replace it. Smith's rhetorical move, by contrast, allows him to circumvent many of the metaphysical difficulties that Hume encounters. As Jacques Khalip notes, because "[s]ympathy thus precariously positions the self on the brink of otherness; […] Smith will

choose to limit its ethical and civic activity to more local circulations and responsibilities" (99). The limitations Smith places upon sympathy allow him to avoid the difficulties that cling to Hume's initial formulation. Yet these difficulties are precisely the residues of speculation that make Hume's approach important for articulating the Romantics' anxiety concerning sympathy.

Anxiety and the Limits of Sympathetic Desire

Hume's rejection of his earlier scepticism results not only in an ethics, but also a recourse to aesthetics. As Jerome Christensen points out regarding the moving final section of Book 1, the "nakedness of the pretense to be conducting an actual experiment, performed before our eyes, is ostentatious" (81).[17] Hume articulates his despair through carefully crafted figures and settings: his intellectual endeavour is an agonizing world circumnavigation; his commitment to scepticism is a monstrosity that will result in his isolation from society; his failure of reason in the explanation of personal identity plunges him into "the most deplorable condition imaginable, inviron'd with the deepest darkness" (175). Out of this despair, Hume discovers his natural tendency to return to "the sphere of common life" (176) within which the speculations of philosophy appear "cold, and strain'd, and ridiculous" (175). As Nancy Yousef summarizes this famous passage, "the spell of melancholy is broken by moving from the solitary chamber to the sociability of a drawing room" (41). Hume's lyrical appeal to his readers' emotions has returned us to the Kristevan semiotic mode of language; however, his attentive orchestration of the movement of this narrative indicates that the problems at hand

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[17] Christensen applies this description both to Hume's "Experiments to Confirm this System" in Book 2 and (in a footnote) to a famous passage from the concluding section of Book 1.

(concerning the self, alterity, and sympathy) are for him already fully implicated in the symbolic order. Moreover, this careful crafting also invites us to raise a more difficult question about the reasons for this particular plotting. Put succinctly, why does the shift from sceptical desire for the transcendent other to the empirical desire for the social other require a supplementary rhetoric of feeling? The answer to this lies in the anxious effect that later writers would come to draw upon in exploring alternatives to a social sympathy that failed to account for the full scope of their desire for the other.

The apparent repression of transcendent desire in Hume's work might be overlooked if the general reception of the *Treatise* had been less lopsided. Nevertheless, since the beginning, Hume's readers have tended to place more emphasis on the first book of the *Treatise* than Hume anticipated.[18] As further evidence of the extent of this misreading, Hume himself was forced to make his intentions more explicit in several places outside the text. In addition to the section in the Appendix to the *Treatise* where he renews his scepticism about personal identity, Hume belittles the so-called "identity crisis" in his *Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh,* a text published five years after the *Treatise* (cf. Potkay 58). Finally, Hume "formally disowned the work toward the end of his life" (57), affixing an advertisement to copies of his *Enquiries* that contained a detailed response to his detractors. Yet, to borrow two terms from William Godwin's essay "Of Choice in Reading," the "moral" Hume insists upon for his *Treatise* is distinct from the "tendency" of that work. As Godwin suggests, most authors "show themselves superlatively ignorant of the tendency of their own writings" (117-18).

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[18] Potkay reviews several examples appearing in the criticism of Hume's contemporaries, as well as in readers up to the present day, noting that "[s]uch readers willy-nilly follow earlier commentators from Thomas Reid and James Beattie through Leslie Stephen in wrongly assuming the centrality in Hume's writings of 'perceptualism' [...] and deducing as Hume's intended consequence a conviction of our perceptual isolation and of the insubstantiability of the external and social world" (53).

Tilottama Rajan describes Godwin's idea of a work's tendency as "an intersubjective and historically developing significance, generated by the interaction of intention and its representation and subsequently of the text and its reading" (*Supplement* 169). As Potkay and others have demonstrated, many subsequent readers of Hume did not properly understand what he hoped would be the *Treatise*'s message, ultimately "misreading" him. Yet this misreading produces another kind of meaning, which is equally relevant to the text's significance not only as a cultural artifact, but also in terms of the historical impact of its ideas. Like Kristeva's thetic phase, which is at once "permeable" and committed "to ensur[ing] the position of the subject put in process/on trial" (63),[19] the *Treatise* remains open, despite its dominant symbolic mode (that is, the doctrine of sympathy advanced by Hume to circumvent his inability to discover the conditions of the selfhood), to "the irruption of the semiotic" (63). Following Freud's description of anxiety as a response to those "traumatic moments, when the ego meets with an excessively great libidinal demand," out of which "[t]he first and original repressions arise" ("Anxiety and Instinctual Life," 783), I want to explore the longer-term ramifications of these irruptions of the semiotic in Hume's text. Given my earlier description of the semiotic mode in Hume as the manifestation of a totalizing desire for the self, I will suggest that these breaches of the dominant symbolic outline of the *Treatise* result in an anxiety that itself becomes aesthetically productive under the kinds of conditions I explore in Chapter 2.

Hume's transcendent desire, finding its antecedents in aspects both of the Cartesian *cogito* and Hobbes's state of nature, comes up against a possibility and a

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[19] Margaret Waller writes in the Translator's Preface to *Revolution in Poetic Language*: "the Kristevan subject is nonetheless always implicated in a heterogeneous signifying process: his identity, never become, ever becoming, questioned and questionable, is always on trial (*en procès*)" (ix).

consequence the combination of which seem to produce just such a "traumatic moment":

first, the possibility that the self—social or otherwise—is just as inaccessible as any

object; and, second, the consequence of this inaccessibility being the wholly insatiable

status of that desire.[20] Hume entertains the possibility that absolute identity might turn

over into alterity in the Appendix where he "plead[s] the privilege of a sceptic" (400) and

declines to decide unambiguously for or against the possibility of identity. His social

response to the consequence such inaccessibility entails is found in the Conclusion to

Book 1, where he declares, "I may, nay I must yield to the current of nature, in

submitting to my senses and understanding" (175). In the face of the self's insuperable

otherness, Hume affirms as reality what things appear to be. By mapping Freud's later

vision of anxiety onto this encounter between transcendent and social forms of desire, we

can read Hume's text as a description of how he comes to fear the libidinal energies at

stake in the desire for the self.[21] From this perspective, a metaphysical move such as his

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[20] Arthur Schopenhauer suggests a point of access to the thing-in-itself; however, since it is a movement away from individuation and, following the ascetic turn, towards the world as will, the result is hardly the unitary self: "I have stressed that other truth that we are not merely the *knowing subject*, but that *we ourselves* are also among those realities or entities we require to know, that *we ourselves are the thing-in-itself*. Consequently, a way *from within* stands open to us to that real inner nature of things to which we cannot penetrate *from without*. It is, so to speak, a subterranean passage, a secret alliance, which, as if by treachery, places us all at once in the fortress that could not be taken by attack from without. Precisely as such, the *thing-in-itself* can come into consciousness only quite directly, namely by *it itself being conscious of itself*; to try to know it objectively is to desire something contradictory. Everything objective is representation, consequently appearance, in fact mere phenomenon of the brain" (Schopenhauer 2:195). Schopenhauer's reflections on the themes I am exploring extend this project beyond the intended scope of its methodology, which focuses on English philosophy of the eighteenth century; however, a more developed version of this project would benefit from Schopenhauer playing an enlarged role.
[21] In a lecture called "Anxiety and Instinctual Life," published in 1932 (and which built on his 1926 book, *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety*), Freud argues "that the generation of anxiety is the earlier and the formation of symptoms the later of the two, as though the symptoms are created in order to avoid the outbreak of the anxiety state" (776). Anxiety is not a result of repression, as Freud earlier thought, but rather that which prompts the repression in the first place. For, he notes, "we have also succeeded in answering the question of what it is that a person is afraid of in neurotic anxiety and so in establishing the connection between neurotic and realistic [or objective] anxiety. What he is afraid of is evidently his own libido" (776). This fear of the libido results from "the reproduction of an old event which brought a threat of danger" and is "psychically bound" to the symptoms formed during the process of repression (776). Where anxiety is typically understood (and Freud had initially thought of it in this way) as a perverted or

rejection of the solitary self is a strategy of repression Hume deploys in response to the anxieties conveyed in the final section of Book 1. In both of his theories of anxiety (developed, respectively, in "Anxiety" [1917] and *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety* [1926]), Freud posits repression as the obstruction of a libidinal cathexis by some influence.[22] The earlier view suggested that the influence was external: the object of the libido. The later view locates that influence within the ego in the threat that the libido might become unmanageable. In the Conclusion to Book 1, this unmanageability of desire is precisely the problematic issue for Hume—not simply its object. Thus, between the ever-expanding desire implied by scepticism and its empirical repression as the social, Hume inserts the term "sympathy" as the "soul or animating principle" that guides "[w]hatever other passions we may be actuated by; pride, ambition, avarice, curiosity, revenge or lust" (234-35).

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corrupted expression of the libido, the later view understands anxiety—insofar as it involves the repetition of an earlier experience—as a kind of memory experienced at physiological and psychological levels, which responds to the libido, rather than being its translation on the other side of repression. Yet what is remembered is "a state of highly tense excitation, which is felt as unpleasure and which one is not able to master by discharging it" (782). Anxiety's fear of the libido is, in fact, a fear of an uncontrollable libido or an ungratifiable desire; in other words, the fear concerns "the emergence of a traumatic moment, which cannot be dealt with by the normal rules of the pleasure principle" (782).

[22] As I have suggested, Freud's 1926 exploration of anxiety represented a return and shift from his earlier thoughts on the matter. In a 1917 lecture, simply titled "Anxiety," Freud describes anxiety as an affect that repeats "some particular very significant previous experience" (403) at an unconscious level. Such an experience may be pinpointed somewhat, he argues, suggesting that "the first anxiety state arose on the occasion of the separation from the mother" (404). This is not the separation from the mother's breast that occurs at the close of the oral stage; however, anxiety arising out of that separation does repeat the earlier experience of a separation that takes place at birth. As Freud writes, "birth is the source and prototype of the anxiety affect" (404). Indeed, the link between the child's experience of anxiety and what Freud distinguishes as "neurotic" anxiety in the adult is much stronger than the other type of anxiety he discusses, "objective" anxiety, which is "essentially a reaction to danger" (408). In both cases, the anxiety affect derives from the repression of the libido (417). Thus Freud describes the childhood fear of the dark (a phobia that "is often retained throughout life" [414]) as something that begins as a desire for the mother, or a "longing felt *in* the darkness" (414; emphasis original). Her continued absence blocks the gratification of that libidinal energy with the result that the child's "libido, unable to be expended, and at that time not to be held suspended, is discharged through being converted into dread" (414). Ultimately, Freud modified his thinking to suggest the opposite: that "anxiety produces repression; it is a signal whether appropriate or inappropriate, realistic or neurotic, of danger ahead" (773).

Where sympathy is intended to organize these elements, its inability to quell their disorder, as evident for instance in the *Treatise*'s tendency to be read mainly in terms of its epistemology, suggests that this ostensibly positive task of organizing is an attempt to obscure the failure of the empiricism of Books 2 and 3 to account fully for the implications of Book 1's traumatic moment.[23] The initial trauma as it appears in the *Treatise* revolves around the unstable pursuit of a knowledge that continually slips from view—as we see in the example of personal identity, which ends up looking much more like indeterminacy. To the extent that this tendency in the idea of sympathy also holds for Romantic writers, those moments of anxiety that prove most productive in their writings and thought must emerge out of a return to the site of trauma: namely, the threat of the thing-in-itself. The path of sympathy out of the self and into the social is one that diverts almost immediately from the goal of becoming a thing-in-itself, as the force of its alterity impinges increasingly upon the social desire for stability. This traumatic threat is rendered even more concrete, if also, paradoxically, obscure, with the emergence of materialism.

Building upon Freud's dynamic sense of anxiety—one that resonates with other thinkers such as Søren Kierkegaard, for whom anxiety is "the dizziness of freedom" (61) and thus occupies a similar relation to the impossible—we may begin to assemble characteristics of this *repressed* transcendent energy within modern sympathy that I am calling dark sympathy. Dark sympathy is not transcendent desire itself, but rather the expression of that desire as it has been attenuated, modified, and reduced within the social sphere. As early as Hume's own work, the desire for the other that precedes (even

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[23] Midway through his second essay on anxiety, Freud describes how anxiety mobilizes repression: "The ego notices that the satisfaction of an emerging instinctual demand would conjure up one of the well-remembered situations of danger" (779).

as it gives rise to) social desire appears predominantly along specific affective, political, and aesthetical registers. For instance, when Yousef describes Hume's (potentially artificial) state of mind at the end of Book 1 as "melancholy" (41), she repeats Hume's own identification of this sentiment: "This sudden view of my danger strikes me with melancholy; and as it is usual for that passion, above all others, to indulge itself; I cannot forbear feeding my despair, with all those desponding reflections, which the present subject furnishes me with in such abundance" (172). As Freud notes, "The complex of melancholia behaves like an open wound, drawing to itself cathectic energies […] from all directions, and emptying the ego until it is totally impoverished" (*Freud Reader* 589). Likewise, only Hume's social intervention—the promise of companionship—stops the outpouring of Hume's self-negation:

> When I look abroad, I foresee on every side, dispute, contradiction, anger, calumny and detraction. When I turn my eye inward, I find nothing but doubt and ignorance. All the world conspires to oppose and contradict me; tho' such is my weakness, that I feel all my opinions loosen and fall of themselves, when unsupported by the approbation of others. Every step I take is with hesitation, and every new reflection makes me dread an error and absurdity in my reasoning. (172)

Woven through this melancholy tone are the signals that Hume will take up in order to found his system in Books 2 and 3. In particular, he will take the paradox that paralyzes him most—that the world opposes him, yet he cannot help but rely upon the world's approval—and locate precisely in that need for others the grounds of his empiricism. Nevertheless, this desire for "the approbation of others" is not merely a social desire, but also complements a transcendent desire that the condition of total opposition between him and others be resolved. Thus, to take an important example from Godwin's fiction, the figure of the misanthrope plays a central role in allowing Godwin

to articulate a transcendent form of desire that exceeds even as it relies upon the social for its expression. Even as his hatred for society derives from his maltreatment by society, the misanthrope desires a relation with others for which society can only ever be at most a weak reflection.

The anxiety that Hume reveals in this section, attempts to resolve in Books 2 and 3, and returns to in the Appendix has a lingering influence upon the Romantic imagination.[24] Although Hume claims to emerge out of the indeterminacy he experiences when "inviron'd with the deepest darkness, and utterly deprived of the use of every member and faculty" (*Treatise* 175), the tendency of his work, I have tried to show, fails to overcome at least some of that darkness. Moreover, this darkness as an expression of epistemological uncertainty takes on new figurations following the materialist turn in the cultural imagination, which I will explore in the next chapter. Romantic writers, influenced by the interwoven discourses of sympathy and materialism, trace the etiology of sympathy's breakdown in order to imagine new forms of community that build upon counter-social categories such as melancholia, misanthropy, dejection, or even dying. Although many of their subsequent literary and communal experiments fail, the poetic energy of those failures extends the latent forms of transcendent desire repressed in Hume's early reflections into what Charles Taylor calls "a secular age," which involves in part the emergence of a condition in which "we lose a sense of where the place of fullness is, even of what fullness could consist in" (*A Secular Age* 6).[25] If the Romantic

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[24] Notably, this influence is a complex one. Tim Milnes writes: "Hume's influence effectively paralysed conventional philosophy of knowledge in the late eighteenth century," but "it also gave rise to a philosophically intense Romantic movement in poetry and aesthetics" (6). The Romantic reaction, Milnes argues, to Hume's scepticism was above all "troubled […] but unable to dissolve it" (6).

[25] For Taylor, the experience of "fullness" occurs sometimes as a "limit experience" that "unsettles and breaks through our ordinary sense of being in the world, with its familiar objects, activities and points of reference" (5) and at other times as a less absolute experience in which "the deep divisions, distractions,

period attempts to recover a desire for the other that transcends the social other

substituted by thinkers such as Hume and Smith, it does so in a paradoxically "post-

transcendent" context. As I will describe at greater length in Chapter 2, transcendent

desire—as a result of a similar intellectual history to that of sympathy itself—is at most

"encrypted" within the cultural imaginary. Hence, it is to the field of anxieties, affect, and

desire that we must look to discover the dark side of sympathy, rather than to particular

limits in the discourse itself.

Relational desire in the modern era is directed towards two different objects:

transcendence, on the one hand, and society, on the other. In the eighteenth century, these

distinct categories begin to overlap within relational discourses such as sympathy, leading

sympathy's major theorists to attempt to attenuate or repress that transcendent element.

This response arises in part pragmatically from the excessiveness of the desire and from

the lack of stabilizing political and theological contexts within which such desire might

be contained. For Romantic writers, however, the conflict prompts them to experiment

with forms of relation that might more successfully retrieve that transcendent dimension

of desire for the other. For instance, Godwin's political imagination comes into contact

with his keen social analysis between *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams*, producing a

series of reflections on the ways relational desire can be circumscribed, deferred, and at

times preserved in oppressive contexts, especially in the paradoxical form of

misanthropy, which he explores further in other novels. Similarly, although Coleridge's

utopian plan to begin a colony in Pennsylvania with his brother-in-law, Robert Southey,

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worries, sadnesses that seem to drag us down are somehow dissolved, or brought into alignment, so that we
feel united, moving forward, suddenly capable and full of energy" (6).

fails, he discovers a relational energy in the ambivalence of that failure—what he calls "dejection"—that incites a series of further literary experiments in bridging the gap between a visceral yearning and the demands of the social. Mary Shelley's speculative re-imagining of her family and circle of friends also gives her the opportunity to draw out threads of desire that extend beyond the social, such as she depicts in the scenes of death in her post-apocalyptic novel, *The Last Man*. As the analysis of anxiety in Hume's presentation suggests, sympathy is haunted by an ongoing negativity that enables the Romantics to put its desires to work in counter- or even anti-social ways extending far beyond the purview Hume and Smith had set for it.

Thus the opening example of Shelley and Harriet establishes an appropriate, if also uncomfortable and sombre, tone for the inquiries I pursue below. Whether in Godwin's appeals to madness and hatred, Coleridge's ongoing struggle with the body's effects, or Mary Shelley's painful realization of the problematic artifice of any idealism about the other, the desire for community rather than mere society carries with it the destructive effects of the latter's critique or rejection. While I will investigate these effects and the literary attempts to mitigate them, my primary intention in this chapter has been to focus specifically on the faulty mechanism itself as instantiated in the discourse of sympathy. In its modern conception, sympathy's parallel sets of significations enter into conflict as its transcendent meaning gets submerged beneath its more feasible social meaning. As we see in Shelley's appeal to a transcendent form of relation (what he calls "elevated friendship") outside of his marriage, the Romantic response to this conflict of desire involves a sometimes problematic attempt to reclaim the hidden promise of sympathy.

In this chapter, I have tried to establish some of the discursive conditions informing sympathy's development through the course of the eighteenth century. As philosophers begin to recognize the need for a new understanding of human nature, incompatibilities surface between the different models advanced. Here, I have focused on one incompatibility in particular relating to the desire for the other. On the one hand, Descartes seeks to emphasize what is remarkable in human nature, imagining a much larger scope for the other and for otherness altogether. On the other hand, Hobbes, recognizing the limits of human nature, conceives of the other in social terms, appealing to the stability such conceptions imply. As I suggest, this tension between different ways of thinking about others and our relations with them accompanies sympathy from the beginning of its tenure as modernity's dominant relational mode. Hume draws upon both of these sources to build a rich, if aporetic, mechanism for the expression of human desire for the other, which attempts to respond to both its transcendent, expansive mode and its need for social stability and security. The great contribution of Smith, by extension, is to marshal a strong (and emphatically non-transcendent) defence for the modern social imaginary and to determine modes for expressing the desire this imaginary engenders. As I have suggested, Smith's theory of sympathy aligns its failure with the imagination; however, Hume entertains another form of desire (and failure) beyond this imaginary realm.

As this transcendent desire is repressed, it produces a kind of cultural anxiety that informs the relational experiments later thinkers—especially, the Romantics—take up as a result of their encounter with this dark side to sympathy. Indeed, if this chapter exposes how a transcendent desire for the other continues to cling to social discourse in the

eighteenth century, then the next chapter will seek to elaborate what I take to be a key

catalyst in the cultural mobilization of this transcendent desire: namely, materialism. As

materialism takes on a life of its own, it widens the scope of what might constitute

alterity, recalling along the way the transcendent forms of desire that modern sympathy

had sought to abandon. Taking their guiding principles from the questions posed by

materialism and drawing upon the energy produced by the anxious underside of

sympathy, Romantic writers use materialist imagery and situations to imagine moments

or events of near and failed relation as ways of responding to the *aporia* of sympathy. In

its inability to face the insurmountable gap between a desire for stability and the

pressures of alterity, sympathy often functioned as a repressive mechanism for the social.

We may ask, therefore, whether an alternative sympathy or relation is possible that would

recognize this impasse and proceed into the darkness of the other nonetheless?

CHAPTER TWO
Materialism and the Encryption of Transcendent Desire

"There is a great difference between the Idols of the human
mind and the Ideas of the divine. That is to say, between
certain empty dogmas, and the true signatures and marks
set upon the works of creation as they are found in nature."
— Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, Aphorism 23

"But as soon as materialism becomes intelligible it ceases
to be materialism."
— Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*

"Materialism will be seen as a senile idealism to the extent
that it is not immediately based on psychological or social
facts, instead of on artificially isolated physical
phenomena. [...] When the word materialism is used, it is
time to designate the direct interpretation, excluding all
idealism, of raw phenomena, and not a system founded on
the fragmentary elements of an ideological analysis,
elaborated under the sign of religious relations."
— Georges Bataille, "Materialism"

The first chapter sought to distinguish the entwined forms of desire at work within

eighteenth-century discourses of sympathy: a social desire for a stable relation with other

people, or society, and a transcendent desire to comprehend the other in its alterity. Over

the course of the eighteenth century, this latter desire—much more difficult, if not

impossible, to satisfy—gets increasingly subsumed within the former, yet without

entirely disappearing. Instead, the transcendent desire for the other continues to motivate

the representation of community in Romantic writing, as I will survey at greater length in

subsequent chapters. Understanding community as a form of relation that lacks the

intentional and systematic structure of society, expressing an inherent openness and

resistance to constraint, we can identify moments of transcendent desire by focusing on

efforts to imagine and relate to the other in new or unintuitive ways. As I argue in this

chapter, the emergence of modern materialism is saturated with such efforts. Mary Lynn

Johnson notes that "[t]he rediscovery and rehabilitation of ancient Greek atomistic

philosophy, after centuries of Christian efforts to suppress and discredit it, occurred

almost simultaneously at several sites in seventeenth-century Europe" (108). Partly as a

result of the fraught conditions under which this revival occurs, materialism offers figures

for the imagination capable of attending to the anxiety I explored in the previous chapter.

Alongside the growing influence of sympathy in defining the relationship between

individuals and their society, this turn to materialism produces a diversely organized

paradigm revealing the otherness at the heart of reality.

     If the seventeenth century establishes the conditions necessary for society to think

materialism, then the eighteenth century resounds with the effects of such conditioning

upon the imagination. As I will suggest in this chapter, writers attempted to represent this

newly material universe in a number of different ways, including as forces of attraction

and repulsion, as a passive site for the emergence of life, and as sensibility. Yet, for many

thinkers, all such representations fail to account for matter in its newly absolute sense.

Along these lines, Paul de Man usefully distinguishes between phenomenality, which

includes not only the world as it appears to be, but also the metaphysical conditions that

make any apperception possible, and materiality, informing, if never disclosing itself to,

the world of all-pervasive representation.[1] Jacques Lacan's definition for the Real, as

"that which resists symbolization absolutely" (*Seminar I*, 66; qtd. in Evans 162), offers a

useful conceptualization, upon which Jacques Derrida will draw. Thus, for example, even

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[1] De Man's terms, which appear at greatest length in his essay in *Aesthetic Ideology*, "Phenomenality and
Materiality in Kant," seem to overlap in ways with Schopenhauer's *Vorstellung* and *Wille*, the latter of
which Schopenhauer describes as "a blind impulse, an obscure, dull urge, remote from all direct know-
ableness" (1:149).

as sensibility expresses the uniquely corporeal dimension of human experience, its phenomenal aspect as a translation of that corporeality separates it from a materiality that precedes it. One of the key arguments of this chapter, particularly as it relates to my subsequent studies of specific Romantic writers, is that this distinction between what I am calling "the imaginary" and a non-phenomenal materiality raises important questions about the location and character of any transcendent desire for the other. Indeed, as Mary Shelley explores in her fourth novel, *The Last Man*, transcendent desire may find its best approximation not within an imaginary at all, but rather in the ambiguous alterity of a world without us, which Orrin Wang suggests is characterized by "the irreducible specter of antagonism" (155).

In the first section of this chapter, I will offer a brief genealogy of modern materialism, focusing especially on Descartes's and Hobbes's respective contributions to the discourse. I will argue that these contributions participate in – counter-intentionally in the case of Descartes – a gradual turn to monism. By releasing libidinal energies within the cultural imagination, this turn conditions Romantic writing in ways that have yet to be fully explored. While these energies – understood as "passions" – had hitherto been associated with the natural world's apparent subjection to the divine, such desires now return upon the material object from which they had before been definitively distinct. Rather than only identifying transcendence with the spiritual, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers often perceived within matter itself a transcendent scope, which they aligned with its conceptual alterity. This monistic understanding of the world makes possible both the empirical agnosticism embraced by Hume and Kant and their successors, in which the noumenal realm prior to subjectivity remains unthinkable, and

the subsequent Romantic return to this unthinkability as the source of an exciting and troubling potentiality. Finally, I explore this transcendent materialism in greater depth by focusing on critical readings of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century materiality initiated by Paul de Man and taken up subsequently by writers such as Jacques Derrida, Andrzej Warminski, and Orrin Wang.

In the second section, I will briefly discuss three key moments in eighteenth-century materialist discourse in which this newly transcendent quality for materialism attempts to pass into the field of representation, though never with entire success. Instantiations of such experiments include, I will argue, Priestley's "immaterial" materialism, the emergence of vitalism, and, finally, the "culture" of sensibility. These "materialist imaginaries" offer sites for examining the extent to which transcendent desire may be expressed before it is rejected by the social realm as incompatible with social desire. The strategies that each experiment deploys in order to strike the delicate balance between a sufficiently robust and pervasive materialism, on the one hand, and a recognizable idea of the transcendent, on the other, help reveal the cultural resonances of each term and point towards a similar ambivalence in dark sympathy.

These investigations set the stage for a third section in which I read P. B. Shelley's "Queen Mab" (1813) and *St. Irvyne* (1811) as texts that attempt to reflect this alignment of transcendence with materiality specifically in terms of its implications for community. Shelley's early texts – whose themes derive in no small part from the work of the French materialists and of William Godwin – highlight in brief the major terms surrounding dark sympathy and its two discursive influences and also outline the relationships and conflicts between these terms. By placing Shelley's early writing in this

genealogy of materialism, I want to suggest, in the case of "Queen Mab," that an emphasis on the transcendent element in materialist thought to which Shelley is trying to attend resolves many of the problems that accompany the poem's otherwise uneven construction. Likewise, *St. Irvyne*'s narrative weaknesses as well as its fascination with a materialism informed by the *philosophes* reflect the inherent difficulty of describing transcendent desire as it is constrained by the social. In both cases, the texts attempt to imagine the conditions for relationships that exceed representation.

A Genealogy of Modern Materialism

If Plato and his successors advanced a dualism of mind and body or spirit and matter, the modern turn of the seventeenth century (and beginning much earlier) re-folds this distinction into a single, monistic understanding of the constitution of Being.[2] Catherine Wilson writes along these lines, describing the modern perspective on these past thinkers: "We regard the metaphysical systems of the past with aesthetic interest, and with appreciation for the ingenuity with which, applying logic and analysis, their authors reasoned out and invented alternatives to and barriers against the philosophy they thought of as atheistic corporealism" (3-4). This merely "aesthetic" investment derives, Wilson notes, from the fact that "we are all, in a sense, Epicureans now" (3). Having adopted a monistic understanding of the world, the modern mind identifies any supplemental systematization as an organizational narrative distinct from "reality." Wilson's claim is not only persuasive, but also suggestive for its framing: what does it mean for these once-

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[2] The debate over the so-called origins of modernity has become something of a parlour game of late. Even with a focus upon the conceptual shift to an ontological univocity, the enquiry remains ambiguous; for instance, others have identified the source of this shift in the work of the thirteenth-century philosopher, Duns Scotus (Milbank 55, 304-5).

vital inquiries into the nature of Being to be now of merely "aesthetic interest"? What has

happened to that vitality and how has it been transformed?

Epicureanism offers a useful introductory shorthand for marking the re-

emergence of a purely materialist thought within the early-modern world picture.

Building upon the atomism of Democritus, Epicurus's non-theistic meditations upon the

exclusively material composition of the cosmos and its implications for human actions

were taken up most significantly in ancient times by the poet, Lucretius. His masterpiece,

De Rerum Natura, first appeared in English in Thomas Creech's 1682 edition. Martin

Priestman suggests that, if this time just preceding the Glorious Revolution in England

represents the "first great Lucretian moment in Britain," then the second "great Lucretian

moment" takes place between 1790 and 1820—auspicious years for Romantic studies

(289).[3] Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things* is a philosophical poem in six books,

reflecting on the nature and behaviour of atoms, the material basis of mental operations

and sensation, and life at the individual and cosmic levels. While the poem does mention

gods and goddesses (including Venus in Book One's opening invocation), the world it

describes is one that operates very much apart from any divine involvement. As I will

explore further in the third section below, the poem's themes and implications proved

particularly compelling for Shelley in "Queen Mab." Especially provocative was

Lucretius's implicit claim that an exclusively materialist orientation to the world might

not only avoid the charge of nihilism, but even possess a meaningful beauty and

significance of its own. Such an aesthetic value would inhere not in the representation of

the world, the proximity to presence of which would depend upon the guarantee of an

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[3] See Catherine Wilson's *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity* (esp. Chapter 1, "Introduction: The Revival of Ancient Materialism") for a good summary of Lucretius's rediscovery in Renaissance Europe. For a more popular exposition, see Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*.

onto-theology, but rather in the monistic, material form itself. In other words, Lucretius posited an idea of transcendence anchored not in a Being that extends beyond comprehension, but rather in the void at the core of human knowledge. As I have suggested, Hume's sceptical method in Book 1 of the *Treatise* is oriented provisionally towards a similar transcendent void.

Alongside the Epicureanism of the seventeenth century appear many of the same figures I introduced in the previous chapter. These forerunners of modern sympathy not only were convinced to varying degrees of the necessity of incorporating materialist thought into their systems, but also discovered in that materialism an opportunity for retaining what was to become the more elusive element of sympathy in Hume's investigations: a transcendent desire for the other. In the preceding chapter, we saw how Descartes's positing of the *cogito* at the terminus of his radical scepticism enables him to retain a kernel of identity, a transcendent idea of the self, which becomes responsible for orchestrating the passions. Yet that idea of the self also contains an instability that primes it for Hume's later effort to describe human nature. Likewise, while the explicit social desire Thomas Hobbes advances in his argument about the need for taming the passions by submitting them to the rule of the state informs the dominant structure of eighteenth-century sympathy, his argument also continues to maintain a space for the transcendent. In particular, Hobbes follows Epicurus in treating the universe itself as an object of transcendent desire. By more closely attending to the materialist content of both their theories, I want to highlight the ways in which materialism begins to get treated differently in this period—less as a vehicle for higher realities, and more as a backdrop against which any reality may be judged.

As I argued in the previous chapter, Descartes makes available to thought an idea of the human self as transcendent. Inseparable from this development, however, is Descartes's explorations of the systems of nature and of the body. Adopting a perspective in his reflections on substance that intersects with materialism, Descartes imagines a body that is ontologically distinct from the soul. In some ways, the activity of the bodies that he explores, including the human body as a mechanism under the influence of the soul as it operates via the pineal gland, resembles the life-like behaviour of the automata and other machines that were popular in his day.[4] As he famously writes in his *Treatise on Man*, "I suppose the body to be nothing but a statue or machine made of earth, which God forms with the explicit intention of making it as much as possible like us" (99). Nevertheless, these things of earth are not *identical* with the "clocks, artificial fountains, mills, and other such machines" (99) that share their ultimate physical constitution; rather, as Fred Ablondi notes in his reading of Descartes's mechanical biology, living bodies possess both an inner "principle of motion" and "the complexity which only God can give a thing" (185). While Descartes's ideas seem on first glance to resist or contradict the monistic turn I am describing, I want to suggest that they in fact help to facilitate this turn in the cultural imagination. Living bodies *seem* mechanical, yet they are distinguished by their God-given complexity and inner principle. The former characteristic is a feature exclusively belonging to corporeal substance and raises the possibility that materiality—and not just things of the spirit—is itself something that cannot easily be grasped. In his Sixth Meditation, Descartes asserts that "we must allow

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[4] Wilson recounts how "[t]he construction of zoomorphic automata, resembling the moving statues described and constructed by the ancients, further reduced the conceptual distance between machines and animals, even when a soul was deemed necessary to initiate movement in animals. The lifelike figures in the gardens of St-Germain-en-Laye made a remarkable impression on René Descartes" (23).

that corporeal things exist" (191). His primary reason for arguing this is that we seem to perceive such things as existing and for it to be otherwise would make God a deceiver. From another perspective, however, Descartes's reasoning depends upon his sense that there is an inconsistency to sensory experience. If he were simply to dismiss experience because of this inconsistency, then he would be an idealist with little interest in discerning the linkages between matter and mind. His decision to retain sensory knowledge under the category of "complexity" opens a space for imagining a materiality that exceeds our understanding. Likewise, because of the assumption that God is not a deceiver, we must accept even the inscrutable aspects of corporeal substances. Thus his transcendent desire for God leads Descartes to affirm a complexity within matter, implying by extension the beginnings of an alignment between the material and the transcendent.

The characteristic of living bodies described above as an inner principle of motion similarly advances an inscrutable element at the core of material existence. As Descartes describes this principle later in the Sixth Meditation, "the nature of body is such that none of its parts can be moved by another part a little way off which cannot also be moved in the same way by each one of the parts which are between the two" (196). Hume would later identify this principle with causation more generally. Subsequent eighteenth-century writers such as William Godwin would call it "the doctrine of necessity." As I explain in this chapter's section on Shelley's "Queen Mab," questions surrounding necessity play an important role in reinforcing the monistic imagination. Unlike some religious forms of discourse, the doctrine of necessity allows the materialist to reject any recourse to an outside, instead discovering the unfolding of matter as part of an expansive and complex

– and troubling – unity. Descartes's formulation of this aspect of materialist thought

resembles Lucretius's argument for a plurality-of-causes, which similarly emphasizes the

inevitable, if often inscrutable, relation of cause-and-effect.[5]

Nevertheless, despite this overlap, Descartes insisted that his materialist

tendencies were distinct from the theories of the ancients. As Catherine Wilson shows:

"[H]e referred in a letter to one of his critics to 'that inane philosophy conflated of atoms

and the void, usually ascribed to Democritus and Epicurus, and others like it, which have

nothing to do with me'" (113). This resistance to being too closely associated with the

early materialists suggests at least in part Descartes's commitment to a more traditional

understanding of the transcendent. Indeed, part of Descartes's resistance to materialism

derives from its possible theological implications, which would develop especially in the

writing of the French *philosophes* and, later, in the work of the Marquis de Sade.[6] These

implications were already perceptible at the time Descartes was writing.[7] Descartes's

ultimate rejection of materialism thus corresponds in part to the same rejection of

uncertainty that requires him to posit the *cogito*. Nevertheless, as in that case, he creates

the conditions for those who will take up his initial argument and proceed further with it.

Where Descartes resists materialism even as he prepares the way for its ultimate

inauguration, his contemporary, Thomas Hobbes, avows it openly. For Hobbes, the

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[5] In Book Six, Lucretius writes: "There are some phenomena for which it is not sufficient to state one cause: you must mention several causes, though only one of these will be the true cause" (196).
[6] Pierre Klossowski writes: "The materialists and the Encyclopedists, Sade's contemporaries, when they admit matter in the state of perpetual motion as the universal agent that excludes any need for the existence of a god, imply that knowledge of the laws governing this matter will make possible a better individual and social morality, as well as an unlimited rational exploitation of Nature by man. […] For Sade, the substitution of Nature in the state of perpetual motion for God signifies, not the arrival of a happier era for humanity, but only the beginning of tragedy and its conscious and deliberate acceptance" (81).
[7] See Wilson for an extended discussion of Descartes's failed attempts to disassociate himself from atheism (111-25).

universe does not require additional narratives, particularly ones that obscure the

necessity of the social order. As we see in the closing part of *Leviathan*, for Hobbes,

> [t]he World, (I mean not the Earth onely, that denominates the Lovers of it Worldly men, but the Universe, that is, the whole masse of all things that are) is Corporeall, that is to say, Body; and hath the dimensions of Magnitude, namely, Length, Bredth, and Depth: also every part of Body, is likewise Body, and hath the like dimensions; and consequently every part of the Universe, is Body, and that which is not Body, is no part of the Universe: And because the Universe is All, that which is no part of it, is Nothing; and consequently no where. (689)

Significantly, Hobbes's unequivocal description of this monistic universe accompanies

his critique of institutional abuses of power, especially those ideologically motivated

abuses effected by religion and philosophy that "would fright [citizens] from Obeying the

Laws of their Countrey, with empty names; as men fright Birds from the Corn with an

empty doublet, a hat, and a crooked stick" (691). As I suggested in Chapter 1, the social

desire Hobbes hopes to advance depends upon a radical suppression of the human desire

for exerting power over others. Indeed, Hobbes identifies such desire as the reason why

people, when they are in the state of nature, exist in "a condition of Warre of every man

against every man" (196). His critique of these institutions stems from a fear that

theological and philosophical narratives will extract power illegitimately from the very

social systems intended to cultivate safe and secure spaces for developing human virtue.

While his emphasis on such an artificial order suggests that Hobbes retains the

category of the imaginary as a central aspect of his system, his rejection of narratives that

do not acknowledge their own artifice in fact reveals his intolerance of any alignment of

the transcendent with the imaginary. As I have already suggested, the social in Hobbes's

system is meant to bind the state of nature in order to prevent the dominance of its violent

tendencies. Yet the state of nature—a pre-civil state—is part of the larger "Corporeall"

world that Hobbes identifies as the Real subtending all possible imaginaries. The benefit of Hobbes's thought of a wholly neutral materialism (which is to say, neither gnostic nor anthropocentric in character) is that it frees people to accept the security of the social (an openness to transparent "fictions" that we also see in Hume and Smith). It also paves the way for thinking about the Real as something that must be managed imaginatively (via social desire, for Hobbes), yet which nevertheless retains its absolute and total form. In the movement between this imaginative social venture—the inherent reality of which must be disavowed—and a world of Body besides which no thing may be, a transcendent desire emerges once more. The desire to grasp or comprehend the variegated human will and, in so doing, to permit the inscrutable absoluteness of the universe to remain intact transfers this expansive impulse from a super-natural space to a natural one, though one now charged with much greater significance.

Earlier in *Leviathan*, Hobbes has already raised this conception of a material transcendence. He writes: "Whatsoever we imagine, is *Finite*. Therefore there is no Idea, or conception of anything we call *Infinite*" (99). While this statement undercuts metaphysical transcendence, it is not Hobbes's last word on the subject. He goes on to observe, "When we say any thing is infinite, we signifie onely, that we are not able to conceive the ends, and bounds of the thing named; having no Conception of the thing, but of our own inability" (99). Hobbes takes as his example the transcendent object *par excellence*: "And therefore the name of *God* is used, not to make us conceive him; (for he is *Incomprehensible*; and his greatnesse, and power are unconceivable;) but that we may honour him" (99). Not only does Hobbes's word, "*Incomprehensible*," call to mind Coleridge's use of the word in "The Eolian Harp," but his idea of an absolute and

inscrutable object that is not distinct from (nor exactly identical with) the material offers

an expression of transcendent desire that resembles the shape of that desire in the

Romantic period.[8]

Hobbes's version of the transcendent thus also emerges (like Descartes's) in the

space between idealism and materialism. It is transcendent, not in the Platonic sense of a

transcendent realm of Ideas, but in a sense closer to Jean-Paul Sartre's notion of

transcendence as "that inner and realizing negation which reveals the in-itself while

determining the being of the for-itself" (249). Understood as "negation," transcendence is

not an amplified substance or more-real reality, but a recognition of that which

demarcates the edge of any phenomenalization and a realization that the nature of such a

boundary lies beyond our capacity to know it. Both Descartes and Hobbes, though

diverging in their emphases and interpretations of the significance of this monistic shift in

thinking about the universe, agree on the necessity of a materiality that is somehow

distinct from our thinking of it. Yet, as we can see in this paradoxical phrasing, the very

idea of a non-phenomenal materiality is difficult, if not impossible, to uphold. As they

did in the first chapter, so again these early-modern thinkers offer to the future two sets of

emphases that rest upon the same conceptual continuum, reactions to which subsequent

writers (such as the three I take up in the following chapters) will use to orient their

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[8] A key thread in the criticism on this subject revolves around Hobbes's assertion later in life of the doctrine of God's corporeality. Geoffrey Gorham pinpoints Hobbes's explicit affirmation of this view as appearing in the "1668 Latin edition of *Leviathan*" (240). He subsequently expands upon this in his 1682 (written in 1668) work, *Answer to Bramhall*, where he writes, "To his lordship's question here: *what I leave God to be?* I answer: I leave him to be a most pure, simple, invisible spirit corporeal" (qtd. in Gorham 241). Gorham notes that scholars are divided about whether these assertions are in fact sincere – after all, an "invisible spirit corporeal" seems something of a contradiction in terms. This division not only includes those who suggest Hobbes is in fact an atheist (Gorham cites Wiley 1976, Berman 1987, and Tuck 1992), but also those that suggest – somewhat bewilderingly – that Hobbes is an "orthodox Protestant theist" (241n.4), with Gorham pointing to the work of Glover 1965, Martinich 1992, Geach 1993, Paachi 1998, and Lessay 2004. For scholars exploring the more ambivalent theology of the corporeal God, Gorham cites Duncan 2005, L. Strauss 1959, Lupoli 1999 and 2006, Leijenhorst 2004, and Weber 2009.

marshalling of desire for the other. Where Descartes imagines an otherness in corporeal

substance that is distinct from, yet only realizable through, the *cogito*'s transcendent

position, Hobbes locates the otherness towards which the desiring subject is oriented

within an exclusively material universe. Nevertheless, again, since realizing such a desire

is impossible (or catastrophic), Hobbes also advocates its mediation by means of an

overtly social imaginary. The result in both cases is an indeterminate transcendence,

aligned with materialism on the one hand, yet retaining an idealistic character on the

other.

Paul de Man's important intervention into the intellectual history of "aesthetic

ideology" has much to contribute to an analysis of how this indeterminate transcendence

finds expression at the end of the eighteenth century. De Man argues that Immanuel Kant

comes to recognize the need for a linkage between the phenomenal and noumenal spheres

that would maintain the significance of each one. Moreover, he brings the implications of

this articulation to the forefront. On the one hand, as de Man's subsequent interpreters

have insisted, the phenomenal is not simply "meaningless"; rather, it is precisely "the

attempt to unite such understanding and feeling; as Jonathan Culler puts it, aesthetic

ideology 'imposes, even violently, continuity between perception and cognition, form

and idea'" (Wang 120). On the other hand, the noumenal—or, more precisely, the "non-

phenomenal materiality" that de Man culls from Kant's reading—is only "real" in the

sense Žižek describes (again in Orrin Wang's paraphrase): "the symbolic's depiction of

social reality is always incomplete; the real (as opposed to reality) is the failure of that

depiction" (152). Phenomenality possesses a *reality* insofar as it corresponds to the

cognizable organization of what we perceive; materiality names the Being of those things

apart from their representation, yet as such it lacks cognizability.[9] From this perspective, Descartes's organizing *cogito* represents the epitome of phenomenality. That Hume seeks to go beyond the *cogito* suggests an openness to materiality in his thought.

This issue of cognition presented an essential problem for eighteenth-century thinkers. How does one think about that which cannot be perceived? Epicurean atomism and (in a related, though distinct way) the corpuscularism of Newton had paved the way for thinking about ideas such as unobservably small particles, the "void," and forces capable of passing through solids. It is little wonder that David Hume bracketed off such scientific discussion in the opening part of the *Treatise*.[10] The exploration of such counter-intuitive concepts responds ultimately to a desire for the other that refuses to be satisfied by any discrete object—a deeply problematic premise for any empiricism (though, as we have seen, one that Hume nevertheless acknowledges). As Jacques Derrida writes of de Man's essays on the subject: "*materiality* becomes a useful generic name for all that resists appropriation" (353).

Thus, out of this monistic imagination emerges a sense of the world (and of life itself) as somehow distinct from the stories humans tell about it. That is, as de Man writes in his reading of Kant, "[t]o the extent that any mind, that any judgment, intervenes, it is in error—for it is not the case that heaven is a vault or that the horizon bounds the ocean like the walls of a building" ("Phenomenality" 82). The Copernican revolution of the Kantian critical turn is the culmination of a much earlier movement in thought: first,

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[9] Charles Shepherdson offers a useful distinction between "reality" and "the Real" in Lacan, which overlaps with the distinction I am making here: "reality is defined, not as an unknowable, external domain, independent of our representations, but precisely as the product of representation. Our reality is imaginary and symbolic, and the real is *what is missing from reality*—the 'outside' that escapes our representations (the *Ding-an-sich*)" (32). Shepherdson goes on to note how the return of the Real in trauma reveals that it is not simply "pre-discursive," but also resides "at the innermost core of the imaginary" (34).

[10] Hume writes: "The examination of our sensations belongs more to anatomists and natural philosophers than to moral; and therefore shall not at present be entered upon" (11).

towards a monistic understanding of Being, and second, towards a realignment of matter, not with mere appearances, as in Plato, but with a reality that precedes apperception itself. As phenomenality becomes aligned with the operations of the imagination, the idea of a realm that passes beyond or escapes the bounds of the human faculties ceases to be a useful heuristic for solving real, human problems. Moreover, this is an alignment that many, including the Romantics, perceived to have important, positive implications for human freedom.[11] Such a transcendent quality, hitherto discoverable through meditative introspection, as Charles Taylor has suggested (*Sources* 135), thus gets dislocated from its supernatural position in this monistic revisioning.

In the course of its dislocation, however, transcendence does not simply become "aestheticism." Mary Shelley, for example, will reject any aesthetic ideology that attempts to claim priority over the much more difficult "thorny truth of things" (360), as she describes lived experience in *The Last Man*. For William Godwin, likewise, the aesthetic is constantly at the beck and call of a dominant social hegemony of which he is deeply suspicious. For instance, Fleetwood's self-fashioning in the Parisian salons gets critiqued for its inability to move beyond itself. The transcendent desire that stems from his tendency "to attach myself strongly, where I attached myself at all" (*Fleetwood* 102) proves at odds with the aesthetic framework of that society, in which "no man was considered any thing, unless he were […] an individual devoted to the formation of intrigues" (100). Yet the idea that an emphasis on matter in itself will lead humanity to political justice proves just as problematic for him, particularly insofar as such an emphasis contains no safeguards against materiality's reappropriation by the social. Indeed, Godwin seems to agree with Hume and Smith that social ordering is simply one

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[11] P. B. Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* is just one example.

process that humans cannot live without. As Andrzej Warminski writes in his introduction to *Aesthetic Ideology*: "For de Man, as for Althusser, we are never so much 'in' ideology as when we think ourselves to be 'outside' it" (10). Nevertheless, as I show in my readings of all three authors, the slipperiness of transcendence makes it difficult to determine at any given point whether the tone resonates with an imperceptible materiality or whether it is simply serving as an amplified form of social desire—the imaginary at its limit.

Thus, while transcendent desire does get dislocated from its traditionally supernatural position with the emergence of the materialist paradigm, not only does it *not* disappear entirely, it also does not exactly get reappropriated by materialism. Instead, I want to use the term "encrypted" (especially with its suggestion of a "crypt") to signal the way in which transcendent desire haunts every attempt at representing material existence.[12] Materiality, thought in this way, remains endlessly elusive. On the one hand, Hobbes's suspicion about narratives contributes to the idea of the Real as distinct from reality. On the other hand, if Descartes's *cogito* discloses a transcendent desire because of the sceptical method that produces it, then the *cogito* is in some ways offering itself as an imaginative effort to comprehend and represent the otherness of the Real. Several similar efforts were made during the course of the eighteenth century, three of which I explore in greater detail below: Priestleyan materialism, vitalism, and sensibility. These are particularly instructive because they cast into relief the transcendent character of the

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[12] Orrin Wang's idea of "ghost theory" is useful for thinking about this indeterminacy: "Ghosts are precisely not material to the degree that that term stands for an ontological certitude based on the reified hypostasis of physical reality. But they are also not ideal to the extent that that word also refers to an ontology this time based on the reality of the non-physical—of Spirit (*Geist*)" (139). See also the discussions of "cryptic mourning" in Abraham and Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, vol. 1, which the editor defines as "the mechanism of setting up a psychic enclave—the crypt—'housing' the departed love-object in secret because the survivor is being deluded into behaving as if no trauma or loss had occurred" (104).

desire that all representation of the other—whether it pertains to the alterity of the universe or of the other person—seeks to satisfy. Ultimately, however, as de Man demonstrates, these imaginaries are doomed to fail because of how materiality presents the mind with a field for thought that can both accommodate and exceed every imaginative effort.

Materialist Imaginaries

To narrate the intellectual movement that takes us from the encryption of transcendent desire within materialist thought to these attempts by writers to identify its ongoing effects on the idea of alterity, I want to explore three eighteenth-century responses to the emergence of materiality. In all three cases, the thinkers involved recognize an expansive desire that extends beyond the bounds of what appears to be possible for materialism. They address this distinction via a rhetoric of transcendence that gets applied to material conditions. Thus, in his *Disquisitions relating to Matter and Spirit* (1777), Joseph Priestley argues for the ultimate immateriality of matter, suggesting that what appears to be "substance" is in fact much more accurately described as force. Similarly, the myriad inquiries that have since fallen under the category of "vitalism" seek out a supplemental element to explain matter's development and ongoing processes. Finally, a so-called culture of sensibility emerges from the recognition of human experience as somehow inherently corporeal, rather than occurring exclusively within the bounds of the mind. I have ordered these examples according to what I take to be the strength of each one's transcendent content. As Priestley is explicitly a materialist, his system's use of transcendent rhetoric is the most obscure of the three. Vitalism insists

upon its scientific status and thus resists to a certain extent the ascription of "transcendence" to its more nebulous elements. Sensibility builds upon the explicitly transcendent idea of a shared imaginative space and thus is the most receptive to my reading. Nevertheless, I also do not want to imply that these imaginaries build upon one another, though they may overlap in certain places. Instead, they are discrete sites for the encryption of transcendent residues within materialism, providing thought-environments for the dark sympathy that emerges in the wake of transcendent desire's failure within the social context. These attempts to articulate the idealist dimensions of material conditioning, while failing to maintain a strict or pure materialism, help to explain the work of Romantics to account for both streams of modern experience.

More than just discovering a resonance between materiality and transcendent desire, however, the attempt to imagine materialism connects the genealogy I have described above with the paradoxes of sympathetic desire I explore in the previous chapter. The persistence of transcendent residues within materialism provokes strong social reactions, as they are each in their own way seen as threatening to the social framework. This resistance is demonstrated, for example, in Coleridge's strong rejection of Priestley (as well as his contemporaries' reactions and the larger rejection of dissent that led to the 1791 Birmingham Riots). The threat could also appear from within the discourse, as was the case for the vitalists, as they work to escape the transcendent tone of the *élan vital* or *Bildungstrieb* by recapturing its mechanisms within their explanation. Finally, sensibility collapses near the end of the eighteenth century under the weight of critiques that it was either too limited or too capacious. In all three cases, the status of these materialist imaginaries as threats help to link the work of imagining materialism –

and the philosophical alignment of materialism with transcendence that precedes and accompanies it historically – with the reaction that takes place in the encrypted core of desire during an event of dark sympathy. For, although transcendent desire as I explore it always has a dark inflection, particularly given its encrypted position within a social desire that wishes to repress it, its translation into dark sympathy requires an encounter with materiality to momentarily free it from such social bonds. Even then, as I show in the chapters that follow, this process by which this event appears resembles what Slavoj Žižek calls "anamorphosis," which is a distortion signalling the intervention of the Real ("The Matrix" 1559). These attempts at imagining a materialism that better expresses its materiality are encountered as threats that must be contained. As we see perhaps more clearly in literary examples such as *St. Irvyne* below, the threat implied by such attempts to draw out the alterity of materialism establishes the conditions for a desiring subject, at the same time, to want to break free of its social constraints and to reinforce them.

Priestley

Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), the Dissenting Minister and chemist responsible for the discovery of oxygen, among other successes, attempted to span the apparently wide gap separating materialist principles uncovered in the sciences and the spiritual doctrines of Christianity. While he accomplished this partly through an adherence to heterodox beliefs such as Socinianism (that is, the anti-Trinitarian heresy that Christ was only a deified man, rather than the pre-existent son of God), the impulse to bridge this gap may be taken in the first place as an attempt to preserve the transcendent quality in its historical translation from a spiritual to a material discourse. For Priestley, matter itself, if

understood in the right way, offers the conditions necessary for sustaining itself. As he writes: "[W]e have no reason to suppose that there are in man two substances so distinct from each other" as soul and body (xxxviii). Instead, he argues for a unified vision of matter emphasizing relational ideas such as force, organization, and system. Rather than matter being something implicitly inert and acted upon from without, he suggests that "[a]ll properties that have hitherto been attributed to matter, may be comprised under those of attraction and repulsion" (25). For instance, he remarks how even the powers of thought seem to emerge only "in conjunction with a certain organized system of matter; and therefore, that those powers necessarily exist in, and depend upon, such a system" (26). In this way, Priestley completes the movement Descartes initiated towards thinking matter universally.

In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge criticizes Priestley's theory for "stripp[ing] matter of all its material properties; substitut[ing] spiritual powers; and when we expected to find a body, behold! we had nothing but its ghost! the apparition of a defunct substance!" (226). Coleridge's response articulates the more general view that Priestleyan matter seemed, paradoxically, somewhat immaterial.[13] Given its abstract discussion of unperceivable forces and counter-intuitive principles, how was Priestley's model even attending to "matter"? What is misleading about this reading, which notably contradicted Coleridge's earlier interest in and commitment to Priestleyan materialism (see Erving 225), is that it overlooks the crux of Priestley's argument: namely, that matter simply is not what we think it is. As John Yolton suggests, for Priestley,

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[13] Nigel Leask writes that "[t]he 'Unitarian materialism' of both Priestley and [the early] Coleridge is more accurately described as a form of pantheism, in which God is at once an inherent force in matter and yet retains a certain transcendence" (20). As I argue in this section, the slipperiness of "materialism" as a term in usage at this time includes even the "immaterial materialism" of Priestley's near-pantheism.

> the kind of matter on which the two-substance view is based does not exist. When the new concept of matter is put in place of the old one, the radical difference between matter and spirit disappears […] When this concept is put together with the view of man as a uniform composition, the result is a sophisticated system of centers of force interacting with each other, all organized into a whole. (114)

Such an insight subordinates what is typically taken as materialism's emphasis on substance to an emphasis placed on the relation itself. This is not a departure from materialism; rather, it is an attempt to revive the transcendent kernel encrypted within materialism.

Priestleyan materialism suggests that the identifiable relations between parts, their very organization, provide the conditions for life. This recourse to "organization" as the expressive site of transcendent desire fails, of course, to circumvent the problem of phenomenality as de Man describes it, which is its persistent disclosure of its limits. Hence, the following century's inability to take Priestley's theoretical physics seriously, at least until Michael Faraday's empirical discoveries in electricity and magnetism.[14] What Priestley's idea does offer is a way of thinking-in-paradoxes, such as we see in the central destabilizing and counter-intuitive suggestion (in the words of one of Priestley's critics, Richard Shepherd) that matter should be conceived "not as that inert substance, which it is commonly represented, but as possessing the powers of attraction and repulsion" (qtd. in Yolton 121).

As with the other examples I include below, the attempt to imagine a materiality that can sustain itself without recourse to the spiritual appears in the period as a threat.

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[14] Yolton writes: "Priestley's fascinating suggestions were not taken up and extended; they were hardly even perceived as different from earlier versions of materialism" (125). In his second claim, Yolton is describing the way Priestley's contemporary critics failed to respond to his actual arguments, which were very different from those of other materialists in the period—the latter tending to be much more Newtonian, which is to say both mechanical and corpusclar (see Schofield). Notably, Faraday paid tribute to Priestley in an address delivered on March 25, 1833, at a commemoration of the centenary of Priestley's birth.

William St. Clair writes that, by 1791, Priestley was "one of the most hated men in England: his brave attempts to combine reason with Christianity and to work peaceably for reform by parliamentary means had proved worse than useless and he was shortly to leave for permanent exile in the United States" (62). To take one contemporary response to Priestley's *Disquisitions*, we can refer to the Reverend Richard Gifford, who calls Priestley's theory of an immaterial materiality "an Attack upon the good People of this Country" that "behoves every Man, who thinks he can make up an Antidote to this Poison, to lose no Time in preparing it" (Gifford 2). For the reviewer and for those who later perceived a link between Priestley's writing and the larger threat of the French Revolution, there was a profound moral incompatibility between the traditional transcendent imaginary of faith and the new materialist imaginary that Priestley proposed.[15]

Vitalism

If the great contribution of Priestleyan materialism is that it gives pause to assumptions about the nature of reality, vitalism recalls the vibrancy of life that the more reductive versions of materialism threaten to overlook. This vibrant tone resonates with a pre-modern transcendent vision of the world. Nevertheless, I want to suggest here that modern vitalism emerges out of a monistic imagination—that is, that it follows *from* materialism, rather than preceding it. As Denise Gigante, Timothy Lenoir, and others have shown at length, vitalism is hardly a single movement or even a strictly anti-

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[15] Gifford goes on to write, "I trust, it may […] be hoped, that so wretched a System will allure none to embrace it, but those whose wicked Lives have pre-disposed them to wish for Annihilation" (126-27).

materialist reaction.[16] Instead, vitalism raises anew the question of "how" in addition to

the materialist's question of "what." As with Priestley's thought, I hope therefore to

argue here that vitalism should be understood in light of materialism, as an attempt to

express its transcendent content.

Admittedly, vitalism also has a history that is distinct from that of materialism.[17]

Nevertheless, eighteenth-century vitalism (and to an even greater extent, its nineteenth-

century expression) understood itself in relation to materialism. Moreover, this relation is

one-way. The main reason for this relation is that vitalist theory itself undergoes a

profound methodological shift in the seventeenth century under the pressure of

empiricism. Thus, from one standpoint, one of the earliest modern proponents of vitalism,

William Harvey (1578-1657), simply updates Aristotle in his 1651 work, *On Animal

Generation*; from another perspective, however, he has attempted to translate vitalist

principles for a monistic—and thus, at its base, materialist—worldview. As Gigante

remarks: "Harvey's empirical methodology and sense of the human body as a hydraulic

machine were here put in dialogue with the inexplicable: an invisible living principle"

(7).

Yet the question vitalism inevitably raises is why these thinkers insist upon such a

living principle that exists apart from matter itself? For example, Hans Driesch suggests

that, for G. E. Stahl (1659-1734), "who was considered during almost a whole century as

the authority in matters vitalistic" (30), the explanations offered by materialism were not

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[16] Sean Quinlan remarks: "Despite its Enlightenment centrality, vitalism remains notoriously difficult to define. Neither school nor creed, vitalism dealt broadly with definitions of life and death, constituting more of a holistic approach to the study of living things. Rejecting mechanistic reductionism, its practitioners affirmed the autonomy of life, emphasizing force, dynamism, spontaneity, complexity, differentiation, reproduction, development, and growth" (300).

[17] For instance, Hans Driesch offers Aristotle as its "representative of Antiquity" (11).

"sufficient" to account for life: "It is just because of its extreme fragility that the living body requires special powers of preservation"—powers, it should be noted, that Stahl did not believe the body could derive from itself (31). Like Priestley, Stahl argues that "the basis of life consists of activity not matter," yet, unlike Priestley, he goes on to write that this is an "activity not in matter but operating on it in such a manner that the matter remains purely passive and indifferent" (qtd. in Driesch 34-35). This insistence upon the passivity of matter was related to the fears that had emerged surrounding John Locke's notion of "thinking matter."[18] In both cases, the idea that activity might inhere within matter itself, rather than being imposed upon mere mechanism from without, raised anew the atheistic (even nihilistic) implications of a monistic universe. Vitalism holds back all such implications by maintaining a space for mystery.

Significantly, this very potential also runs the risk of aligning vitalism with the aesthetic ideology I discussed above with reference to de Man. Gigante writes: "As the concept of vital power sparked a preoccupation with self-generating and self-maintaining form, it quickened the category of the aesthetic, elevating natural researchers into natural philosophers attempting to account for a mysterious power buried deep within the structures of nature" (5). Despite this potential for seeking out a mere phenomenality, vitalism (like Priestelyan materialism and sensibility) is better understood as standing in the gap *between* phenomenality and materiality. The key reason for this indeterminacy is vitalism's emphatically scientific status during the eighteenth century in Britain and Germany. In the work of John Needham (1713-1781), Casper Friedrich Wolff (1733-1794), Albert Haller (1708-1777), and J.F. Blumenbach (1752-1840), among others, vitalistic imaginaries (which is to say, narratives of a living principle) are submitted again

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[18] See Yolton, esp. chapter 1.

and again to experimentation and review. In this way, the absence marked by materiality—that void that resists all assimilation—may freely unsettle such false stabilities. Furthermore, this transcendent movement of the negative allows the expansive object of material desire to appear, if only in a refracted or encrypted way.[19]

For example, in his influential writing on the *Bildungstrieb*, J.F. Blumenbach not only based his reflections on amassed evidence,[20] but also subjected his findings to repeated critique.[21] For Blumenbach, the *Bildungstrieb* "directed the formation of anatomical structures and the operations of physiological processes of the organism so that various parts would come into existence and function interactively to achieve the ends of the species" (Richards 220). As Robert J. Richards and others have noted, however, it is not always clear whether this process is meant to function in Blumenbach's thought as only a heuristic, that is, a "regulative concept" as it was for Kant (220). Indeed, Richards points out that later in his career Blumenbach "refer[red] to the principle of the *Bildungstrieb* precisely as a *qualitas occulta*, though in the positive sense (pace Leibniz) that might be associated with Newton's principle of gravity" (219 n.35). This ambiguity about the reality of the formative drive helps to suspend the libidinal dimension of monistic experience between the imaginary realm of an expansive desire and the material realm as inscrutably complex.

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[19] The social consequences of the Abernethy-Lawrence debates of the 1810s reveal the way vitalism, just as much as materialism, represented a threat to the status quo. John Abernethy posited the idea that life derived from an immaterial force superadded to matter; William Lawrence, his former student, rejected this idea in favour of a more thorough-going materialism. Paul Gilmore notes: "As the debate gained publicity, Lawrence was attacked as an atheist and as unpatriotic, while Abernethy's compromise position, though more acceptable to most orthodox believers, also came under attack. Most significantly, Coleridge's rejection of electricity as the life-force or as the vehicle of thought largely grew out of his complete dismissal of Lawrence and his skepticism about the materialist elements of Abernethy's vitalism" (70).
[20] Robert J. Richards writes that Blumenbach "piled up his evidence for the existence of a *Bildungstrieb* from instances analogous to that of polyp regeneration" (219).
[21] His *Handbuch der Naturgeschichte* went through eleven editions.

I want to suggest that this emergence of modern vitalism out of materialist discourse represents an incursion of the semiotic within the symbolic order, along the lines of what Kristeva describes as "a breach [*effraction*] subsequent to the thetic phase" (69). As Gigante shows, vitalism plays an important role throughout the Romantic period not only as a scientific perspective, but also as a creative methodology emphasizing "life in its plenitude—in the sheer gusto of its living power," which "threatens to overwhelm formal containment" (48). Given the basic tenets of materialism, especially as regards the universality of matter, vitalism appears, as I have already suggested, a discourse in explicit contradistinction. Yet I include it as a permutation of materialism, first, because it emerges out of the evolution of materialism as a response to the rise of certain theoretical emphases, and, second, because it is an attempt to think the "inwardness" of matter. This latter aspect of vitalism is particularly revolutionary, since it makes room to reintroduce the resonances of the spiritual within the domain of the material. To attempt to locate "life" within matter is to locate the argument within the context of a materialist universe.

Sensibility

Like Priestleyan forces and vitalism, sensibility names the attempt to come to grips with the possibility that matter has a life of its own. The age of sensibility, which Janet Todd suggests reaches its ascendency "from the 1740s to the 1770s" (4), saw the entwining of moral and natural philosophies, which meant the intersection of multiple meanings of the single word: feeling. On the one hand, sensibility could refer to the concept of feeling as an experience occurring within the confines of one's consciousness; on the other, it could mean a process occurring within the physical body primarily at the

level of the nervous system. While these understandings of "sensibility" appear in different contexts as far back as the sixteenth century, it is not until the middle of the eighteenth century that the word gains cultural currency.[22] Thus feeling at the level of consciousness and feeling at the level of the physical senses become mutually implicated with two effects: pity—and, later, sympathy—acquires a physical character, and the sensory experiencing of the world becomes understood as mediated through the psyche. As Jerome McGann writes of sentimental writing, "The spiritual condition it celebrates comes through a regimen grounded in the senses. Harmony is (paradoxically?) a function of pleasure, whose increase transports one to a new sensual order—an order where one may at last experience 'the life of things'" (125).

G. S. Rousseau suggests that we may take John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) as introducing a new paradigm of thought via his "integration of ethics and physiology" (125). By developing Descartes's emphasis upon physiology and accepting the assertion of anatomists like Thomas Willis (who taught Locke at university) that "the soul was located in the brain" (127), Locke opens the way not only for sensibility to give a material basis to moral feeling, but also for feeling to be elevated to the level of an epistemology. This movement from sense to feeling to thought traces an attempt to transform materiality into an imaginary—to discover the transcendent element of materiality and render it phenomenally. Moreover, as critics have widely recognized, sympathy plays a crucial role in facilitating this tri-part movement from sense to thought. In turn, it appears as the dominant vehicle for disseminating the

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[22] The note in the OED on the etymology of "sensibility" says that it was "[r]are until the middle of the 18th century." Dates are taken from entry 5.b. and entry 2.a. under "Sensibility." Regarding the second entry, I have disregarded the quotations listed prior to the 1533 example as it is only beginning with that example that sensibility becomes connected to an idea of the "sinewes which make sensibilitie"; i.e., sensibility that is connected with the inner mechanisms of the human body.

culture of sensibility as a guiding paradigm across several levels of society. Along these lines, Jacques Khalip writes how, "[e]ven though sympathy is seemingly deployed to promote a humanistic epistemology and ethics, it also generates a slippery rhetoric of interpersonal communication that is in turn indebted to the eighteenth-century cult of sentimentalism" (100).[23] As a process concerned predominantly with this polysemous understanding of "feeling," sympathy establishes a context in which the interior register of sensibility may encounter and even engage with the world. Yet the extreme scope of sympathy's premises begs a question similar to the one posed by scepticism, that other defining feature of Enlightenment discourse. As David Marshall puts it, "Both sympathy and scepticism address the question of whether one person could enter into the thoughts and sentiments of someone else," and, thus, "the age of sensibility must be played out in the age of scepticism" (180).

This observation recalls the ambiguity of sensibility as a discourse. Neither an attempt to escape the monistic universe nor an effort to affirm it wholeheartedly, sensibility is rather an experiment—or series of experiments—to discern the encrypted form of something that extends beyond the "merely" material into the realm of signification. Ildiko Csengei has shown how eighteenth-century writers attempted to identify signifiers of sensibility in objects and gestures such as tears, blushes, and swooning. These signifiers operated on sympathetic readers for a time, yet ultimately come to be seen as excessive, anti-rational, or inappropriate. For instance, Csengei directs

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[23] As G.J. Barker-Benfield (among others) reminds us, sentimentalism is a cognate of sensibility (xvii). Khalip's use of the term—marked as a 'cult'—helps to recall the pejorative connotations of "sentimentalism" in particular, which arose during the decline in popularity of the literature of sensibility over the last two decades of the eighteenth century.

our attention to Mary Wollstonecraft's discussion and dismissal of sensibility in *A*

Vindication of the Rights of Woman:

> the definition [of sensibility in Johnson's dictionary] gives me no other idea than of the *most exquisitely polished instinct*. I discern not a trace of the image of God in either sensation or matter. Refined seventy times seven they are still *material*; intellect dwells not there; nor will fire ever make lead gold! (qtd. in Csengei 177)

As Janet Todd notes, for many English writers during the French Revolution, sensibility

"was the mode of an apathetic middle class which enjoyed dabbling in philanthropy […]

It did not mount a general attack on the social problems of an unequal and unfree society

and it did not encourage political response" (131). This resistance to sensibility, which

also highlights the uncertain attitude of many to what sympathy entailed as a means of

social cohesion, further underscores its inability to serve as an adequate marker of

transcendent desire. Sensibility constitutes a direct investment of materiality into the

social and therefore implies, on the one hand, a dilution of the threat of that materiality,

yet also, on the other hand, a reminder of the social's limits. Its collapse under the

divergent critiques of either a Wollstonecraft, for whom sensibility is too material, or an

anti-bourgeois radical, for whom sensibility is too idealistic and abstract, reiterates the

encrypted position transcendent desire must occupy within a monistic universe.

Like the other experiments surveyed above, sensibility attempts to discern an

idealism within materialism, or to showcase a materiality charged with the transcendent

tone of an idealism that no longer holds. As will become clear in the following chapters,

this effort is characterized not only by paradox, but also consistently by failure.

Nevertheless, sensibility's failure also points forward to its redeployment in several of the

texts described below as the vehicle for expressing the event of dark sympathy. If the

threat that materiality poses to the social is what prompts the encrypted transcendent desire within sympathy to press against its social constraints, then the specific catalyst may be in the extensions of materiality unpacked by sensibility as it intersects with the body, affect, pain, and other sites of meaning. By piercing the social to uncover the interior otherness of the desiring subject itself, images of materiality such as are described above recall an instability within the self that has been covered over through a social turn such as the one exemplified by Hume. The interaction of the outside with the discovery of otherness in the body itself reignites the anxiety that an immersion in the social was meant to extinguish.

Resisting the Ideology of Sympathy in "Queen Mab" and St. Irvyne

This gap between the irreducibly complex reality of lived experience and its representation is a key problem in the work of P. B. Shelley. Denise Gigante suggests that all of Shelley's "major poetry, from 'Queen Mab' through 'The Triumph of Life,' constitutes an aesthetic inquiry into life, 'the great miracle' that bears no reduction" (155). We might extend this statement to include his early Gothic fiction as well. This writing emerges in part out of his complex fascination with the work of the French materialists. Anthony Howe writes that Shelley read "Laplace, Condorcet, Volney, Cabanis, and Holbach," the last of whom "seems to have been particularly influential" (103), as he quotes him extensively in the notes to "Queen Mab." If this early period in Shelley's career intersects with a materialist turn in his thought, then it also prepares the way for a less straightforward revision of the *philosophes*' ideas later. Howe notes, "Although it is difficult to be precise, it seems that at some point from around 1813

Shelley began to drift away from materialist dogma towards the less systematic views we encounter in the later prose" (103). By reading these texts in terms of their contemporary and unsettled engagement with the imaginaries eighteenth-century materialism makes possible, we can perceive how these imaginaries also shape new forms of desire for otherness.

"Queen Mab" can be read as an initial artistic attempt to mobilize transcendence against social imaginaries in part because of its closing depiction of the conflict of desire in the ambiguous relation of Henry and Ianthe. The reading I want to propose of Shelley's first major poem begins from this final scene not only because of how it illuminates the essential social frame of the poem's philosophy, but also due to its emphasis on an inextricable connection between the somewhat abstract implications of materialism and concrete political realities. As Monika Lee writes, commenting on the standard critical readings of the poem: "If […] we choose to view the tensions between the text's materialist message and its supernatural setting as a flaw or inadequacy that resulted from Shelley's youth and immaturity, we risk overlooking what becomes a dominant poetic strategy in this as well as in his later poems" (171). Moreover, this reading of the poem as inadequate does not account for the possibility that Shelley's awkward juxtaposition of discourse and tone may attempt to respond to what he sees to be the limits of traditional understandings of social desire. As I have tried to show, the rise of an idea of materiality understood on its own terms sets the stage for a redeployment of transcendent desire. The more this inscrutable material otherness comes to be seen as permeating, and indeed, even constituting the "real" world, the more its

encrypted transcendent tone latches on to social and relational concepts such as sympathy in order to provide a viable framework for thinking about otherness in this new way.

In Shelley's poem, thought about the other is radicalized through the idea of death. As the reader discovers in the anonymously spoken opening statement, a fear of "death's disrobing hand" (9:171) informs the entire poem: "How wonderful is Death, / Death and his brother Sleep […] Hath then the gloomy Power / Whose reign is in the tainted sepulchres / Seized on her sinless soul?" (1:1-2, 9-10). The poem's concern with the fear of death shares a purpose with Lucretius's poem, which argues: "Death, then, is nothing to us and does not affect us in the least, now that the nature of the mind is understood to be mortal" (3:830). Nevertheless, the fear of death in "Queen Mab" is certainly distinct from that of Lucretius, who suggests that this fear arises in people because of "the thought that after death they will either rot in the grave or be devoured by flames or the jaws of wild beasts" (3:870-72). For Ianthe, the fear of death is linked rather with "a bigot's creed" (QM 9:186) and "the tyrant's rod" (9:187): *social* institutions that attempt to form the character of her desire for the other. She is encouraged not to fear because death is "but the voyage of a darksome hour" (9:174); hence, the death that social institutions can bring about should not diminish the transcendent desire for "Freedom's fadeless laurels" (9:178). The poem attempts to prioritize the demands of the other (even on to death) over the threats of the social. The predominance of the poem thus comprises Mab's argument against the inherent authority of these institutions—an argument that has its modern origin in *Leviathan*—and her aim, by extension, is to reorient the site of authority from an imaginary to a material context.

The poem does not conclude with an indication of whether she is successful in this or not. Instead, we are presented with Ianthe awakening from her voyage with Mab and beholding both Henry and "the bright beaming stars" (9:239). Adjusting the otherwise traditionally romantic *mise-en-scène* is the presence of this new alterity: the stars, which are earlier associated with "those mighty spheres / Whose changeless paths through Heaven's deep silence lie" (3:228-29), an image for the fundamental necessity of material existence. In addition to the social bond imposed upon her and Henry, Ianthe therefore discovers a transcendent bond with the universe that encompasses both of them. The question of whether she will allow her desires to be dictated by social expectations or by the transcendent potential at the heart of the material universe concludes the canto. The careful details of this closing scene recall the ongoing ambivalence that guides the Romantic exploration of what is here an *invitation* to dark sympathy. On the one hand, Henry gazes upon Ianthe sleeping "with looks of speechless love" (9:238); on the other hand, "the bright beaming stars" are visible only "through the casement" of the window next to Ianthe's bed. The scene thus describes a moment just prior to decision, fraught with indeterminacy: the love of Henry and Ianthe has yet to be subjected to the constraints of language. Similarly, Ianthe's attraction to the Dionysian vision signalled by the stars has yet to be tested outside of the social enclosure of the home. As I will argue, this tension represents one of the defining features of Romantic experimentation with this desire for the other that extends beyond the social.

Of course, as I will show in the chapters that follow, the Romantics regularly break this tension completely with scenes of excessive desire for the other, which irrupt within the social as perversions or skewed manifestations of relation. Shelley depicted

such a scene in his Gothic romance, *St. Irvyne* (1811), published only two years prior to

"Queen Mab." Like "Queen Mab," the major relationship that closes the novel is defined

by the fear of death. Wolfstein's deep connection with Ginotti revolves around the life-

debt Wolfstein owes the mysterious figure. When Ginotti finally returns to recover this

debt, Wolfstein discovers that his "horror" (225) of what he thought was "the darkness of

his future destiny" (222) gets replaced with a "resistless anxiety" (225). The anxiety—

similar to Caleb Williams's relentless curiosity or Christabel's fascination with

Geraldine—presses Wolfstein into a darkly sympathetic relation with Ginotti, "fix[ing]"

Wolfstein's attention "upon Ginotti's countenance, await[ing] his narrative" (233). Both

he and Ginotti desire each other in a manner that far exceeds a merely social connection.

Instead, they seek to be related through a secret that will eradicate their mutual fear of

death: "To one man alone, Wolfstein, may I communicate this secret of immortal life"

(238). The fear of death, Lucretius and Queen Mab teach, derives from an insufficient

understanding of materiality; here, Shelley aligns materiality with a secret, thereby

emphasizing what he takes to be its transcendent character.

Ginotti's narrative of how he overcomes the fear of death escorts Shelley's

thought further into the dark side of materiality—with similarly dark effects upon the

nature of his and Wolfstein's relation. He declares:

> I thought of *death*—I shuddered when I reflected, and shrank in horror
> from the idea, *selfish and self-interested* as I was, of entering a new
> existence to which I was a stranger. I must either dive into the recesses of
> futurity, or I must not, I cannot die. (234)

Ginotti finds no solace in a bare materialism, which only exacerbates his despair with the

realization: "why am I to suppose that these muscles or fibres are made of stuff more

durable than those of other men?" (235). His encounter shortly thereafter with "a superior

and beneficent *Spirit*" (236; emphasis original) follows an admission of the limits of "the rules of science" (236). This encounter, leading to a dream that resembles the one Mab gives to Ianthe, culminates in a choice between a "phantasm" taking "a form of most exact and superior symmetry" (237) and "a form more hideous than the imagination of man is capable of portraying" (237). Notably, Ginotti chooses not the immaterial form epitomizing order, but the "form" that cannot be represented. This transformation of Ginotti's materialism into materiality ultimately directs him to "the method by which *man* might exist for ever" (238; emphasis original). Like his dark lord, Ginotti avoids representing his desire by communicating it only as a secret to Wolfstein. Shelley follows suit through the use of aposiopesis—leaving sentences unfinished, marked with ellipses, or simply redacted in the covenantal dialogue between Ginotti and Wolfstein.

This scene reveals the close interaction of transcendent desire with materialism. The ambiguous ending of "Queen Mab" reveals the terms of the conflict of desire without allowing the conflict itself to unfold as dark sympathy: this major encounter between Ginotti and Wolfstein also prepares for the conflict to occur. Unlike "Queen Mab," however, this catastrophic conflict does finally occur in *St. Irvyne*. In the closing chapter, Ginotti attempts to complete the ritual he has initiated with Wolfstein, but the social obstructs him. He says: "Wolfstein, dost thou deny thy Creator?" Wolfstein's response, "Never, never. […] No, no, — any thing but that" (252), precipitates their mutual destruction. His extreme refusal to deny his Creator and willingness to reject anything else stem from his desire to maintain at least a vestige of an earlier imaginary. This desire corresponds to two other moments in the chapter. First, upon discovering Megalena's body, "his soul was nerved by almost superhuman powers; yet the ice of despair chilled

his burning brain" (251); second, he has "a thirst of knowledge [that] scorched his soul to madness; yet he stilled his wild energies" (251). What lies behind this twofold movement of frenzy and calm is his "[c]uriosity, resistless curiosity" (251). Ginotti's demand, he realizes, means a rejection of that "most exact and superior symmetry" (237)—in other words, a representational order that might satisfy his curiosity at least provisionally. Ginotti's desire extends beyond representation, yet ultimately Wolfstein asks only for a narrative: "to know what would be the conclusion of the night's adventure" (225). The result of this social impasse is an event of dark sympathy—a desire epitomized by "Ginotti's burning gaze" (252)—in which the impossible transcendent desire of Ginotti gets contained and transformed by the recourse to social desire Wolfstein enables. Like all instances of dark sympathy, moreover, it cannot last.

The materialist imagination in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries continued to harbour a pervasive desire for something greater than mere substance, yet the collapse of pure dualism necessitated the return of this desire into the fold of substance. Philosophers as divergent as Descartes and Hobbes perceive in common a shift in the conceptual constitution of reality. They each attempt to account for this shift in different ways: Descartes seeking an epistemological certainty in the kernel of identity he posits for the thinking subject, and Hobbes hoping to find stability in the power of the state. I explored the implications of their differences in the previous chapter; where they overlap, they have the effect of rendering materialism transcendent, albeit by encrypting idealism within materialism.

The eighteenth century explores the imaginative effects of this encryption, attempting to rescue aesthetically the expansive desire that materiality's inscrutable core sets in motion. The problem all such attempts encounter is the same as that described by Paul de Man in his reading of Kant: "The bottom line […] is the prosaic materiality of the letter and no degree of obfuscation or ideology can transform this materiality into the phenomenal cognition of aesthetic judgment" ("Phenomenality" 90). At the most basic level, this materiality of the letter is the reminder that there is an insuperable gap between representation and reality.[24] This gap (and our inability to let it stand) gets translated into the eighteenth-century theories I explore above: "immaterial" materialism, vitalism, and sensibility. The recognition that the sign can never more than refer to the thing itself (if even that)—that the thing is forever occluded from our view—prompts scientists and humanists alike to formulate in the period increasingly comprehensive systems for signifying the thing. As the monistic turn of the preceding century gives rise to a much greater sense of what reality might include, making its representation increasingly difficult, the desire to accomplish such a representation and to comprehend the otherness of the universe in spite of the impossibility of this task, increases in kind.

In Shelley's "Queen Mab," the artistic effects of this conflict of representation with reality come full circle at Ianthe's awakening. Under Mab's direction, Ianthe has been given the ability to see the limits of the imaginary within which she has acted and understood her relation to Henry. Her fear of death, derived from one of the many social narratives Mab disputes, has shaped her relationship thus far; its reframing within a materialist understanding of the world provides her with a degree of liberty. Yet Mab's

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[24] Rei Terada writes on this passage in de Man that "the message of the larger narrative is that we are (only) what we are, that the world is what it is—which is not to say that we know what it is" (para. 1).

disclosure does not lead Ianthe to abandon imaginaries altogether. Instead, it invites her

to conceive of life in terms of activity rather than "a bigot's creed" or a "tyrant's rod"

(9:186, 187):

> Life is its state of action, and the store
> Of all events is aggregated there
> That variegate the eternal universe;
> Death is a gate of dreariness and gloom,
> That leads to azure isles and beaming skies
> And happy regions of eternal hope. (9:158-63)

This declaration is no less an imaginary or narrative than any other; however, like

sensibility, vitalism, or Priestleyan materialism, this new narrative keeps open the

possibility of difference—that is, the potential operation of the other. Shelley also

explores a somewhat terminal understanding of transcendent desire in the closing

paragraphs of *St. Irvyne*, which this time succeeds in overwhelming narrative altogether.

However, as we see in his attempt to arrive at a more ambiguous position in the later

"Queen Mab," it is the tension between transcendent and social desires that ultimately

interests him—and many of his fellow Romantics.

Indeed, part of my objective in the subsequent analyses of Godwin, Coleridge,

and Mary Shelley is to explore the way materiality retains a paradoxically "social"

flavour, even as it expresses the transcendent desire encrypted within it. For Godwin, the

social is a necessary evil—inevitable, yet always verging on tyranny and oppression.

Moreover, Godwin recognized with increasing conviction an inscrutable element at the

heart of material temporality (i.e., the temporality of necessity), which subsequent critics

have called "contingency." As he experiments with the representational potential of

contingency, he uncovers a role for the anti-social figure of the misanthrope in disclosing

the limits of this otherwise insuperable social. For Coleridge, the social emerges out of a

failure of community; however, this community itself always fails because of its inability to account for materiality. Given his general resistance to monism,[25] Coleridge held out hope that transcendent desire might aim at something beyond the material, yet this hope also faltered in the course of his expanding view of what this materiality might include. The ongoing persistence (that is, to use Coleridge's term, "constancy") of such a melancholy desire for the other keeps open a space that not only resonates with de Man's ideas about materiality's resistance to representation, but also suggests a much larger scope for sympathy than its eighteenth-century thinkers had envisioned. Finally, for Mary Shelley, sympathy "works" most successfully for her in its *repeated* failure to satisfy the dictates of representation. Her suspicion of the tendency for transcendent desire to be merely an amplified social desire because of its cultivation of uncritical imaginaries enables her to return to the question of transcendence and its relation to materiality and to pose one of the questions that guides this entire study: how may we express a desire for the other that extends beyond our ability to express it?

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[25] See McFarland (1969) for an extended discussion of the tensions in this aspect of Coleridge's thought.

CHAPTER THREE
"I wanted something, I knew not what":
Sympathetic Narratives and Misanthropic Madness in William Godwin's Novels

"So little was I aware of the cogs, the sockets, and the
teeth, by which the different parts of the social system are
connected with each other, and are made to act and react in
perpetual succession, and to sympathise to their remotest
members!"
— William Godwin, *Mandeville*

"Sanity can exist only because we are willing to function
within the conventions of duplicity and dissimulation, just
as social language dissimulates the inherent violence of the
actual relationships between human beings. Once this mask
is shown to be a mask, the authentic being underneath
appears necessarily as on the verge of madness."
— Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality"

In the preceding chapters, I have attempted to trace the history of a fertile

encounter between two major ideas emerging in the eighteenth century. Both sympathy

and materialism make claims about the nature of "the other." The former discourse does

so by imagining a life for the other similar to that led by the self, while the latter

identifies otherness itself as the central characteristic of its ontology. Where sympathy is

haunted by a desire for a relation that would stretch beyond subjectivity, materialism's

own universalizing pretensions threaten to dispense with subjectivity altogether. In this

chapter and the two that follow, I will explore several literary instantiations of this

struggle over the meaning of the other and the question of what it entails to desire it. The

Romantic writers who reflect upon this problem are keenly aware both of the

representational possibilities a more robust understanding of materiality opens up to

thought and of the lingering transcendent desire that theories of sympathy fail to address

in a modern context. The combination of these tendencies enable the Romantics to

inquire into forms of community emerging in the wake of society's inability to account for the whole of human experience.

This chapter will situate this encounter between sympathy and materialism in the writing of William Godwin by examining one of the major character-types deployed in his fiction: the misanthrope. In the four novels I will consider, *Caleb Williams* (1794), *St. Leon* (1799), *Fleetwood* (1805), and *Mandeville* (1817), Godwin uses misanthropes to delineate the horizon of the social realm by revealing that which it excludes: a desire for the other that goes beyond the mere knowledge or comprehension of another person's actions or experience (i.e., beyond conventional sympathy). Instead, the repressed transcendent desire that misanthropy reveals is a desire for an unmediated relation, which would be a relation not dependent upon objectification. Using the language I have already introduced, I want to suggest that misanthropy unsettles the imaginary realm of social relations by drawing attention to its materially conditioned limitations. For Godwin, this materiality manifests itself symbolically in terms of the unanticipated (and often bodily) event that escapes the narrative logic of the social realm. This narrative logic is what Godwin, and others following Hume, called "necessity": the unavoidable linkage of an antecedent event or motivation with its consequence.[1] Yet more than simply unavoidable, this necessity also contains an element of inscrutability: at the heart of the matter is an inability to know with certainty that the cause will produce its attendant effect. That is, it extends Hume's deconstruction of causality insofar as the mechanism by which cause leads to effect is emphatically unknown, yet it affirms a retrospective fatalism in the

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[1] Godwin describes moral necessity in *Political Justice* as a "certainty of conjunction between moral antecedents and consequents" (*PJ3* 1:363-64).

sense that "things as they are" must unfold from events and through processes that have preceded them.

As readers of Godwinian historiography have noted, the inscrutability of necessity, implying its inherent potential for *contingency*, becomes an increasingly important issue for Godwin over the course of his writing career. Jon Klancher, for instance, writes that "[t]he notion of 'necessity,' as it will under intense historical pressure, began to produce in Godwin's revisions of *Political Justice*—and most fully in his project of cultural inquiry and criticism, *The Enquirer*—the complex and chaotic actions of the 'contingent'" (27).[2] In the context of his use of misanthropy as a limit-case for the social, Godwin aligns this contingency with that which exceeds the strictures of reason—that is, with madness. The madness of the misanthrope, as Godwin depicts in his novels, expresses indirectly a transcendent, if impossible, desire to overcome the limits of social identity and to uncover the truth behind all narratives. By establishing the conditions for suppressing this transcendent desire, the social realm forces it to appear only in the form of a traumatic energy. Sympathy fails when it appears alongside such feelings that cannot be properly imagined because of their traumatic character; nevertheless, in this failure, the contours of a way of being with others that goes beyond

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[2] Tilottama Rajan, similarly, elaborates and expands upon Klancher's postmodern understanding of contingency by showing how Godwin's own notion parallels earlier theorizations by Leibniz. In comparing Godwin and Leibniz, Rajan offers an especially apt excerpt from an essay, "Of the Liberty of Human Actions," appearing in *Thoughts on Man: His Nature, Productions and Discoveries* (1831): "Hence arises the idea of contingency ... and the opinion that, while, in the universe of matter, every thing proceeds in regular course, and nothing has happened or can happen, otherwise than as it actually has been or will be, in the determinations and acts of living beings each occurrence may be or may not be ... both issues being equally possible till that decision has been made" (230; qtd. in "Between Romance and History" 248-49 n.11). Although Godwin does not fully accept contingency even at this late date, arguing later in that essay that "the phenomena of mind are governed by laws altogether as inevitable as the phenomena of matter" (232), his perspective has definitely altered by this point in his career, as he references *Political Justice* repeatedly alongside contradicting caveats representing his attempt to come to grips with the feeling that mind is not matter, but rather "an absolute prince [...] endowed with an initiating power" (230). He continues to believe this feeling is "delusive" (231), yet he has come to recognize its vital role in giving rise to "our moral sentiments" (235-36).

the social emerges. Whether or not this alternative community is ultimately desirable, however, is a question that will remain unanswered with the Romantics.

For the sake of both reference and clarity, I will briefly summarize the key critical moves that I make in this chapter. As I have indicated, my central argument is that Godwin experiments with misanthropy as a counter-social vehicle for carrying the kinds of desires modern sympathy fails to accommodate in its capacity as the period's dominant relational vehicle. By reading both sympathy and misanthropy as vehicles for desire, Godwin aligns them with the larger deterministic processes he raises initially in *Political Justice* and then more pervasively throughout his novels: respectively, as dependent upon necessity and what critics have come to identify as "contingency." As he will demonstrate most explicitly in *Caleb Williams*, Godwin understands sympathy's relation to necessity specifically in terms of its reliance upon narrative. For sympathy to take place, the actor must express a narrative—i.e., a story composed logically of antecedents and consequents—that can be reproduced by the social spectator. While misanthropy itself seems to follow a similar social narrative (as I will show is the case with the character of Bethlem Gabor), its potential for expressing transcendent desire lies in its proximity to the ultimate anti-narrative: madness. If narrative follows the chains of mere logic, then madness explodes out of the contingent moment that reveals the inscrutable void that lies at the heart of reason. Moving forward, I will suggest that, where *St. Leon* allows Godwin to explicitly locate misanthropy within the social realm, his next novel, *Fleetwood*, allows him to explore more extensively misanthropy's susceptibility to conditions such as sensibility or madness, as opposed to a normative rationality. As these conditions tend to emphasize contingent and anti-narrative elements,

they may offer an exit route from constraining social narratives and provide the conditions necessary to establish another form of relation. The final section on *Mandeville* takes up the libidinal dimension of the misanthrope's madness more directly in order to consider both its role in forming communities that escape social reason and the means by which these communities can be recaptured by the social.

As I have already suggested, the aftermath of the failure of sympathy in the eighteenth century is a renewed focus on the repression of transcendent desire by the social. This focus is made possible by speculations into the nature of a matter subsisting prior to all imaginaries. In this respect, dark sympathy for Godwin traumatizes the subject so long as the subject remains enmeshed within the social. While there can be no real escape from the social for Godwin, the promise entailed by this trauma is the possibility of locating an outside to history, of encountering an unexpected or contingent event, or of discovering an unanticipated otherness within even social others that might suddenly and without warning shift the dominating narrative of being altogether.

The Ambiguity of Sympathy in Godwin's Thought

In his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1798), Godwin identifies the central position occupied by sympathy in human experience.[3] As he notes in the opening "Summary of Principles," "[t]he most desirable condition of the human species, is a state of society" (1:xxiv), precisely because such a state possesses the greatest opportunity for experiencing "certain secondary pleasures, as the pleasures of intellectual feeling, the pleasures of sympathy, and the pleasures of self-approbation" (1:xxiii). Sympathy, in this

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[3] Godwin published three editions of *Political Justice* in 1793, 1796, and 1798. For a brief summary of Godwin's modifications between the three editions and of the textual history in general, see Clucas 27-33.

model, is as much a process of society, as in Hume, as it is an object of society; it offers itself as a motivating factor for forming and sustaining social relations. To satisfy this desire for a sympathetic "state of society," Godwin offers two competing activities: on the one hand, *government*, the "immediate object" of which is a "security" obtained through "restriction, an abridgment of individual independence" (1:xxiv) and, on the other hand, *justice*, which Godwin defines in several ways, including as "the production of the greatest sum of pleasure or happiness" (1:xxv) and as an ethics that requires "I should put myself in the place of an impartial spectator of human concerns, and divert myself of retrospect to my own predilections" (1:xxv). If the first definition understands justice as a kind of benevolent utility, then the second definition comes very close to Adam Smith's theory of sympathy, in which the exercise of imagining another's experience takes on a universal point of view. Nevertheless, justice in both definitions goes beyond utility and even Smithean sympathy because of its evacuation of subjectivity. In the latter case, this is explicit; in the former, it is implied by Godwin's omission of the second part of Bentham's principle: "the greatest happiness *of the greatest number*" (ii; emphasis mine). Justice posits a sum of happiness without a subject of happiness. In its idealist vision of human relations, justice offers itself as a transcendent object of desire, just as government offers in its provision of security a social object of desire. Government and justice are central concepts in Godwin's exploration of sympathy because they both entail a form of relation through which sympathetic desire may seek to satisfy itself, though neither appears to be ultimately successful. The ambiguity of sympathy, I will argue, arises from its dual use.

The distinction between government and justice corresponds, respectively, to a rejection or validation of reason. In the section of *Political Justice* on "Political Associations," for example, Godwin writes that, "[i]f we would arrive at truth, each man must be taught to enquire and think for himself" (1:288). He argues that the success of this independent and individual use of reason increases as individuals are brought into society with each other; however, such increase depends not upon the repetition of a single idea, such as in "government," but rather upon the multiplication of ideas brought together through unreserved conversation. Thus he writes, "the chance [of success] will also be increased, in proportion as the intellectual operations of these men are individual, and their conclusions are suggested by the reason of the thing, uninfluenced by the force either of compulsion or sympathy" (1:288). The perilous tendency of sympathy to conjoin *opinions* rather than reflective judgments is particularly concerning to Godwin: "While the sympathy of opinion catches from man to man, especially among persons whose passions have been little used to the curb of judgment, actions may be determined on, which the solitary reflection of all would have rejected" (1:293). Such "sympathy of opinion," which he also calls "imitation," is the antithesis of Godwin's stated aim of helping individuals to use their reason, and its predominance thus aligns sympathy generally with government.

In an essay called "Of the Obtaining of Confidence," included in his 1797 *Enquirer*, Godwin elaborates further how sympathy can tend to support the restrictive measures of government. While this essay explores the pedagogical work of gaining the student's trust, a precarious tone underpins Godwin's reflections. He writes that "[w]here sympathy is strong, imitation easily engrafts itself. […] There is, as it were, a magnetical

virtue that fills the space between them: the communication is palpable, the means of communication too subtle and minute to be detected" (124).[4] The sympathetic process creates an imaginative space within which learning through the modeling of virtue becomes possible. Nevertheless, such imitation raises the possibility of manipulation and psychological subterfuge: "If any man desire to possess himself of the most powerful engine that can be applied to the purposes of education, if he would find the ground upon which he must stand to enable himself to move the whole substance of the mind, he will probably find it in sympathy" (124). The threat sympathy poses—as it also does in Godwin's novels—lies precisely in its status as a "powerful engine that can be applied." Sympathy's availability to multiple, even contradicting, uses—a feature of what we have seen to be its work in support of social imaginaries—opposes the universality of what Godwin wishes to see undergirding the system of things: justice as a commitment to reason.

Just what reason entails for Godwin, however, shifts over the course of the 1790s. In terms of its general character, the idea of reason is cast in increasingly transcendent terms in Godwin's writing of that period—making his idea of justice increasingly transcendent as well. Thus, where the 1793 edition of *Political Justice* declares, "Reason is the only legislator, and her decrees are irrevocable and uniform" (PJ1 1:166; qtd. in

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[4] As I explore below, Godwin's use of "magnetism" as a metaphor for sympathy is slippery. In instances such as the one cited here, it seems to indicate a straightforward sense of "strong attraction." Elsewhere, for instance, in his essay, "Of History and Romance" (1797), he writes: "We go forth into the world; we see what man is; we enquire what he was; and when we return home to engage in the solemn act of self-investigation, our most useful employment is to produce the materials we have collected abroad, and, by a sort of magnetism, cause those particulars to start our to view in ourselves, which might otherwise have laid for ever undetected" (455). Here, magnetism functions more literally as a force operating at the level of particulars rather than persons. In general, I see "magnetic virtue" as signaling the more general meaning, which is aligned with social sympathy, and other instances as more ambiguous and possibly intersecting with the idea of dark sympathy, which involves a resonance between alterities within and without.

Collings 871 n. 1), the 1798 edition reads, "Immutable reason is the true legislator, and her decrees it behoves us to investigate" (PJ3 1:221; qtd. in Collings 847). This slight shift also marks a difference in Godwin's evolving understanding of the relation between social and transcendent desires. In the first place, he has added a layer of phenomenality. The 1793 edition describes the legislations of reason as autonomous in their authority; by adding the word "true" in the 1798 edition, he produces an over-determination that implies a multitude of untrue legislations deriving, we can suppose, from misinterpretations of reason. The third edition's additional qualification of "immutability" connects reason with Godwin's doctrine of necessity. Reason is no longer simply "things as they are," but rather it is the unchangeable and necessary process. Yet, as the second clause indicates, the truth of immutable reason must now be sought out ("investigate[d]"). One of the key implications of this distinction is that it becomes possible to pursue the principle raised in the opening pages of the third edition of *Political Justice*, namely regarding "the improvement of reason" that will lead to "the improvement of our social condition" (1:xxvi). Although the "immutability" of reason and its propensity for improvement appear to contradict each other, it is precisely because reason has been cast into the necessitarian backdrop of existence that the *human understanding of it* is made improvable at all. Reason-as-immutable is therefore ultimately inscrutable, though one may occupy a position more or less proximate to its unchanging, occluded centre. As Godwin writes in the same paragraph discussing "immutable reason": "The functions of society extend, not to the making, but the *interpreting* of law; it cannot decree, it can only declare that, which the nature of things has already decreed, and the propriety of which irresistibly flows from the circumstance

of the case" (PJ3 1:221; emphasis mine). By extension, David Collings argues that this

new distinction enables the radical critical exercise of Godwin's *Enquiry*: "Because

reason is prior to its historical articulation, the latter is illegitimate" (847).

Once reason as a path to truth is distinguished from *rationalizing* in the sense of

interpreting things in order to satisfy desire, the transcendent ideals of *Political Justice*

become increasingly difficult to access. As he moves away from an uncritical view of

reason—reason as simply "things as they are"—towards a view of reason as both

immutable and therefore inscrutable at its root, Godwin increasingly conceives of the

idea of "things as they are" as itself a narrative distinct from the truth. The relation of

sympathy to such narratives is complex. Generally, as he suggests in *Political Justice* and

elsewhere, sympathy remains susceptible to being a *purely* social expression, which is to

say an expression in which the social precedes and determines the individual. Yet the

desire for the other that sympathy elicits also remains deeply lodged within the

individual. Thus, from the beginning, Godwin's understanding of the desires contained

within sympathy attends to the conflict I introduced in Chapter 1. Sympathy tends

towards imitation, and it lends itself easily as a tool for manipulating and oppressing

others. Yet it also evokes a transcendent desire for something beyond the mundane reality

of either "my own predilections" or even simply "the conviviality of a crowded feast"

(1:293)—the latter description of which Godwin offers as a figure of the social.

This transcendent desire for an alterity subsisting at the root of nature ultimately

promotes an "individuality," which Godwin insists is "the very essence of intellectual

excellence" (PJ 2:500) and "flows from the very nature of man" (PJ3 1:167).[5] Such

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[5] In this important passage, Godwin distinguishes between individuality and imitation. He writes: "He that resigns himself wholly to sympathy and imitation, can possess little of mental strength or accuracy. The

individuality constitutes what Robert Anderson calls "the sacred sphere of private judgment" (617). Yet private judgment, although Godwin insists that it must not be infringed upon, is not also infallible—far from it. Rather, private judgment must be preserved so that what might be better termed the "community" of political justice (as opposed to any "governed" society) can emerge. His idealism about the possibility of such a community dissipates with the death of Mary Wollstonecraft, though it is perhaps not surprising that the optimism of the *Political Justice* period overlaps the optimism of *St. Leon*. Nevertheless, as I explore in the sections that follow, this waning conviction in the possibility of transcendent desire does not mean that he stops pursuing it. Instead, misanthropy reconstitutes private judgment as an explicitly anti-social posture, which can only be expressed within the social as madness.

As he comes to discern the instrumentality of reason and thus the need for a deliberate commitment to its inscrutable core, Godwin also discovers the role competing narratives play in the amplification of social influence upon individuals. If sympathy expresses the desire for others, obtained either through government (as in social desire) or through justice (as in transcendent desire), then narrative represents the means by which that sympathetic desire communicates itself, delineating a set of relations within which the subject asks to be understood. *Caleb Williams* strives to show both how the social strives to dominate all attempts at narration and how a material remainder nevertheless escapes such totalization.

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system of his life is a species of sensual dereliction. He is like a *captive* in the garden of Armida; he may revel in the midst of a thousand delights; but he is incapable of the enterprise of a hero, or the severity of a philosopher. He lives forgetting and forgot. He has deserted his station in human society" (2:500; emphasis mine). If imitative sympathy implies a kind of captivity, individuality suggests freedom.

Caleb Williams: *The Failure of Sympathy and the Intervention of Misanthropy*

While I will explore the figure of the misanthrope in much greater detail in the subsequent sections of this chapter, I first want to consider Falkland, the prototypical Romantic misanthrope Godwin developed in his first novel, in the unique context of his self-fashioning in relation to Caleb and others. The central issue for Falkland (and the reason the novel reveals the catastrophic failure of sympathy) is his inability to narrate his life as he chooses. This difficulty is also a problem for Caleb and, indeed, this novel may be read as a record of his training in misanthropy. My larger argument about misanthropy is that it is the condition that emerges out of the repression of transcendent desire by the social; in other words, it has the potential to manifest a dark sympathy. In this way, it renders explicit the conflict of desire that appears in theories of sympathy in the mid-eighteenth century. Godwin seems intuitively to recognize this in his development of the character of Falkland.

As Godwin himself (in the novel's Preface) and many critics since have suggested, *Caleb Williams* can be read as a fictional experiment investigating the ideas Godwin raises in his nearly contemporaneous prose work.[6] I would like to extend this observation to suggest that one of the key questions Godwin is revisiting in *Caleb Williams* is the question of what is required to belong to society. In *Political Justice*, Godwin grows increasingly suspicious of necessity's ability to lead to justice; however, he does not reject the utopian and future possibility of a social realm that might be

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[6] Evan Radcliffe writes, "There may be no other case as prominent in which a novel succeeds a philosophical treatise so closely in time, is so closely connected to its concerns, and yet is so unprogrammatic. Accordingly, a number of critics have explored the relations between *Caleb Williams* and *Political Justice*, especially the complex ways in which the novel, which sharing and pursuing many of the political and philosophical positions of *Political Justice*, diverges from them" (528). Radcliffe goes on to distinguish between the two works in terms of their formal differences and the effects these make upon their apparent incompatibilities.

grounded upon this transcendent objective. *Political Justice* imagines a society founded upon reason. Nevertheless, with each subsequent revision, reason becomes less and less an immediate revelation of "things as they are" and increasingly a mystery requiring interpretation—and therefore narration. Indeed, what is at stake is precisely the libidinal status of narrative: can narrative be deployed to express a transcendent desire for the other, or will it always collapse into a mere social desire because of its reliance upon communication, exchange, and—ultimately—sympathy?

Several critics have identified this issue of narration and narrative as a central concern in *Caleb Williams*. Cheryl Walsh writes that "*Caleb Williams* is a novel about narratives and their credibility" (23). Emily R. Anderson notes along similar lines that the novel "interrogat[es] the construction of narrative" and "tends towards a different view. In every imaginable circumstance, the novel suggests that a good story is more powerful—and ultimately more dangerous—than a true story" (100). David S. Hogsette likewise argues: "The main purpose of Caleb's own narrative confessional—the novel he narrates—is to escape the prison of Falkland's narrative legacy and to redeem himself in the eyes of the public" (par. 10). In this section, I will continue this discussion of the central role narrative plays in *Caleb Williams* and argue that Godwin links narrative with sympathy and its failure. I will support this argument in the first place by narrowing my focus to consider a centrally important scene in the novel: the "mousetrap" episode in which Caleb attempts to trick his master into revealing the dark source of his misanthropy. This scene indicates not only the limits of social desire (and therefore the far edge of sympathy's other), but also the mechanisms by which the social works to reintegrate individuals on the cusp of escape. I will also read the novel's original and

revised endings, respectively, as Godwin's attempt to preserve sympathy for justice

(rather than government) by casting Caleb fully out from the social realm and, in the

revised ending, as his return to the ambiguity of sympathy that he raised in *Political*

Justice. If sympathy is overly susceptible to the circulation of opinion that directs

government, then Caleb's descent into madness outside the social realm, at the hands of

government, can promote the reader's own sympathy and—by extension—desire for

justice. The original ending pits sympathy-as-justice against the more pervasive

sympathy-as-government. Just as Godwin would become increasingly suspicious of this

kind of optimism over the course of the 1790s, so does he opt for a less optimistic ending

in his revision of *Caleb Williams*. For, as we see in the revised ending, Caleb's ability to

elicit sympathy helps him to find social acceptance, but at the expense of becoming a

misanthrope like his master. The subsequent sections of the chapter will consider at

greater length the representational value of misanthropy for revealing desire.

Desperate for the sympathy that Godwin identified as one of the chief aims of

human desire in *Political Justice*, both Caleb and Falkland ultimately seek the more

realizable social sanction of their personal narratives rather than an impossible

satisfaction of their transcendent desire for immediacy. Falkland has understood the

secret since his quarrel with Tyrrel, but Caleb only discovers it in the closing chapters of

the novel: that social sanction depends not upon truth-content, but upon convincing form.

The form that convinces the social is specifically one of necessity, in which each effect

follows "naturally" from its cause. As Falkland discovers many years prior to Caleb

joining his household, "All are but links of one chain. A blow! A murder! My next

business was to defend myself, to tell so well-digested a lie as that all mankind should

believe it true" (214). Thus he articulates his actions as necessary moments reproducing the *narrative* of honour he wishes to posit for social approbation. Unlike Caleb, who continues for much of the novel (and, in the original ending, to its conclusion) to imagine the possibility of an unmediated relation to the Real, Falkland believes that the secret at the heart of history is the artifice of history itself, or what Godwin calls "the character of freedom" in an especially resonant section of *Political Justice*:

> All the acts, except the first, were necessary, and followed each other, as inevitably as the links of a chain do, when the first link is drawn forward. But then neither was this first act free, unless the mind in adopting it were self-determined, that is, unless this act were chosen by a preceding act. Trace back the chain as far as you please, every act at which you arrive is necessary. That act, which gives the *character* of freedom to the whole, can never be discovered; and, if it could, in its own nature includes a contradiction. (1:378; emphasis mine)

Thus, on the one hand, Caleb's initial (transcendent) curiosity grows the closer he gets to Falkland, appearing ultimately as anxiety in its sheer "restless propensity" (187). Yet, on the other, when this anxiety first encounters the social in the form of the magistrate Forester whom Caleb believes to be similarly interested in the truth itself, Caleb's unvarnished tale fails to convince and collapses back into anxiety. In part, this failure is because, in a manner of speaking, the "varnish" of the tale is precisely the point. As Cheryl Walsh notes, "According to Forester, truth cannot be one's main concern when representing oneself to the judicial system. The object of the game, as it were, is to 'make the best story,' where the criteria for a good narrative are plausibility and ingenuity" (30). By the time Caleb encounters Falkland again in a scene of trial, he has learnt how to manage his anxieties and how, as Eric Daffron suggests, "sympathy can be turned to resistant uses" (214). The story must be told in such a way that it can be "carried […] to every hearer" (CW 432), introjected, and its effects reinscribed. Caleb's tragic discovery

near the close of the novel is that the success of his sympathetic narrative has in fact

resulted in the obstruction of that original transcendent desire, which gets replaced

instead with "a secret foreboding, as if I should never again be master of myself" (423).

This anxious feeling describes the experience of Godwinian necessity, in which "man is a

passive, and not an active being" (PJ 1:389). Moreover, it is an experience of necessity

with no recourse to the potentiality implied by its inscrutable contingent core.

Nevertheless, as Godwin recognizes in *Caleb Williams* and elsewhere, all

sympathetic narratives are susceptible to disturbance. Indeed, as Paul de Man suggests,

the aesthetic ideology implied by these socializing narratives encounters an insuperable

obstacle in "the prosaic materiality of the letter" ("Phenomenality and Materiality" 90),

which underlies all forms of textuality as the condition of their possibility and ultimate

horizon. De Man writes elsewhere:

> Sanity can exist only because we are willing to function within the
> conventions of duplicity and dissimulation, just as social language
> dissimulates the inherent violence of the actual relationships between
> human beings. Once this mask is shown to be a mask, the authentic being
> underneath appears necessarily as on the verge of madness. ("Rhetoric of
> Temporality" 216)

The process by which this de-masking might occur—and the possibility it entails for

community—can best be described with reference to Godwin's subsequent work, where

the figure of the misanthrope (introduced here with Falkland) takes on a central role as

does his concomitant outbursts of madness. Nevertheless, Godwin's first novel sets the

stage for these later investigations through its close analysis of the intimate interactions

between Falkland and Caleb, the misanthrope and misanthrope-in-training. As Caleb

discovers, Falkland's misanthropy—and especially his moments of madness—interrupts

the unfolding of necessity, obstructing sympathy, while also opening a space for community through the mutual experience of contingency.

On the surface, the so-called "mousetrap" scene at the beginning of the second volume depicts a conflict of narratives, yet such conflict is driven unwittingly by a material corollary that cannot be assimilated. Thus, when Falkland extols the virtues of Alexander the Great, he does not realize that another inquiry is taking place simultaneously. Even as he insists that Caleb will find "in Alexander a model of honour, generosity, and disinterestedness" (184), Falkland fails to understand—until it is too late—that his allegorical appropriation of the past (for, like Alexander, he "has been much misunderstood" [185]) is already being framed within Caleb's ironic testing of him. Yet Caleb too does not foresee the consequences of this act. For, as Caleb reveals the textual character of Falkland's narrative, he radically disturbs its smooth continuity and social propriety. Thus Caleb initiates the discussion by explicitly calling into question the material grounds of a textual phenomenon: "how came Alexander of Macedon to be surnamed the Great" (183). While the conversation that ensues on one level revolves around the semantics of what constitutes "greatness," on a deeper level, both parties are interested in the nature of truth and each implicitly identifies with his respective reading. Thus Falkland appeals to Alexander as "gallant, generous, and free" (184) and tasks Caleb with "becom[ing] more liberal" (185), while Caleb suggests that this "freedom" was little more than an expansive tyranny, "the common disturber of mankind" (184). Yet undergirding this discussion is Caleb's remarkable deployment of allegory against itself. By appealing to a purely textual question, in which he counters a democratic hermeneutic ("Man is surely a strange sort of creature, who never praises any one more

heartily than him who has spread destruction and ruin over the face of nations!" [184-85])

against Falkland's hermeneutic of glory, Caleb conceals until the last moment the

material corollary of this hermeneutic, namely, Falkland's guilt. The veiled accusation he

ultimately levels against Falkland serves in the same instant as a critique of the textual—

that is, imaginary—basis of Falkland's narrative and as an oblique disclosure of Caleb's

own transcendent desire to know Falkland in an absolute sense.

The disclosure, although it posits a darkly sympathetic relation initially, also

almost immediately shuts down the full possibility of this relation: "The instant I had

uttered these words, I felt what it was that I had done. There was a magnetical sympathy

between me and my patron, so that their effect was not sooner produced upon him, than

my own mind reproached me with the inhumanity of the illusion. Our confusion was

mutual" (186). The agency described in this action presents a kind of non-intentional

experience, which develops contingently and non-linguistically as in "magnetism," rather

than through narration. The provision of a narrative explanation for this feeling partially

subordinates its unanticipated quality, yet without sublimating it completely. Where

Caleb had attempted to posit his liberal narrative against Falkland's classical narrative,

the material underside of this work of narration interrupts the competition, resulting in a

mutual "confusion" that cannot be fully explained away by mere sympathy. Moreover,

Falkland's *body* reacts more violently than he would like. At first, he only "redden[s] at

these citations" (183). Once Caleb reveals his true intent to be an attack on Falkland's

narrative domination, he inadvertently discloses the limits of the social imaginary they

both inhabit. The consequence for Falkland, the more entrenched in social desire of the

two, expresses itself again in material terms: "[t]he blood forsook at once the transparent

complexion of Mr. Falkland, and then rushed back again with rapidity and fierceness"
(186).[7] This non-intentional, material response inducts Falkland into a community with
Caleb that neither member can quite articulate—but, above all, one that resides elsewhere
than within the bounds of the Symbolic order. Yet, as we see in the almost immediate
turn from "magnetical sympathy" to the narrative of his "mind reproach[ing]," this
unanticipated, contingent, and material community only corresponds to one aspect of
their desire for one another. Thus, even as he enjoys the destructive pleasure of pressing
truth in the form of material necessity against the fragile narrative webs that Falkland has
woven, Caleb ultimately desires a future situation in which "the world shall do justice on
us both" (421). Notably, here Caleb uses "justice" in a sense far different from Godwin's
use of the term: to ask "the world" to do justice is ultimately a request for "government."

This conflict of desires reflects the conflict of sympathy: a contention between, on
the one hand, a transcendent desire for a relation with the other that overcomes
subjectivity and, on the other, a social integration, which aims at a kind of totality, though
one diffused through sympathy's ruse of only gesturing towards otherness. Caleb is never
quite able to enter into the former's expansive relation with the other because he still
desires an identity for himself. Moreover, he understands that desire specifically in terms
of an identity within the social. Similarly, Falkland desires honour, but conceives of that
potentially transcendent object only in social terms as a kind of lingering, though
perverted, residue of the chivalric relationship. As John Bender writes, describing the
social systems of judgment as understood by both Falkland and Caleb: "Both the old
system, based upon honour, and the newer one based upon sympathetic introjection are

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[7] P. B. Shelley would draw on this description of physical response in a similar scene between Ginotti and
Wolfstein in *St. Irvyne*: "Wolfstein started. The terror which had blanched his cheek now gave way to an
expression of fierceness and surprise" (224).

political in the worst sense because they personify judgment as an enforcing third person rather than founding it upon the analogous but independent percipience of individuals" (267). Thus, despite the differences separating Falkland and Caleb, the form of desire that motivates both of their narratives is startlingly consistent: a desire for an immediate relation with others disingenuously articulated through a desire for the social.

This desire to remain entrenched within the social helps to explain Godwin's different endings for the novel. In the original ending, Caleb abandons his desire for social sanction and decides instead to pursue a truth unsullied by the machinations of the social order; in this way, the ending represents a logical development following Caleb's realization that "[s]ympathy, the magnetic virtue, the hidden essence of our life, was extinct" (414). As Cheryl Walsh notes, "In the manuscript ending, there is no reversal, no new revelation. Caleb sticks to the calculated narrative strategy that is evident throughout the novel, the concentrated purpose of which is to clear his name" (34). Caleb describes his feelings freely to the indignant judge: "I expressed my sorrow for the apparent state of Mr. Falkland's health. I did not thirst for his blood. But I could no longer be easy to confine within my own bosom the knowledge I had upon this terrible subject" (436). David Collings writes regarding this scene that it "gives Caleb the chance to act out the fantasy that he is the solitary truthteller in the face of a closed and total system of oppression" (856). Thus he is able to perform his transcendent desire for the revelation of truth without admitting that his decision to express this in the context of the trial stems from a desire for society to approve of him. When that society does not, but instead consigns him to his madness, the implication is that social sympathy (and government) ought to be rejected. By extension, the reader is encouraged to imagine the conditions by

which Caleb might be rendered sympathetic—to imagine truthtelling as sympathetic and

hence deserving of justice. Yet Godwin proposes instead to devise a "new catastrophe"

(qtd. in Handwerk, *Caleb Williams*, 435) because such an expulsion from the social—as

he explores at greater length in his later novels—does not reflect the totalizing aims of

the social as he has come to understand it. Furthermore, Caleb discovers that he has not

only been cast out of the social, but also from a realm in which transcendent desire itself

is possible. Instead, he finds himself in a realm emptied of desire, where "[t]rue

happiness" is "being like a stone" (443), and he is encompassed in madness and death by

the material otherness of what Žižek calls drive.[8]

Although Caleb's response to the scene of judgment in the revised ending seems

to depend upon straightforward sympathy in order to overcome the destructive effects of

the fabric of identity Caleb has woven for himself thus far, I want to suggest that it also

articulates the encrypted and perverted character of transcendent desire within a social

realm that cannot truly be escaped. Up to this point, Caleb has attempted to retain this

vision of himself as the truthteller and, in the original ending, he is permitted to live out

that fantasy to its logical conclusion. Yet, as we have seen in Godwin's revisionings of

Political Justice, this "fantasy of reason" harbours a contingent core. This contingency –

the very alterity of materiality – surfaces momentarily when he encounters Falkland

dying and he finds himself in a position similar to his master's experience in the

mousetrap scene. This is not simply a matter of "feeling with" Falkland. Instead, Caleb

perceives in the demand that he sympathize with this broken man the necessity that he

betray his own transcendent desire. The effect of this dark sympathy, which remains

concealed from the social scene of the trial until he textualizes it in his testimony, causes

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[8] For a more extended discussion of Žižek's contrasting of desire and drive, see Chapter 4.

him to tremble (his "whole frame shook" [428]), much as he had vowed to cause

Falkland to "Tremble!" (421) earlier. Despite the unmitigated transcendent desire he has

for justice earlier on, Caleb finds in the social context of the trial that the affective and

seemingly visceral reactions he displays both in his first encounter with Falkland and

during the course of his prosecution cannot properly be communicated to the court. Thus

he confesses his desire to "recall the last four days of my life" (428). The encounter has

led him to recognize, on the one hand, that his "fine-spun reasonings," a phrase that

implies the artifice of his justification, had not accounted for the meaning of that moment

of desire for Falkland. This realization forms the basis of a rational critique of Caleb's

own necessitarian use of reason: "There must have been some dreadful mistake in the

train of argument" (427). His discovery is that what he had taken for a transcendent

desire to know the truth about Falkland was in fact a social desire to have his own

narrative sanctioned instead of Falkland's—and that such a desire had led him to this

scene of judgment. Yet, unlike the original ending, the revised ending requires that Caleb

remain within the horizon of the social, which he comes now to see as "a rank and rotten

soil, from which every finer shrub draws poison as it grows" (434).

As was the case in the mousetrap scene, Caleb discovers the depth of his desire

for Falkland traumatically and materially, as it comes upon him unaware, "fe[eling] what

it was that [he] had done" (186). This contingent event is inherently fleeting, yet it signals

Godwin's working through of a concept of desire that extends beyond a mere social

desire for the other. Furthermore, as we can see in Godwin's exploration of the way

Caleb's and Falkland's respective narrative trajectories gradually converge, with the

former ultimately (and Oedipally) supplanting the latter, the economy of social

participation also implies an ongoing misanthropic element, which surfaces partly as a result of this trauma. If Falkland exemplifies misanthropy throughout the bulk of the novel, then Caleb's development as a character emerges out of his own education in misanthropy—his experience of life as "a theatre of calamity" (59). Godwin's decision to retain Caleb for misanthropy in the revised ending indicates a certain resignation to the limits of the social, which he will nevertheless continue to probe in his subsequent work.

St. Leon: *Misanthropy at the Limits of the Social*

In Molière's *The Misanthrope* (1666), the miserable protagonist, Alceste, claims that his "main gift is for frankness and sincerity" (56).[9] This extreme sincerity alienates him from society not only by making his presence uncomfortable to others, but also by making the artifice of others distasteful to him. Although somewhat mitigated by an ending in which the moderates, Philinte and Éliante, follow the solitary Alceste off-stage in order to "do all we can to persuade him to give up this foolish plan" (75), Molière's play can be read as generally interested in the merits of sincerity. The most insincere character, Célimène, is forced to confess her artifice, while the truthful Éliante gains a husband. Godwin similarly aligned an ideal sincerity in *Political Justice* with the more benevolent society he imagines there, as opposed to the current state: "At present, men meet together with the temper, less of friend, than enemies. Every man eyes his neighbour, as if he expected to receive from him a secret wound" (1:334). The "secret wound" derives from the universal story of social disappointment that lies at the heart of all of his subsequent fictional explorations of misanthropy. Yet, where Alceste's

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[9] Godwin notes in his diary that he read *The Misanthrope* from March 10-11, 1799. He had previously read three acts of the five-act play on 26 June and 2 July 1793.

misfortunes lead him to abandon society altogether and flee into solitude as the curtain falls, the misanthropes of Godwin's fiction find they cannot escape the social—as though Hume's social turn had denied them that option altogether.

As I have suggested, misanthropy is a regular feature in Godwin's work, appearing in one form or another in all of his novels. In his second novel, *St. Leon*, Godwin introduces the historical character, Bethlem Gabor, as a limit-case for testing the compatibility of social sympathy with misanthropy.[10] Gabor fits well the description of an extreme sufferer that David Hume offers us in Book 3 of the *Treatise.* Hume argues that, just as there is "an immediate sympathy which men have with characters similar to their own" (383), a person's excessive response to suffering (in which "angry passions rise up to cruelty" [386]) produces an antipathy in which "[a]ll the pity and concern which we have for the miserable suffers by this vice, turns against the person guilty of it, and produces a stronger hatred than we are sensible of on any other occasion" (384). Having lost his family and possessions suddenly and through a brutal violence, Gabor "wandered a solitary outcast upon the face of his country […] but every day engendered some new thought or passion: and it appeared probable that he would not yet quit the stage of existence till he had left behind him the remembrances of a terrible and desolating revenge" (SL 383). Godwin's depiction of the relationship between St. Leon and Gabor explores the extent to which this boundary of the social may be crossed.

Although he later claims that "there was little sympathy between us; he was wrapped up in his own contemplations; he was withered by his own calamities; our souls scarcely touched in a single point" (424), St. Leon initially discovers an intimacy with this misanthrope that resembles the kind of sympathy Godwin describes elsewhere as

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[10] For a comparison of the Bethlem Gabor of history and Godwin's character, see Kelly 119-20.

"magnetic" (CW 414), which is to say predicated upon a shared, though unconscious, worldview. He describes their relationship as a shared melancholy:

> We had each by the malice of a hostile destiny, though in a very different manner, been deprived of our families; we were each of us alone. Fated each to be hereafter for ever alone; we blended ourselves the one with the other as perfectly as we could. Often over our gloomy bowl we mingled groans, and sweetened our draught as we drank it with maledictions. (384-85)

Godwin would later describe a similar relationship in *Mandeville* in Mandeville's short-lived acquaintance with Lisle at Oxford. There, too, their companionship consisted in the exchange of world-denouncing execrations. Mandeville describes the appeal of their union: "We found a social pleasure in looking in each other's faces, and silently whispering to our own hearts, Thank God, I have a companion, that hates the world as much as I do!" (127).

In *St. Leon,* this attempt at finding sympathy in a sharing of their hatred ultimately fails. When Gabor discovers that St. Leon is not a true misanthrope (indeed, that he imagines himself the opposite, a philanthropist), he throws him in prison. As a novel of ideas ("a text as playful as Godwin's other novels are traumatic" [Rajan, *Romantic Narrative*, 144]), *St. Leon* explores anew the potentialities of the social order that Godwin initially raised in *Political Justice*, but partly undermined in his first novel, *Caleb Williams*. As a wanderer and misanthrope, Gabor appears to stand outside society, and indeed he believes that his imprisonment of St. Leon will satisfy "the scope of my misanthropy" as "in your restraint, I image myself as making the human race an orphan" (SL 403). In this act, however, Gabor inadvertently imitates St. Leon's other imprisonments (such as his time spent under the Inquisition) and thus reveals himself to be complicit with—rather than opposed to—the social order. As we see in his ironic

phrasing, explaining his impetus for imprisoning St. Leon, Gabor ultimately shares the same goals as the social order: "Never shall Bethlem Gabor set at large a man of your unnatural and gall-less disposition, and your powers for the indulgence of that disposition" (403). Later, St. Leon's son, Charles, a veritable representative of the dominant social imaginary, will express similar sentiments when he discovers his father's duplicity: "If such a wretch as thou art, be permitted to go at large, what human institution, what human possessions, shall ever be secure?" (444).

This perverse connection between the misanthrope and the social is consistent throughout Godwin's novels. As he develops his thinking on misanthropy, Godwin strives to account for the possibilities it might also entail as a resistant force. Bethlem Gabor serves not only to dispute the universality of social sympathy, but also to mark the inherent misanthropy of the social order itself. In his contrast with St. Leon, Gabor reveals that misanthropy is less an inversion of social desire than its own far limit. Thus David Collings notes the similarity between Gabor's demand that St. Leon support his violence financially and Falkland's demand that Caleb implicitly support his murder of Tyrrel by signing a letter renouncing his earlier public charge. In both cases, misanthropy reveals that "[t]he public authority of the English magistrate or Hungarian authority is founded upon lies and violence, in the attempt to master, rather than serve, true knowledge" (869).

Similarly, the maze-like subterranean dungeon of Gabor's castle ("with a variety of cells and lurking places, of which no man had to his knowledge ever ascertained the number" [392]) appears as a stereotypically Gothic setting that lends itself to psychoanalytic readings of this genre's disclosure of the place of the unconscious. Yet,

unlike the underground tunnels of Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*, which open a space within which transgressive desires may flow freely apart from social strictures, Gabor's dungeons are more akin to the Inquisitional labyrinths in Radcliffe's *The Italian*, which are hidden from view precisely because of how they render literal the machinations of the social order aboveground.[11] On the one hand, St. Leon as alchemist signifies to both Gabor and the reader a linguistic slipperiness and potentiality that we may associate more broadly with, if not transcendent desire itself, then at least a desire emphasizing the semiotic over the symbolic. He is, in his own words, "an equivocal character, assuming different names, and wandering over the world with different pretences" (447). On the other hand, Gabor comes to embody system—and its concomitant principles of necessity and rationality. As St. Leon notes just before his imprisonment, "I felt as if I were the slave of some dark, mysterious tyrant, and dragged along supinely wherever he motioned me to go" (392). In this reference, Godwin recalls the language Caleb Williams uses to describe the misanthrope of his tale: Falkland, the "dark, mysterious, unfeeling, unrelenting tyrant!" (CW 420).

Nevertheless, despite similarities that might render Gabor "a second Falkland" (as the Holcrofts remarked),[12] an important feature distinguishes the presentation of misanthropy in *St. Leon* from its function in *Caleb Williams* and Godwin's other novels. For, although misanthropy is likewise condemned in these other novels, it is never as wholly rejected as it is in *St. Leon*, which sees Gabor entirely vanish after Charles's attack. Indeed, that Godwin would reject misanthropy here is perhaps not surprising for a

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[11] Radcliffe writes of Vivaldi's mental revolution: "Vivaldi had been no stranger to the existence of this tribunal; he had long understood the nature of the establishment, and had often received particular accounts of its customs and laws; but though he had believed before, it was now only that conviction appeared to impress his understanding" (198).

[12] Qtd. in Kelly 119n.7.

novel that ends with the optimistic promise "that this busy and anxious world of ours yet contains something in its stores that is worth living for" (450). Furthermore, as I will explore at greater length below, the misanthropes of Godwin's other fiction regularly experience unsettling bouts of madness, which render them at least provisionally distinct from the social order. By contrast, Bethlem Gabor's particular presentation of misanthropy appears somewhat sanitized. While he is ostensibly given to fits of madness (as St. Leon implies in his assertion that "I could fill volumes with the detail of the multiplied expedients, the furious menaces, the gigantic starts and rhapsodies of passion, by which he alternately urged me to compliance and concession" [404]), the reader never encounters these. Moreover, it is striking to note the way Gabor is seen as using his madness to "urge" St. Leon. Unlike those subject-destabilizing outbursts by Mandeville or Fleetwood, or even Falkland, Gabor's explosions of feeling are in fact cunningly rational. Thus, having finally imprisoned St. Leon, Gabor gives him the terms of his imprisonment plainly: "I have nothing to propose to you. Think you that, either as my enemy or my slave, and I hold you for both, I would descend to negotiate with you? I simply told you your situation. Yours be the consequences of your wilfulness and folly!" (402). By deterministically condemning St. Leon to his fate, Gabor allies himself with the doctrine of necessity that we have seen play an essential role in lending the social imaginary its authority.

Bethlem Gabor reveals the misanthropic underpinnings of the social order; his systematic approach indicates moreover the social's claims upon necessity as a mechanism. Yet Gabor's eminent rationality ensures that contingency never infringes upon the mechanisms he has established. Rather, the contingent event of Charles's

sudden appearance produces only Gabor's disappearance from view. Thus, while *St. Leon* affirms the association of the social order with what Godwin calls government in *Political Justice,* the novel does not develop the alternative forms of relational desire that surface in *Caleb Williams.* As I hope to show, such avenues for escaping the constraints of social desire appear instead in Godwin's subsequent depictions of the misanthrope's madness.

Fleetwood: *The Traumatic Energy of Misanthropy*

If Bethlem Gabor in *St. Leon* reveals the way misanthropy resides along the inside edge of the social realm, that novel's optimism impedes any exploration of the effects of misanthropy's traumatic energy. Unlike his first two, Godwin's third novel, *Fleetwood*, locates a misanthrope in the place of the first-person narrator. Bethlem Gabor's secondary position in the novel permits him (and Godwin) to conceal his conflicting motivations and desires; by contrast, Fleetwood must attempt a sufficiently coherent "confession" to convince his readers of his "penitence and humiliation" (59). The result is Godwin's tracing of the development of a repression. As I will show, Fleetwood—like so many of Godwin's characters—desires an unmediated relation with others; this transcendent desire appears with greatest clarity in his childhood curiosity. Nevertheless, in keeping with the Rousseauian model Godwin repeatedly employs,[13] Fleetwood's incorporation into the social realm does not simply cancel out that original desire. Rather, the social realm has a perverting effect upon desire. To the extent that he continues to desire this transcendent relation to the other, Fleetwood becomes misanthropic. Thus far,

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[13] See Handwerk, who links Rousseau and misanthropy (or, more precisely, misogyny) in Godwin's work ("Mapping Misogyny" 378).

Fleetwood might serve as well as Bethlem Gabor for illustrating the dynamic Godwin

perceives underpinning misanthropy in modern society. The difference comes about in

the unique depiction of the affective excesses of this "new man of feeling." In what

follows, I will sketch the connection Godwin makes between madness and the refracted

expression of that encrypted desire, that is, the way madness enables the misanthrope to

communicate a dark sympathy with the other. If narrative in the sense understood by

Falkland and Caleb proved complicit in every instance with the social realm and the

desire that motivates it, then madness renders narrative impossible. This discussion will

lead to the last section of the chapter, on *Mandeville*, in which I dwell at greater length on

the relational dimension of misanthropic madness, which seems intimately connected to

the traumatic energy that Godwin imagines for community.

As was the case with *Caleb Williams*, *Fleetwood* not only establishes a strongly

marked opposition between transcendent and social desires, it aligns these again with a

free-ranging curiosity, on the one hand, and a manageable social identity we might call

reputation, on the other. The truncation or attenuation of the former within the latter gives

rise to misanthropy—as it was depicted to do similarly for Falkland and Bethlem Gabor.

A closer look at this process as it appears in *Fleetwood* helps also to raise the crucial

question of the role of materiality in the Romantic response to sympathy, as I described in

Chapter 2. As indicated in the novel's subtitle, "the new man of feeling," this materiality

most regularly takes the form of sensibility.[14] Fleetwood's excessive sensibility is acutely

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[14] Peter Melville Logan remarks of novels such a *Fleetwood*, "[b]ecause the nervous narrative was viewed as the product of the speaker's disease, what is remarkable is not that it was routinely discounted because of its formal qualities but that—quite the reverse—it was routinely deployed by writers in the late Georgian period" (45). Logan draws attention to the role played by a material-imaginary distinction in novels of this kind: "the first-person narrative begins with the narrator's nervous body and sets out to explain the specific social conditions that produced it" (46).

physiological in character: described in terms of nerves and physical reaction and appearing in violent, irrational fits inscribed upon bodies. Yet sensibility is also aligned with Fleetwood's transcendent desire for an unmediated relation with others. As I hope to show in my discussion of *Mandeville*, Godwin's exploration of an affective epistemology that extends beyond reason corresponds to his attempt to uncover the contingent core that haunts necessity, such as we saw briefly in *Caleb William*'s mousetrap scene. That scene showed a necessary train of events that may unfold along the narrated continuum between social selves that Godwin calls "magnetical sympathy," yet it also disclosed in its initial moment the possibility of a relation that escapes articulation. Necessity's intimate connection to social forces, such as appears in ideological narratives, survives only on the basis of a repression of the contingent core of the relation between antecedent and consequent.

In *Caleb Williams*, the social's appropriation of the *force* of necessity without the *mystery* of necessity amounts to an unjustified influence of the imaginary upon the material. The transcendent desire for the other, under these terms, is squeezed out in favour of a more stable sociality predicated upon pre-determined values and narratives. In *Fleetwood*, such purely social imaginaries appear in the narratives of Ruffigny and Macneil. While both men distinguish their worldviews from the explicitly negative one Fleetwood associates with superficial social contexts such as court life, literary clubs, or his political work in the senate, they continue to assume the possibility underwriting *Political Justice*: that there may be a harmonious reconciliation between our deepest desires and reason within the social realm. As Steven Bruhm argues, by contrast, "The novel squarely sets affections and emotions against a rationalist program to demonstrate

that affections and rationality are always intertwined, mutually defining, and mutually

problematic" (106-107). Conflict, not harmony, characterizes the libidinal dimension of

human relationships for Godwin: whether that conflict is productive or not remains to be

seen. Furthermore, this conflict, to the extent it appears within the imaginary contexts of

sociality and transcendence, reflects at a deeper level the inherently agonistic condition of

materiality.

Like so many Romantic protagonists after Rousseau, Fleetwood grows up in

relation with nature. This harmonious condition, as I have suggested, rapidly unravels as

it is taken up and redeployed within the social. Nevertheless, it seems significant to notice

the formative position transcendent desire occupies in *Fleetwood*:

> I had few companions. The very situation which gave us a full enjoyment
> of the beauties of nature, inevitably narrowed both the extent and variety
> of our intercourse with our own species. My earliest years were spent
> among mountains and precipices, amidst the roaring of the ocean and the
> dashing of the waterfall. A constant familiarity with these objects gave a
> wildness to ideas, and an uncommon seriousness to my temper. My
> curiosity was ardent, and my disposition persevering. (53)

Applying the language of relation and sympathy to the objects of nature rather than to

Fleetwood's fellow members of society, Godwin articulates a form of attraction (a

"constant familiarity") that escapes the constraining *habitus* of what Fleetwood takes as

the "jarring passions of men, their loud contentions, their gross pursuits, their crafty

delusions, their boisterous mirth" (54). From this perspective, the state of nature is a state

of pure selfhood, aligned with the pre-Oedipal stage of the infant in which no break

between it and its mother has yet been encountered. Notably, this immediacy produces a

transcendent desire in the form of "ardent" curiosity that leads Fleetwood to treat not only

animals and landscapes, but ultimately his fellow university students (whom he likewise

calls "animals, so different from any that had been before presented to my view" [72]) as objects of "wonder"—a term P. B. Shelley would take up only a few years later in "Queen Mab."[15]

Although this wonder is short-lived ("It happened in this, as in all cases of a similar nature, that familiarity annihilated wonder" [72]), it is worth underscoring the fact that Fleetwood's intense curiosity about—that is, his transcendent desire for—his fellow students derives from the unknown quality of "their motives, their propensities, and their tempers, the passions of their souls, and the occupations of their intellect" (72). Like the transcendent desire of the student of history in Godwin's "Of History and Romance," who "would follow [the man of history] into his closet" (CW 458), Fleetwood's curiosity takes as its initial object the other's freedom, its contingent elements, its status as unknown and (as-yet) unwritten. To accomplish this study, Fleetwood asserts that he must only be "familiar" and not "intimate" with his object; however, as he comes to realize, such familiarity extinguishes the wonder in a manner intimacy might have avoided. This familiarity arises through the operation of sympathy so that, if "[i]n Wales, the end I proposed to myself in my actions was my own approbation; at Oxford, I had regulated my conduct by the sentiments of others, not those of my own heart" (99). Unlike the open-ended nature of Fleetwood's transcendent position at home, the narratives that direct him at school in his interactions with others are pre-determined and fixed. As he becomes increasingly entrenched in this social space, Fleetwood discovers the manner in which the social puts necessity to work accomplishing its purposes.

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[15] Wordsworth's phrase in *The Prelude* resonates with this transference of transcendent desire into the social realm: "after I had seen / That spectacle, for many days, my brain / Worked with a dim and undetermined sense / Of unknown modes of being" (1:417-20).

The most overtly social spaces explored by the novel after Fleetwood's time in university are found in the amorous court life in Paris, the literary club, and Fleetwood's work as a senator. I say "overt" because, while I hope to show how these spaces emphatically correspond to elements of Godwin's social critique, I also do not want to suggest their exclusivity. I have already alluded to the amplified social narratives of figures such as Ruffigny and Macneil—I will return to these figures shortly. In all cases, the social—as it did in the world of *Caleb Williams*—aligns itself with a dominant narrative composed of discrete, possible identities. Thus the societies of Paris into which Fleetwood is introduced and where he determines to court various women of high station require that he assume the identity of "*un homme à bonnes fortunes*," who is "devoted to the formation of intrigues" (100). Literalizing the narrative-making dimension of the social, Fleetwood in this guise "gratuitously ascribed" to his lovers, such as the Marchioness, "a thousand virtues" (106), inventing via the imagination the very conditions of sympathy that would enable that sociality to sustain itself. Similarly, Fleetwood's participation in a literary club only functions on a surface level, failing to fully substitute itself for a transcendent desire of the kind he experienced in his youth and which now made him "the spoiled child of the great parent, Nature" (223). As was also the case in Paris, the bare narratives of "intrigue" or, in this case, wit, do not yield "the pleasure I had anticipated" (219). Fleetwood explains the discrepancy: "It might have answered to the confections which amuse the palate at the end of a feast, but it could never appease the appetite of him, who feels an uneasy and aching void within, and is in hot chase for the boon of content" (223). Again, the aesthetic attractiveness of the social space fails to account for the scope of Fleetwood's desire. The same can be said for

Fleetwood's work as a senator, a position for which, initially at least, he entertained high hopes. He "enter[s] with awe the walls of the British parliament" (224) and finds his imagination stirred by "the glorious struggles of our ancestors" (224). Yet again he meets with disillusionment at the narrowness of what his fellow senators desire: "I saw that their aim was to thrust the ministers in possession out of office, that they might take their places" (225). The social's failure to extend beyond itself only serves to aggravate Fleetwood's misanthropy.

Even in the more transcendently inflected social imaginaries offered by Ruffigny and Macneil, the scope of desire has been radically truncated. While I will explore the implications of this version of the social in my chapter on Mary Shelley, it suffices to say that Godwin perceives a similar "aesthetic ideology" to be at work in these deeply Rousseauian characters. As Gary Handwerk notes, Ruffigny is "a character whose own life story demonstrates the transformative power of human sympathy and benevolence" (391). This "transformation" emerges out of a social desire that we might describe as paternalistic, gesturing towards the dominant narrative themes Ruffigny wishes to impart to Fleetwood by sharing his story. Thus Ruffigny quotes to his would-be son the self-perpetuating lines Fleetwood's grandfather had spoken to him: "You belonged to me, because you belonged to no one else. This is the great distribution of human society; every one who stands in need of assistance appertains to some one individual, upon whom he has a stronger claim than upon any other of his fellow-creatures" (195). Like the magnetic sympathy Caleb experiences for Falkland, which threatens not only to draw him unwillingly towards his master, but also to interpellate him back into a social imaginary determined by Falkland's narrative of honour, Ruffigny aligns an ethics of

generosity with a narrative about property as the limit of desire. The narrative is effective yet does not entirely shut out other strands of desire. Thus Fleetwood, backsliding into his old amorous ways, "confess[es] that at moments Mrs. Comorin never appeared to me so beautiful as now. I gazed on her with ecstasy; but that very ecstasy was tempestuous, and interrupted with visions of my father and my father's friend" (209). The transcendent desire that Fleetwood now displaces into his more purely erotic desire buckles under the weight of social expectations about the form his desire should take, resulting in a strangely Oedipal condition in which Fleetwood experiences this desire only under the disapproving gaze of his "father and my father's friend."

Similarly, in the case of the domestically blissful Macneil, what begins as Fleetwood's effort to articulate his transcendent desire turns into yet another sympathetic relation in which the stable Macneil attempts to call the excessively sensitive Fleetwood into the social realm. Fleetwood's request for "the sight of a happy family" (242) ultimately corresponds to the ineffable desire he describes earlier: "I spent more than twenty years of my life, continually in search of contentment, which as invariably eluded my pursuit. […] I wanted something, I knew not what" (233). His admission, "I know not whether the answer I give to this question [of why he wants to see them], will be or ought to be satisfactory" (241), indicates the connection between his transcendent desire for others and the ambiguous desire for this "transient and momentary pleasure" (242) of seeing a happy family. The problem for Fleetwood is that, rather than the *event* of "the happy family," he is ushered into a social imaginary extended in time and space, which thus possesses the very narrative restraints and assumptions that have impeded his transcendent desire thus far. Macneil himself recognizes this when he advises Fleetwood

about "a conversion or a cure" of his excessive sensibility: "Every man has in him the seeds of a good husband, a good father, and a sincere friend. You will say, perhaps, these are not sublime and magnificent virtues; yet, if each man were enabled to discharge these, the world upon the whole would afford a ravishing spectacle" (248). The heteronormative narrative Macneil advances further interpellates Fleetwood into a realm that fails (though it does not acknowledge its limits as "failure") to account for the full scope of his desire—indeed, the end result is his catastrophic marriage to Mary.

If the problem for Fleetwood, as Macneil summarizes it, is that "you are too much alone" (251), then the solution—much as it was for Hume—is to "[s]ubject yourself to the law of associating with your fellow-men […] You will be a million times the better and the happier for it" (255). This entrance into society also involves, from Macneil's perspective, a marriage, which will exercise Fleetwood's innate relational capacities by forcing him to "please" and "sympathize" with another person different from him not only in sex, but also in age. (Macneil foreshadows unwittingly the dire consequences of this relation in his violent image of "grafting a young shoot upon your venerable trunk" [254]). Yet, in an ironic reversal of David Hume's image in the *Treatise* of the solitary's safe arrival on the shores of sociality, Macneil and his family (apart from Mary) perish in a shipwreck. Without Macneil's strong personality to sustain the social narrative into which Fleetwood has imaginatively and legally projected himself, the strands of transcendent desire resurface via a materiality that this social narrative had attempted to circumvent.

Shortly after their marriage, for example, Fleetwood shows Mary his favourite room and Mary asks that he give it to her. Notably, he immediately *says* that he will,

ventriloquizing an appropriate response that he locates within a discourse of domestic

sacrifice: "Shall I think this too great a sacrifice, who would offer up my life for you? It

is no sacrifice! I have more joy in considering the things I love as yours, than in regarding

them as my own" (293). Yet violently running up against his attempts to maintain the

social imaginary of a certain kind of marriage is Fleetwood's accompanying material

response. Although he says nothing to Mary, his confessional narrative describes his

inner turmoil in detail: "[m]y sensations at this moment were of a singular and

complicated nature" (292). This encounter with his "sensations" leads Fleetwood to a

realization about the limits of sympathy, which reside in the subjective experience of

necessity:

> No man can completely put himself in the place of another, and conceive
> how he would feel, were the circumstances of that other his own: few can
> do it even in a superficial degree. We are so familiar with our own trains
> of thinking: we resolve them with such complacency: it appears to us, that
> there is so astonishing a perverseness in not seeing things as we see them!
> (295)

While Fleetwood hardly takes his own insight to heart, the necessitarian language of "our

own trains of thinking" suggests that he recognizes the contingent as appearing in "the

place of another."

The difficulty or impossibility of entering into this "place," as Fleetwood

observes, and realizing an unmediated relation to the other stems from its inextricable

lodgment within social narratives of marriage, gender, and decorum. This encryption

reproduces Fleetwood's longstanding misanthropy, which he aligns with an accusation

levied against his past self: "He who flies from all contradiction, must dwell alone, or

dwell with those to whom he never opens his soul" (304). To "fly from contradiction,"

yet continue to dwell with others, as he does, produces a restless negativity such as we

have also seen in Falkland. (Here we may find another difference in the misanthropic character of Bethlem Gabor: he seems, until he encounters St. Leon, to live only *apart* from society). Such restless negativity—as Kristeva has noted—is not simply an absence or void within the Symbolic order; rather, it is productive in its own right.[16] In an extremely bizarre scene that follows Fleetwood's abandonment of Mary, this semiotic value finds full expression and a connection to the material dimension of being-together.

Fleetwood closes himself within a room containing wax figures representing Mary and his nephew, Kenrick. This deliberate simulacrum of his paranoid imagination about his wife's infidelity takes on a life of its own in an important way: when Fleetwood least expects it, "while I was still speaking, I saw her move—if I live, I saw it. She turned her eyes this way and that; she grinned and chattered at me. I looked from her to the other figure; that grinned and chattered too" (387). The scene of madness is still contained within a social imaginary—after all, Gifford's henchman is posted at the door to the room. (Gifford functions as one more representative of the social, despite his counter-social tendencies: he is seeking, like Holloway in *Mandeville*, upward mobility *within* the social realm). Nevertheless, despite this containment, which perpetuates the social frame, the scene succeeds in gesturing at the same encrypted kernel of unexpected transcendent desire as appears in *Caleb Williams*'s mousetrap scene.

Fleetwood's momentary shift into the present tense, describing his shock at having seen the wax figure of his wife move ("if I live, I saw it"), discloses a desire for the other's freedom and forms an unanticipated relation igniting the ruinous madness that

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[16] In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva writes: "Negativity constitutes the logical impetus beneath the thesis of negation and that of the negation of negation, but is identical to neither since it is, instead, the logical functioning of the movement that produces the theses" (109). The implication is further that "negativity prevents the immobilization of the thetic, unsettles doxy, and lets in all the semiotic motility that prepares and exceeds it" (113).

follows. His "grinning and chattering" wife and the similarly behaving faux-Kenrick open a space, beginning with the Other, into which Fleetwood also enters. Furthermore, far from being a *social* space, it is *material* on several levels. Rather than speech, the trio communicates in "murmurs, and hissings, and lowings, and howls" (388). This movement into non-signifying (and thus non-imaginary) forms of expression becomes increasingly prevalent as Fleetwood enters into his fury, violently destroying the room. Like the cattle in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*, who fill the "whole world" with their "dumb yearning" (96) and thereby reveal the Dionysian underside of that novel's central scene of the Apollonian pageant, Fleetwood's becoming-animal rejects the socializing imaginary in favour of a material vehicle that carries a transcendent significance.

But this disclosure is short-lived, or perhaps instantaneous: following this outburst, he falls again under Gifford's constraining influence.[17] Such provisionality is suggestive once more of the common thread throughout Godwin's analysis of the transcendent desire for which sympathy fails to account. The pervasiveness of the social, embedded in the very form of narrative itself, affects every expression of transcendent desire in Godwin's view so that the contingent moments, such as the one Fleetwood experiences at the limit of his hyper-social ritual of misanthropy, can barely be distinguished. Just as Caleb's magnetic sympathy follows without interruption from the indeterminate moment of his "fe[eling] what it was that I had done," the reality of social enframing refuses any return to a more transcendent desire. The ultimate tendency even

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[17] Notably, however, some after-effect of his transcendent desire remains: "I always opened [Gifford's] letters with vehement emotion; a strange expectation still lingered about me, that I should find the accused parties innocent" (388-89). This action above all confirms his re-assimilation within the social, as he reverts to the hope that he will discover a satisfaction to his transcendent desire in the very words of the social narrator.

of madness to be recaptured within this socializing drive to find sympathy is one of the

key discoveries Godwin makes in his fourth novel, *Mandeville.*

Mandeville: *Madness and Community*

If *Fleetwood* offered the inner voice of a misanthrope for the first time in

Godwin's writing, then *Mandeville*, by extension, elaborates much more completely the

sources—and thus the implications—of this prioritized misanthropic sensibility.

Mandeville's miraculous escape from the massacre of the Ulster rebellion in the arms of

his nurse, Judith, sets the stage for a conflict between the social desire of the "bigot[ed]"

British and a transcendent desire exemplified in Judith's heartrending exclamation, "Kill

me, cut me to pieces, but do not ye, do not ye, be so barbarous as to put me away from

him, and leave me alive. My child! my child! my child!" (22). Introjecting his nurse's

desire for him, Mandeville harbours an ongoing interest in the oppressed or rejected:

from Judith (in retrospect), to his uncle Audley, to the coward Waller at Winchester

College who proves the source of so much grief, he repeatedly takes the side of society's

outcasts. Yet he has also introjected the oppressive social desire of his British

compatriots—in the first place, through the anti-Catholicism of his tutor, Hilkiah

Bradford, and also through his privileged situation as the heir of an aristocrat.[18] The

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[18] Notably, both of these contexts are themselves inwardly unstable. For instance, despite Hilkiah's staunch anti-Catholic Protestantism, his Calvinism has him teach a doctrine of total depravity (to be applied, presumably, universally), which suggests to Mandeville "that the most ragged and shivering beggar stood an equal chance with myself, to receive the most exalted marks of divine favour in the kingdom of heaven […] a person of the most loathsome and offensive appearance might, in the sight of God, be among the excellent of the earth, and be ranked by omniscience with his most chosen saints" (55). While Mandeville "should have been content" if this doctrine had remained merely "as words" (55), that is, as an idea, the fact that Hilkiah makes a point of connecting Mandeville's moral defects with the doctrine renders it more than just an abstraction. This material inflection gives the idea a weight that clashes with Mandeville's

implication of this psychical conflict for Mandeville is a profound misanthropy characterized by an arrogant certainty about his rightful place in society and a bewilderment at his inability to arrive there. The first-person narration of the novel locates this incommensurability at the heart of the plot, drawing attention to the contingent core of necessity in a more direct way than any of Godwin's other novels thus far. Yet, as I will show in closing, the novel also indicates Godwin's ultimate pessimism about the possibility of transcendent desire.

A brief consideration of Mandeville's first personal encounter with this contingency at Winchester College may serve to draw the interoperation of these elements to the surface. At this school, Mandeville's "unsociableness of nature" (96) and "self-centred and untameable pride" (97) lead him to reject the ideal representative of society, Clifford, and to be attracted instead to one to whom he feels he may condescend, the son of Sir William Waller. When a book of anti-monarchy prints appears and Waller shifts the blame from himself to his only friend, Mandeville, the prefects of the college, led by Clifford, call both Waller and Mandeville to a trial—an important setting, as we have seen, that appears throughout Godwin's writings.[19] The call prompts a series of responses in Mandeville that press upon his psychic conflict in different ways. In the first place, before he fully comprehends the circumstances of the trial, he finds himself in the stable locus of social sympathy: "I looked upon Waller, and saw that he was extremely distressed; he turned pale, and was scarcely able to support himself. I pitied him from my soul" (99). Waller's unanticipated accusation, however, interrupts the inevitability of this

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social understanding. Furthermore, Hilkiah's fascination with martyrs and his general religious enthusiasm often suggests a transcendent desire perverted within the social form of his anti-Catholicism.

[19] Tilottama Rajan writes that "judgment is at the heart of the Novel as socialization and normalization" (xxii) and suggests that "[t]he mousetrap scene [in *Caleb Williams*] is the prototype for the trial of judgment" (137).

social narrative, shocking Mandeville into a realization not only of Waller's own free act,

but also of the threat the social narrative poses to his own freedom: "'By *me!*' I uttered an

interjection of astonishment merely.—But what an age of experience and horror was in

that moment communicated to me!" (99). This bewilderment gets reinscribed into his

misanthropic narrative as a counter-social circumstance within which he may mobilize

anew his freedom, if only in a perverted sense. As Emmanuel Levinas writes, freedom is

the condition "to receive nothing of the Other but what is in me, as though from all

eternity I was in possession of what comes to me from the outside—to receive nothing, or

to be free" (43).[20] This desire for freedom, for Mandeville as it was for Caleb and

Falkland, entails the freedom to plot one's own narrative and is therefore generally

distinct from the anti-narrative of transcendent desire. Thus Mandeville convinces

himself that "there was something gallant, that at this time suited my savage temper, in

braving the imputation of guilt, when secretly in the chambers of my own heart, I knew

that I was innocent, and more than innocent. It accorded with the disdain which, without

yet knowing why, I entertained for my species" (103).

Nevertheless, in the process of setting up these narratives against each other,

Mandeville discovers a lingering effect of the original transcendent desire implicated in

his misanthropy: namely, his potential for madness. Following his indictment by Clifford

and the others, Mandeville's misanthropy therefore enters a new phase as it shifts from

the necessitarian version embodied by Bethlem Gabor into the much less stable variety

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[20] In this statement, Levinas posits freedom as a product of the narrative "that neutraliz[es] the other and encompass[es] him" (43). Freedom only becomes the transcendent desire that Levinas describes as "the Desire for exteriority" (82) when freedom, "instead of being justified by itself, feels itself to be arbitrary and violent" (84). At no point does Mandeville feel this about himself—unlike Fleetwood, for whom his often self-defensive memoirs are still a "confession"—and this suggests the entangled position within the social realm that I will argue he claims for himself in the closing paragraphs of the novel.

exemplified by Fleetwood—an extreme sensibility that agents of the social, such as Gifford or Mallison, cannot ultimately control. Even the more ambiguous (because explicitly "good") representatives of the social, such as Marguerite or Henrietta, cannot tame these excesses because of their reliance upon moral narrative structures that cannot accommodate the contingent character of madness. Mandeville reflects upon the material dimension of this new phase in particular:

> It will hardly be thought how fierce a havock this event made with my constitution. It was exactly as if an envenomed arrow had entered my flesh. My blood boiled within me. The whole surface of my body burned, so that every one that approached me, and touched my flesh, suddenly snatched away his hand, as if it had been scorched with fire. I was in a raging fever. […] My agonies, and the distress both of my mind and body, were insupportable. (104-105)

Misanthropy occurs when the oppressive mechanisms of the social turn upon the transcendent desire that compelled social desire in the first place. Furthermore, if misanthropy is itself a form of social desire, then, as I explored in the previous chapter, the ghostly remainder of the evanished transcendent desire for the other may be found haunting the material vehicle of desire itself.

Godwin works out the relational implications of Mandeville's misanthropy in his protagonist's fraught relationships with his rival, Clifford, and sister, Henrietta. While Mandeville marked Clifford out as an antagonist following the injustice at Winchester College, his enmity with Clifford takes on a transcendent significance following the latter's usurpation of the position of secretary to Sir Joseph Wagstaff, which Colonel Penruddock had attempted to secure for Mandeville. Initially, entering his "first scene upon the theatre of real life," Mandeville describes his "joy at the attention and partiality I had […] experienced" (120). This joy corresponds to a sense of necessity working itself

out in his favour and of the social somehow supporting his desires. When this is obstructed (notably, by the inherently oppressive mechanisms of the social itself, as we see in Wagstaff's bigoted dismissal of Mandeville based upon his Presbyterianism), the material remainder of that transcendent desire surfaces upon his body. His earlier encounter with Clifford predominantly remained within a social register, as it is a case of his alternative social imaginary of privilege and condescension running up against the democratic one advanced by his rival: he accepts an unjust punishment out of sympathy for the guilty Waller. The second catastrophe with Clifford, however, unfolds without recourse to such an alternative social. In the first place, he is no longer able to function within the social scene that Clifford attempts to maintain with his apology; instead, "I stammered and grew inarticulate. My voice faltered; my colour changed. I felt a film come before my eyes, that I could see no object distinctly" (125). Yet this failure within the social becomes a success, according to Mandeville's retrospective gaze, within a different kind of relational contest. When Clifford follows Mandeville out to attempt his apology again, he encounters the horror of Mandeville's face and "the sight of the passions that were working in it. His hand, which had been extended to grasp mine, fell nerveless, like a dead thing, to his side" (126). The realm of the social imaginary that Clifford is able to navigate so easily and smoothly dissolves in the harsh light of the material effects of Mandeville's mad hatred.

While such imaginaries prove ultimately to be inescapable and re-surface inevitably following such an interruption, the material event that momentarily interrupts the dominating social narrative is significant for the Romantics precisely because of the way it opens up the possibility of alternative imaginaries. As Mandeville says following

this scene, "the passion of Clifford, beautiful as it was, sunk into nothing, before the eddy and whirlwind of mine" (126). In his retort to Clifford, Mandeville articulates this sublime passion as a refusal to relate, "Kindness! keep it, keep it to yourself! Hug it to your heart, and applaud yourself that you have so much humanity, and so much friendship! I will not hear you! I never will hear you more!" (125); however, as he reflects on the success of this declaration, he emphasizes the bond that draws him and his rival together. This bond may be characterized by a lack of communication, yet the disillusionment Mandeville has just experienced seems also to open a space for imagining a togetherness based upon such a refusal to engage with another.

For instance, in the scene that follows, Mandeville recounts his strange friendship with the son of Sir George Lisle (a famous royalist leader killed in 1648 and discussed elsewhere by Godwin in his *History of the Commonwealth*).[21] Like Mandeville, Lisle has acquired a melancholic disposition from his unfortunate circumstances. Together, they form a relationship in which "we would sit silent together for hours, like what I have heard of a Quakers' meeting; and then, suddenly seized with that passion for change which is never utterly extinguished in the human mind, would cry out as by mutual impulse, Come, now let us curse a little!" (129). Yet, despite this strange relational accord, they never realize their proposed "misanthropical club, where the knot that bound the members together, and the feature that they held in common, should be a disappointed and embittered spirit" (132), because they retain an aesthetic desire—"a refinement of taste, and elegance of sentiment" (132)—that impedes them from choosing additional members. Thus their refusal to include others implies that they retain an entirely different

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[21] See Volume 2, Chapter 18, and Volume 3, Chapter 3, for Godwin's discussions of the last stand and deaths of George Lisle and Charles Lucas.

goal than sociality. The shared practice of silence and cursing does not represent an *interaction* between Mandeville and Lisle; rather, it is an attempt by both parties to encompass the whole, to incorporate the outside within themselves.[22] When they part ways, Mandeville alludes to this shared dark space: "Misanthropy at least, the God that I worship, is the gainer [of our parting]. You hate me, because I am calumniated; and I hate you because you are unjust. The hatred that existed this morning, has spread its empire wider, and has gained two additional subjects to exercise itself upon" (138). Although they are no longer in society with each other, their mutual hatred has fortified the non-relation that appears as misanthropy within the social. Similarly, the apology that Clifford offers is hardly necessary or effective because what Mandeville wants is not unity, but to be indistinguishably part of a totalizing relational ontology that would encompass *both* of their subjectivities.[23]

While Mandeville feels he has gained the upper hand in his moment of rage against Clifford, partly because the contingent freedom he expresses in his body successfully stands against what Clifford thinks is the necessity implicit in the social narrative of reconciliation, the novel is more generally interested in the social's strategies for sublimating this freedom. In this way, it continues to explore issues raised initially in *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams*. Thus, in the scene in which Henrietta attempts to unite her brother to her secret betrothed, Clifford, Mandeville is forced not only to relinquish his hatred of his rival in exchange for some indistinct promise that he "may

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[22] As Mandeville remarks, he is unable to utter Clifford's name, despite knowing that such an utterance would have ensured that "I should have become a different man; I should have been lightened" (133), and this inability gestures at the spectre of desire that continues to haunt him. If he had been able to exorcise that name, he implies here, then he might have successfully articulated the totality he wished to encompass with his cursing.

[23] See Jean-Luc Nancy's description, mentioned in Chapter 1 above, of "le semblable" (*Inoperative* 34).

reasonably expect that the world will reward my generosity" (163), but also to submit to a public airing of his lost reputation. He is aware of the primary effect of this attempt by the social to reintegrate its narrative:

> The time had been, when the bare mention of this name [of Sir Joseph Wagstaff], and that as the prelude to a story, and before so numerous and respectable a company, would have driven the colour from my cheek, and have deprived me at once of speech, of hearing and sight; I should by turns have glowed like fire, and been covered from head to foot with a deathlike dew. (165)

Yet, in the face of this material possibility, Mandeville "show[s] that [he] can endure what requires much fortitude to endure" by requesting himself that Clifford tell the story of his exploits with Wagstaff. Significantly, the effect of this deliberate capitulation is to aggravate that momentarily suppressed transcendent desire into a full-blown madness. Following Clifford's account, Mandeville finds that he cannot stay and discovers—in a description that plays upon the elements of his name, Man-Devil—that "I was but half a demon, when I came out at the park-gate, and set my first step into the forest. But now my better angel, my new-found virtue, was driven from my side as with a puff of wind; and Mandeville was himself again" (172). Having undergone "a vehement and a terrible effort" to "suppress my nature," Mandeville discovers that, "in proportion to the exertions that it had cost me, was the vehemence of the recoil" (173). He had bent his transcendent desire in a perverse manner to serve social expectations; upon breaking the bounds of this exertion, however, that desire expresses itself as madness.

Because this scene of madness occurs outside the social (beyond "the park gate"), it cannot serve as an effective example of how madness can produce dark sympathy. A striking example of madness erupting in proximity to the social, however, occurs near the end of the novel during Mandeville's conversation with Henrietta. He has discovered the

news of what he sees as her betrayal in becoming engaged to Clifford and attempts to use (what he sees as) "reason" against her. As we have seen in Godwin's other work, on the success or failure of this venture depends his inclusion within the social realm: Henrietta has resolved to align herself only with her brother if she is able to dispute the Montagus' charge of madness. At first, she finds "no touch of insanity" and the positive implication is immediately clear to Mandeville: "Henrietta, who was the jewel of the earth to me, and to whom all the rest of the world was only the crust and the setting, was mine. Her heart was mine" (315). In his discovery of Henrietta's sympathetic response to his use of reason, however, Mandeville's sanity slips upon the momentary elision of a social narrative by the transcendent desire he has for his sister. His language of property traces the edge of the social, remaining within its bounds, even as its semiotic implications, reflected in his "energy unbounded, and the deepest pathos" (315), push him towards a radical break with the social. His "soul was wrought too high; and the cord by which every thing that was dear to me was suspended, could hold no longer" (315). Unlike other incidents in which Mandeville's madness helps to preserve his transcendent desire within the social, this moment of an intense desire for the other—not in her freedom, but as a totalized and restricted object—prompts a madness that casts him out of the social altogether. That is, the madness *follows* from the totalizing desire that he feels for Henrietta in his moment of social relation with her. And yet, as we have seen in other social expulsions, Mandeville's sojourn outside the social is only temporary: the novel itself, which he has written retrospectively, stands as a testament to his return.

Indeed, the closing pages of *Mandeville* reveal that our narrator's entire account follows from an act of violence that has forever bound him to the social realm wherein

Clifford is the chief representative – at least from Mandeville's perspective. With Clifford's act, in which he blinds his brother-in-law in one eye and leaves a long wound "full across my eye and my left cheek: it descended even to my lips" (324), Mandeville discovers not only a perverse form of being-with Clifford, but also the meaning of his own traumatized story.[24] In *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth connects traumatic experience with the "striking juxtaposition of the unknowing, injurious repetition and the witness of the crying voice" (3). These two elements of repetition and witness inform her understanding of history as itself traumatic: an "oscillation" "between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (7). Caruth insists that "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past" (4), but rather that the traumatic experience is itself this disturbing encounter with what cannot be known or assimilated into experience. Caruth's analysis of trauma illuminates all the more forcefully this experience of Being arrested or paralyzed in the realm of becoming. Trauma, as the reverberation of a forgotten encounter with "unexpected reality—the locus of referentiality" (Caruth 6), offers itself as both a potentially viable representation of alterity—what Caruth describes as "the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound" (8)—and the horrible realization of representation's ongoing inadequacy to alterity. Thus when Mandeville declares, in closing his narrative, that the wound functions "as a token that I was [Clifford's] for ever" (325), he draws attention not only to the larger significance of the act, but to its essential, concealed role in the production of the narrative we have just finished reading.

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[24] As Jean-Luc Nancy points out, this phrasing may draw too strong a distinction between the two conditions: "Whether it is aware of it or not, the contemporary discourse on meaning […] brings to light the fact that 'meaning,' used in this absolute way, has become the bared [*dénudé*] name of our being-with-one-another" (*Being Singular Plural* 1).

Indeed, the possibility that the entire novel is an extended attempt on

Mandeville's part to transform his acute material experience into something textual—and

therefore amenable to the social imaginary—gains support in the strange philological

exercise that follows his description of the violent act.

> My wound is of that sort, which in the French civil wars got the name of
> *une balafre*. I have pleased myself, in the fury and bitterness of my soul,
> with tracing the whole force of that word. It is *cicatrix luculenta*, a glazed,
> or shining scar, like the effect of a streak of varnish upon a picture.
> *Balafré* I find explained by Girolamo Vittori, by the Italian word
> *smorfiato*; and this again—I mean the noun, *smorfia*—is decided by 'the
> resolute' John Florio, to signify 'a blurting or mumbing, a mocking or
> push with one's mouth'. The explanation of these lexicographers is
> happily suited to my case, and the mark I for ever carry about with me.
> (325)

At one level, this teasing out of the semiotics of his wound allows Mandeville to move

beyond the merely horrific: "When I first looked in my glass, and saw my face, once

more stripped of its tedious dressings, I thought I never saw any thing so monstrous"

(325). He has therefore "trac[ed] the whole force" of the word he uses to describe his scar

in order to narrate himself more completely into the social imaginary he retrospectively

appears to have sought all along: a world in which Clifford is tyrant. Useful for

understanding Mandeville's pursuit of a vocabulary suitable to his predicament is Martin

Heidegger's reading of the poet Stefan George's line, "Where word breaks off no thing

may be." Heidegger writes that "the poet has experienced that only the word makes a

thing appear as the thing it is, and thus lets it be present" ("The Nature of Language" 65).

Mandeville's philological exuberance in this closing paragraph marks his attempt to

make the thing [*das Ding*], which is to say the relational determination between him and

Clifford, appear.[25]

Thus the word that Mandeville uses in the first instance, *une balafre*, links him

with the French Civil Wars (which Pamela Clemit suggests "[p]robably refer[s] to the

French Wars of Religion 1562-98" [325n.b]), echoing his own sense of religious struggle

with Clifford. The deliberateness of Mandeville's diction finds further support in his

reference to *cicatrix luculenta*, which late seventeenth-century dictionaries such as the

Dictionnaire Nouveau François-Latin (1689) connect with "balafre" (90).[26] His choice of

simile, suggesting that the scar is "like the effect of a streak of varnish upon a picture,"

underplays the martial context from which the phrase derives and instead enables him to

locate himself in the place of the unjustly injured victim—vandalized, in effect, by

Clifford's attempts to restore him. Anthony Jarrells similarly interprets this reference as

an attempt to express how Clifford's weapon "tarnishes the picture painted by the

conniving lawyer Holloway, by Mandeville, by Godwin himself" (28).

Returning to "balafré," Mandeville attempts to produce a more complete

European philology for his wound, and therefore a more complete synchronic history for

his relation with Clifford, by passing from French into Italian and then finally into

English. The scholastic tone of this passage especially, exemplified by the parenthetical

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[25] Heidegger describes how "the Old High German word *thing* means a gathering, and specifically a gathering to deliberate on a matter under discussion, a contested matter" ("The Thing" 172). Yet the philological turn Heidegger makes in tracing "thing" (in the conventional sense, a material object) to "an affair or matter of pertinence" (that is, a social context) is itself problematic in ways Mandeville's closing speech discloses.

[26] The Latin phrase appears to originate in the seventh of Cicero's *Philippics,* a speech in which he criticizes Mark Antony's brutality, "After having equipped his own companion and intimate friend in the armor of a Thracian, he slew the miserable man as he was flying; *but he himself received a palpable wound, as the scar proves*" (7.17; in Latin, the italicized portion reads: "…luculentam tamen ipse plagam accepit, ut declarat cicatrix"). In this context, the wound draws attention to the horrific violence of its bearer, perhaps a much more accurate description of the circumstances in the novel.

moment in which Mandeville corrects himself ("…*smorfiato*; and this again—I mean the noun, *smorfia*—is decided by 'the resolute' John Florio, to signify…" [325]), further highlights the irony implicit in his attempt to narrate his horrific material experience. Yet the irony is lost on Mandeville, as he appears in the closing lines really to believe his own textual self-fashioning. Indeed, he goes so far as to suggest in the final sentence an analogy between Clifford's defensive act and what he describes as the manner in which "certain tyrannical planters in the West Indies have set a brand with a red-hot iron upon the negroes they have purchased, to denote that they are irremediably a property" (325). Such an analogy, not only deeply incommensurate with Mandeville's actual situation, is also an attempt to overlook the way Clifford's violence reveals the transcendent desire these rivals share. For, unlike the slaves, forced and constrained to act as commodities within the modern British economic system, Mandeville's encounter with Clifford involves a degree of will. Although he sees himself as a victim, the violent signature Clifford has given him represents the best possible outcome for Mandeville's misanthropy, as it allows him to express materially both the catastrophic results of his transcendent desire (thereby preserving it) and his social desire, which lends him a firm identity confirmed through the social sanction of sympathy.

Thus, to take up once more the final paragraph of *Mandeville* in closing this chapter, we find in Mandeville's attempt to trace a monumental change in his life-experience the crux of a struggle that Godwin has already explored many times: "Before, to think of Clifford was an act of the mind, and an exercise of the imagination; he was not there, but my thoughts went on their destined errand, and fetched him; now I bore Clifford and his injuries perpetually about with me" (325). Mandeville, like his fellow

misanthropes, finds the realization of his transcendent desire obstructed by a social

narrative that cannot be circumvented. Yet he discovers a possible "bastard course," to

borrow Derrida's phrase for reading against the dialectical grain,[27] in the experience of a

contingent representation: "Every time my eye accidentally caught my mirror, I saw

Clifford, and the cruel heart of Clifford, branded into me" (325). Misrecognizing himself

repeatedly, he experiences a kind of conversion (as we also see indicated in his

description of "b[earing] Clifford and his injuries perpetually about with me," which

alludes to 2 Corinthians 4:10, where St. Paul describes the Christian as "[a]lways bearing

about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made

manifest in our body") and perverse identification with his one-time rival.[28] This marks a

bifurcation in time, as he says, "My situation was not like what it had hitherto been"

(325). With Clifford's stroke, a completely new hermeneutical dimension gets layered

over the preceding three volumes so that the reader perceives the profound effect of

Mandeville's past-tense voice throughout the novel. This outcome is not a

straightforward capitulation to the social; rather, it reveals how the misanthrope organizes

his necessary entrenchment within the social in such a way that forms of transcendent

desire can still find paths (albeit twisted ones) to expression.

      This struggle to escape or resist the social, without any sense that such a thing

could be possible, characterizes all of Godwin's writing. In his early reflections on

sympathy, he pinpoints its double-edged character: as something at once necessary to

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[27] See Derrida, *Glas* 6.

[28] Tilottama Rajan introduces this term, "perverse identification," in a number of contexts, including *Romantic Narrative* (136), where she uses it to describe Falkland's stubborn commitment to taking Alexander as a model.

human happiness and yet also implicated in power-systems that confound that happiness. Hoping to attend to the desire for an unmediated relation to others with an appeal to justice, Godwin attempts to undermine the purely mimetic functions in sympathy (which make it so amenable to the sharing of mere opinion) by positing a transcendent conception of reason as the catalyst of human action. As we see in *Caleb Williams* especially, however, transcendent reason is extremely susceptible to social influence. Godwin's efforts to discern an expressive mode for that transcendent desire begin in the novel's exposition of the differences between necessity and contingency.

Using *Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams*, I have shown how Godwin aligns sympathetic narratives with a certain deployment of reason: namely, one that promotes necessity without acknowledging its inscrutable, material, and therefore contingent core. In matters of identity and relational desire, this reliance upon narrative corresponds to what I have called the "social desire" for the other, which in the eighteenth century appears primarily under the guise of sympathy. Against this sympathizing social subject, Godwin posits a figure—first in Falkland, but even more extensively in subsequent novels—whose desire for identity and relation exceeds the bounds of narrative: the misanthrope. If Bethlem Gabor reminds us of the misanthrope's ongoing position within the social realm, then Godwin's other major misanthropes (Fleetwood and Mandeville) demonstrate the function of madness in disclosing the misanthrope's repressed transcendent desire. Sympathy relies upon causal narratives to effect a relation in society. Social desire is reasonable precisely in the commonsensical way that Hume and Smith understand it to be reasonable. It must avoid the inscrutable element that Descartes discovers for reason and which Hume ultimately rejects. The desire that circulates within

the social realm is thus characterized by the necessary relationship of cause and effect; misanthropic desire, when it is able to escape this economy momentarily and express itself, appears as madness. Godwin shows the complicity of narrative in reinscribing social desire, yet also the inextricable quality of social desire as it inevitably seems to return following the failure of transcendent desire.

Godwin believes that the experience and operation of sympathy is central to the human condition. This centrality, however, makes it dangerously susceptible to external direction or manipulation. Even under an ostensibly "rational" protocol such as we see in Hume, sympathy also fails to account for the full scope of our desire for the other. Godwin's reaction to the problems inhering in sympathy represents one important response in which the social desire of sympathy comes to be viewed as traumatic, yet unavoidable. The transcendent desire Godwin has his Rousseauian misanthropes display must ultimately fail or be repressed or displaced within a constricting social framework, precisely because of the conflicting desires of human experience. Godwin's contribution is to explore the extreme expressions of this conflict in order to discern the ongoing possibility of justice in the face of the stability and security of government. For Godwin's friend and one-time disciple, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the transcendent is what makes the social – in its best sense – possible. Thus the task of the desiring subject is to uncover this transcendent core that has become increasingly occluded by society in its present state. This view undergoes substantial revision over the course of Coleridge's career, as he both discovers the necessary implication of materiality within transcendent desire and the insurmountable difficulties this poses to the possibility of community. Drawing upon mechanisms of sympathy in his earlier work, Coleridge attempts to extrapolate its

resonances into a worldview of a fundamental harmony. This conception, however, cannot survive the physical and social disruptions he experiences over the ensuing years, leading to an attenuation of transcendent desire in his thought. Nevertheless, as with the other authors studied here, this attenuation is not also a rejection. Instead, the appeal of dark sympathy leads them to retain a space for such desire, even in its apparent impossibility.

CHAPTER FOUR
**"And art thou nothing?": The Fragility of Transcendent Desire in
Coleridge's Life and Poetry**

> I may not call thee mortal then, my soul!
> Immortal longings lift thee to the skies:
> Love of thy native home inflames thee now
> With pious madness wise.
> — from Coleridge's 1793 Cambridge Prize Greek Ode,
> translated by Robert Southey

William Godwin's response to the limitations of the social was partly to show how transcendent desire drew upon figures of materiality – violence, trauma, and madness – to assert itself in spite of these constraints. For Godwin's friend and sometimes critic, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, this response abandoned hope in the social too quickly. Although he also recognizes how social sympathy fails to account for the total scope of human desire, Coleridge spends much of his life attempting to find a way to integrate transcendent desire with his belief in the possibilities of social forms. As was the case for Godwin, however, Coleridge's literary inquiries into transcendent desire encounter an inscrutable force that prompts him repeatedly to develop alternative strategies for managing this integration. This force – materiality – is the resistance and affective friction that accompanies every attempt to develop an imaginary framework for expressing transcendent desire. While his early work attempts to mitigate this by reinforcing transcendent desire in the form of an ideal rather than something more fluid and capacious, his later writings' more sustained reflections on the impact of materiality refuse him this option. Instead, Coleridge ultimately endeavours to articulate the conditions that might permit transcendent desire to unfold, not as a sympathy for the other that would form the basis of a new kind of society, but as a darkly sympathetic

event, signaling the persistence of community in spite of an overwhelming sense of dejection.[1]

In this chapter, I will begin by exploring a key example of Coleridge's initial attempt at integrating desire from early in his career: the pantisocratic schema he developed with Robert Southey, which would have seen them travel to America to establish a commune of universal egalitarianism. By tracing the rise and fall of this imaginary, I want to introduce Coleridge's particular configuration of the dynamics of social and transcendent desires. Pantisocracy represents an attempt to establish social conditions capable of supporting an ideal vision of community as characterized by proximity between its members, proximity to nature, and the absence of mediating systems or structures. At least in its initial conception, it is a vehicle for expressing a transcendent desire for the other. Its failure foreshadows similar obstacles Coleridge will face in developing that transcendent desire more fully in his poetry. Thus I will follow up this section with a closer examination of the nature and operation of transcendent desire in his "conversation poems," where Coleridge attempts to articulate the object of this desire as a relationship or harmony that serves as the condition for the possibility of all things. While this anterior relation is sometimes called "the one Life" in his writing (and in critical discussions of his early philosophy), I am interested in detailing a broader understanding of transcendent desire, which encompasses the one Life, yet also goes beyond it. My reason for taking this approach is to chart a longer trajectory for the development of Coleridge's thinking on desire, which extends far beyond the conversation poems to permeate other examples of his work, including "Christabel"

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[1] As I have suggested elsewhere, I am deploying "community" in the sense Jean-Luc Nancy uses, taking it as a largely non-intentional proximity that forms relation by virtue of nothing greater than a sharing in Being.

(1797, 1802) and his later poetry. Pantisocracy and the one Life describe in different ways an orientation to the other as universal and therefore inclusive even of the desiring self. Jean-Luc Nancy's description of being singular plural is helpful for elaborating Coleridge's view: "Being is put into play among us; it does not have any other meaning except the dis-position of this 'between'" (27). By positing this anterior relation as the ultimate object of both Coleridge's political schema (in its nascent form) and his philosophy, it becomes possible to assess its role in his subsequent work as well.

This assessment is complicated by Coleridge's growing sense of what I have been calling "materiality." In both pantisocracy and his early conversation poems, Coleridge attempts to negotiate a place for his transcendent desire within the constraints of the social. Yet he also encounters less manageable obstacles. These obstacles take the form of prominent interruptions to the narratives (or imaginaries) of desire Coleridge constructs for himself; like Paul de Man's "prosaic materiality of the letter," these events of alterity not only force Coleridge to shift his narrative into a more explicitly transcendent (and, by extension, artificial) register, but also draw attention to the narrative itself *as* narrative. As I discussed in Chapter 2, sympathy is limited in its capacity to narrate or represent the experience of another person or of the self. That which lies beyond this capacity is a materiality that social forms cannot account for. An example of such an event might include Coleridge's encounter with the paradox of Southey's desire to retain servants in the pantisocracy, which leads in part to the schema's breakdown. Generally, though, at this early point in his thinking, Coleridge is able to mitigate the disruptive effects of materiality through an appeal to greater abstraction or by burying these contradictions more deeply within his idealism. Hence,

for instance, his humble about-face in response to Sara's reproof in "The Eolian Harp" represents a retreat into orthodoxy, which at the same time allows him to protect the transcendent kernel of his desire for "the Incomprehensible." By reinforcing the bounds of his imaginaries, such as with his pantisocratic appeal to "duty," Coleridge is able to keep the unsettling impact of materiality sufficiently at bay.

While he resists the ways these dark affects threaten to nullify his desire, Coleridge appears also to be attracted to their inherent unrepresentability and hence their potential (and paradoxical) serviceability in relation to transcendent desire. The infinite quality of that desire, implicitly inconceivable because of its scope, resonates with the defining mechanism of materiality, which is its capacity to escape all attempts at limiting it. Coleridge will explore the nature of these limits at greatest length in his unfinished poem, "Christabel," where Christabel's transcendent desire intersects in a horrible and unrepresentable moment with the pure materiality of Geraldine's body. Indeed, it is this very encounter that marks both her desire as transcendent and the object of that desire as exceeding any constraints that Christabel might attempt. That is, the attempt to desire and the failure of this attempt combine to disclose the materiality of the object. This interaction of transcendent desire with materiality serves as a particularly powerful example of dark sympathy because of its description of the ensuing rejection of Christabel's desire by Geraldine. By staging this communication of desires—on the one hand, Christabel's transcendent desire and, on the other hand, Geraldine's social desire— and indicating its inherent tendency to failure, Coleridge experiments with an understanding of community defined as event and proximity. This represents an

important shift from his previous attempts to find a sustainable and more idealistic

definition such as in his alignment of duty with pantisocracy.

Coleridge's effort to develop this understanding of community unfolds at greater

length in his later poetry, begun after he meets Sara Hutchinson at the end of 1799.[2]

Although Coleridge does begin to perceive the social's antagonism towards transcendent

desire (such as appears in the case of his rash marriage to Sara Fricker), he continues to

experiment with the possibility of discovering a proximity to others that might sustain

both forms of desire. I will argue that these experiments are characterized by the affect he

calls "dejection." As he demonstrates in the poem of the same name, dejection is not

simply a wholly despairing separation from others; it can also be productive of a bare,

inoperative community in which the event of hope or desire remains, even if failure

follows immediately in its wake. Thus, beginning with "Dejection: An Ode" (1802),

Coleridge initiates a more resigned tone for his poetry enabling him to move towards the

sheer materiality of dark emotions that cannot be grasped.[3] As a result of his "afflictions"

(many of which he details in the original poetic letter to Sara Hutchinson upon which he

based his subsequent, less personal, ode), he discovers that the central Romantic image of

what Wordsworth called the "corresponding breeze" – the wind – has gone mad. Rather

than "Melodies round honey-dropping flowers, / Footless and wild, like birds of

Paradise" ("Eolian Harp" 23-24), the noise of inspiration has become as "the Rushing of

an Host in rout" ("Dejection" 111). This traumatic encounter with the materiality of an

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[2] J. C. C. Mays identifies Coleridge's "later poetry" with the period after Coleridge met Sara Hutchinson ("Later Poetry" 89).
[3] Morton Paley draws attention to this "most celebrated poetic valedictory" as describing a "connection between 'abstruse research' and the failure of poetic power […] with such conviction that few have questioned it" (*Coleridge's Later Poetry* 3), referencing the poem's lines regarding Coleridge's plan "to steal / From my own nature all the natural Man" (89-90).

unrelenting "grief" reveals that intervening imaginaries can no longer succeed in suspending the impact of the object of desire's fundamental alterity. Moreover, this is a grief that "finds no natural outlet, no relief, / In word, or sigh, or tear" [23-24], which signals its sharp distinction from the comforts of the imaginary.

As he describes in "The Blossoming of the Solitary Date-Tree" (1805), Coleridge can now only "listen" for the voice of his beloved, knowing at some level that "'tis not thine! Thou art not there!" (19). This declaration is not to deny the reality of a voice heard or, to borrow from another late poem, which I explore at greater length below, the truth of "an image with a glory round its head" ("Constancy to an Ideal Object" [30]). Instead, Coleridge acknowledges the insuperable gap between an adequate social form and the transcendent object of a community always only to come. To recognize this gap, he must submit his visceral response to transcendence to the materiality of "all that resists appropriation" (Derrida, "Typewriter Ribbon" 353). As I argue in Chapter 1, Hume's solution to the problem of alterity in the *Treatise* represents a major re-fashioning of the central figure of philosophical exercise: a turn from a solitary individual to an active social participant. Coleridge's inability to make a similar turn in response to alterity presses him in an entirely new direction. By withdrawing from the social, he retains only the outline of community and takes up dejection itself as a description of a way of relating to others – of desiring the other – that is both invested in and dissatisfied with the social. Nevertheless, this dynamic becomes increasingly untenable in his later poetry as he begins to question the very possibility of such a community.

To borrow a formulation from Lacanian psychoanalysis and to provide a theoretical touchstone for my subsequent readings, Coleridge's struggle is ultimately not

to arrive at any kind of demystification or "reality," but to question whether "traversing the fantasy" is itself a worthwhile or meaningful endeavour in the first place. In Lacanian terms, traversal here would be the work of rejecting the imagined belief that the social is transcendent; that is, rejecting the belief that "things as they are" is not only descriptive, but prescriptive.[4] While Coleridge increasingly perceives the limits of the fantasy, his thought is characterized by an ongoing inquiry into the methods that may be available for sustaining it nonetheless. Desire requires such social frames or what Slavoj Žižek describes as "a symbolic prohibition" or "Law" (*Plague* 46); by contrast, drive is the realm of materiality. Žižek observes that

> drive can be said to be "meta-physical": not in the sense of being beyond the domain of the physical, but in the sense of involving another materiality beyond (or, rather, beneath) the materiality located in (what we experience as) spatio-temporal reality. In other words, the primordial Other of our spatio-temporal bodily reality is not Spirit, but another "sublime" materiality. (*Plague* 42)

If traversing the fantasy is a matter of moving beyond desire into the "truth" of drive, then the affective dimensions of such a traversal, for Coleridge, correspond to his love of desire for its own sake, on the one hand, and his paralyzing fear of a world of pure drive, on the other. As Žižek suggests elsewhere, "Once we move beyond desire—that is to say, beyond the fantasy which sustains desire—we enter the strange domain of *drive*: the domain of the closed circular palpitation which finds satisfaction in endlessly repeating the same failed gesture" (*Plague* 40). The movement between these states informs the trajectory of his developing understanding of community.

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[4] Jodi Dean glosses Žižek's understanding of "traversing the fantasy" as "giving up the fundamental fantasy that sustains desire. Thus, whereas the pervert knows the truth of desire, the analyst knows that there is no truth of desire to know" (89).

Pantisocracy: An Experiment in Socializing Transcendent Desire

In the summer of 1794, Coleridge befriended the radical poet, Robert Southey. Drawing them together was a potent idea, pantisocracy, sparked by the writings of radical philosophers of the period and fuelled both by Coleridge's relentless imagination and by Southey's radicalism. As the name implies, pantisocracy was a theory of equal governance—a "flat model" of social organization. Their plan was to follow Joseph Priestley to the banks of the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania. There, twelve men and twelve women would live in proximity with nature, pooling resources and sharing in the (according to Coleridge, very minimal) labour required for self-sustenance. Yet a little more than a year later, the plan had collapsed leaving Coleridge both married and bitterly estranged from Southey.[5]

Pantisocracy was an attempt to create a society that might accommodate the transcendent relation implied by sympathy. Coleridge's early optimism about the social is not surprising given the general excitement about the possibilities entailed by radical new forms of society such as were forming in America and France. As Margaret C. Jacob notes, "There is as much continuity – as there is rupture – between Enlightened social practices and the heated fraternizing of the 1790s, between the Enlightenment as lived earlier in the clubs and salons and the political socializing of radicals and Romantics" (25). Artists during the early 1790s express a strong interest in amplifying the imaginative potential of this social impulse – as, for instance, William Blake does in

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[5]Kelvin Everest suggests that "Pantisocracy itself lay behind the community that Coleridge actually succeeded in bringing about, briefly, in Nether Stowey. And Nether Stowey is one defining context of the best conversation poems" (10). Whether or not Nether Stowey represents a concrete manifestation of the ideals of pantisocracy is ultimately irrelevant as, only eighteen months later, Coleridge was also to abandon "his family in the cottage at Nether Stowey, and all the friends and places associated with the eighteen months of his life in that small community" (290). Here, as elsewhere, material circumstances clash with Coleridge's attempt to integrate transcendent desire and the social.

nearly contemporaneous poems such as *America: A Prophecy* (1793).[6] Arguably, the

schema's greatest intellectual debt was to Godwin's *Political Justice*, with its principles

of a "genuine system of property," its rejection of institutions, and above all its effort to

imagine an entirely different kind of society.[7] In a poem called "Pantisocracy" (1794),[8]

Coleridge explores whether a transcendent quality might be applied to a social form.

Thus he imagines the future pantisocratic society as a place just beyond the "Sublime of

Hope [...] / Where Virtue calm with *careless* step may stray" (5, 6; emphasis mine). The

amplification of the social's aesthetic dimension, he suggests, results in a receding of the

social's explicit structure. Unlike those "Joys, that were" (2), which the speaker rejects as

contributing to an accumulating "weigh[t]" of "Shame and Anguish" (3, 4), the

pantisocratic vision, appearing like "the rising Sun" that "dart[s] / New rays of Pleasance

trembling to the Heart" (13-14), prompts "Tears of doubt-mingled Joy" (10). Thus

society as it presently exists appears as a negative encumbrance physically burdening its

participants, while the future order appears as a source of intense pleasure and without

restraints. Nevertheless, this is not a rejection of the social, as we see at times attempted

by Godwin's misanthropes: instead, it is an exchange of one social imaginary for another,

this time charged with transcendent potential. As we will see, Coleridge would develop

this idea further in "The Eolian Harp." These early conversation poems emphasize not a

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[6] Cf. Saree Makdisi, *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s*, for an extended discussion of Blake's unique understanding of the potential – and failings – of the new social forms emerging at the end of the eighteenth century.

[7] See William St. Clair for an extended description of the ways *Political Justice* influenced Coleridge and the other pantisocrats (96-98).

[8] E.H. Coleridge notes that, although the poem was not published until 1849 in *The Life and Correspondence of R. Southey*, it did bear the name "Pantisocracy" as early as 1795, Coleridge having included it in the handwritten collection of his poems that he gave to Susanna Estlin of Bristol (whose husband, John Prior Estlin, was a Unitarian minister there) sometime that year. Notably, the poem is based on lines contributed by Samuel Favell.

society-less transcendent reality, but a different, transcendent mode of society; in pantisocracy, the roots of this idea (as well as its inherent limits) already appear.

The transcendent dimension of pantisocracy in the poem overlaps with its recourse to feeling – what Coleridge calls "the wizard Passions" (8). These feelings are organized around a sense of possibility, figured as the irresponsible freedom of a "careless step" (6) in a dance to the "the moonlight roundelay" (7). By contrast, the "joys that were" associated with "the evil day" of previous social systems find expression in the angular imagery of "precipices of distemper'd Sleep" (11) and "fierce-eyed Fiends" (12). This distinction between the amorphous and the rectilinear recalls one of Coleridge's earliest statements about pantisocracy in a letter to Southey: "When the pure system of pantisocracy shall have *aspheterized* [...], instead of travelling along the circuitous, dusty, beaten highroad of diction, you thus cut across the soft, green, pathless field of novelty! Similes for ever! Hurrah!" (CL 1:84).[9] Where the "highroad of diction" suggests an unreflective acceptance of things as they are, the "pathless field of novelty" opens up a space for lateral association in labour and expression and an analogously horizontal organization for society. Thus, despite its socially pragmatic intentions, the promise of pantisocracy was found in its capacity for opening a space for thinking beyond pragmatism. Indeed, as Coleridge represented it initially, the idea should destabilize one's social practices: "at the last place I preached Pantisocracy and Aspheterism with so much success that two great huge fellows, of Butcher like appearance, danced about the room in enthusiastic agitation" (1:88).

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[9] "Aspheterization" was Coleridge's word for the universal distribution of property, which he coined based on the Greek word *spheterizein*, which means to take for one's own.

As the idea of pantisocracy unfolded over the course of Coleridge and Southey's youthful (and admittedly short) friendship, the lingering negative effects of those problematic "joys that were" increasingly come to be recognized as what Coleridge calls with equal irony Southey's "innovation[s]" to the "leading idea" of pantisocracy (CL 1:114). Thus, as James McKusick points out, Southey (perhaps realizing that the farm work would be much more arduous than his friend would admit) suggested to Coleridge that "they bring labourers with them from England to do the heavy farming work" (125). Southey claimed that they would be treated as equal, yet would be doing work for which their lack of education fitted them. Coleridge could not condone this. If the idea of pantisocracy is "to make men *necessarily* virtuous by removing all motives to evil – all possible temptations" (CL 1:114) – then the alterations that Southey introduces are in fact attempts to counteract this impulse. Pantisocracy was intended to be a system for freeing virtue from the constraints of a corrupt society; hence, the ongoing desire for such "motives to evil" represents a nostalgia incompatible with vision. By coming to understand pantisocracy as an ideal (and having a "leading idea") whose significance was in its status *as* an ideal, Coleridge protected himself from Southey's conservative backsliding. Yet, notably, this shift required a rejection of the amorphous and semiotic impulses (to borrow Kristeva's term) that had suggested pantisocracy in the first place.

Coleridge's early love, Mary Evans, describes this impulsive aspect of Coleridge's personality in a letter she wrote to convince him to give up on pantisocracy: "There is an Eagerness in your Nature, which is ever hurrying you in the sad Extreme" (qtd. by Coleridge in CL 1:112). She goes on to cite Ophelia's speech: "O what a noble mind is here *o'erthrown*, Blasted with Exstacy" (1:112). As many critics have pointed

out, Coleridge's tendency to pursue "the sad Extreme" and an almost self-destructive state of "ecstasy," even as he continues to desire social acceptance and affirmation, informs the divided tone of much of his writing.[10] Over the course of its development, pantisocracy's capacious potential as unthought—that potentiality Coleridge initially perceived as the "novelty" and "careless[ness]" of the idea of pantisocracy—is restrained as Coleridge discovers increasingly the fragility of this way of thinking. As Colin Jager notes of the pantisocracy poem, "This is celebratory but ambivalent language, as if even in the midst of his idealization of America Coleridge understood that the choice was not between bondage and freedom but between one kind of powerful myth and another" (para. 52). Pantisocracy begins as a concrete intention to realize a transcendent idea in the world and was supported by concrete actions not least of which was Coleridge's marriage; however, it comes to be further and further removed from any interaction with that which might reveal its limits as an imaginary. Indeed, as he writes near the end of his friendship with Southey: "Pantisocracy is not the question: its realization is distant— perhaps a miraculous millenium" (CL 1:158).

The ultimate failure of Coleridge and Southey's friendship (and of pantisocracy) derives in part from this substitution of the openness of the unthought with the structure and constraint of "duty" as a social ideal. The chief cause of the rift, from Coleridge's perspective, was Southey's abandonment of what he calls "Virtue" (1:161). An unswerving commitment to the principles of pantisocracy was required of its members; in Coleridge's view, Southey's various capitulations disrupted the actual relation implied by the ideal. In the letter, Coleridge describes himself as faithful to *duty*—the newly ascribed

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[10]Cf. Perry writes that "Coleridge is the great case of this kind of division, a man in two minds about which of two minds a man should be in" (2). His review of Coleridge criticism responding to this "double-mindedness" follows on pp. 3-4.

ideal of the pantisocratic system. From his perspective, duty demands that he cut his ties to real life relations in favour of the transcendent relation promised by pantisocracy. Thus, he writes, "You remember what a Fetter I burst, and that it snapt, as if it had been a Sinew of my Heart" (1:164), referring to his past love for Mary Evans and his repression of it in order to "do [his] duty" and marry Sara Fricker.

Finally, in Southey's contemplation and resolve to join the clergy *despite his atheism*, Coleridge perceived the end of their friendship. No longer venerating his friend, Coleridge comes to see Southey as "one who had *fallen back into the Ranks;* as a man admirable for his abilities only, strict indeed in the lesser Honesties, but like the majority of men unable to resist a strong Temptation – FRIEND is a very sacred appellation – You were become an Acquaintance" (1:166). In describing this shift in their relationship, Coleridge attempts to enter into an exclusively social relation with his one-time friend: a mere acquaintanceship in which "literary Topics engrossed our Conversation" and for which "shaking the Hand [...] is assuredly the *pledge of Acquaintance, and nothing more*" (1:167). This effort of segregating Southey from the realm of transcendent possibility that he understands pantisocracy to be aims at reinforcing that space; however, this very process of giving up Southey to a lesser, social relation recalls for Coleridge the earlier mode of desire that had been undermined – that is, transcendent desire as unthought rather than ideal. Thus he closes his letter enumerating what has been lost:

> You have left a large Void in my Heart – I know no man big enough to fill it. Others I may love equally & esteem equally: and some perhaps I may admire as much. But never do I expect to meet another man, who will make me unite attachment for his person with reverence for his heart and admiration of his Genius! I did not only venerate you for your own Virtues, I prized you as the Sheet Anchor of mine! [...] But these Things are past by, like as when an hungry man dreams, and lo! he feasteth—but he awakes, and his Soul is empty! (1:173)

While the rift has come about partly because of Coleridge's turn to an idealized social desire rather than an ongoing acceptance of what he will come to call "the Incomprehensible" element of community, the melancholy of this parting description renews the transcendent element momentarily and raises the possibility of a dark sympathy persisting between them. As I will explore in greater depth below, Coleridge's desire for community can resemble what Jacques Derrida calls "impossible mourning": hence, even though Southey lives, Coleridge still experiences "the dark light of this nothing [of the dead other]" in which he "learn[s] that the other resists the closure of our interiorizing memory" (*Memoires* 34).

Nevertheless, the lesson is only a passing one as Coleridge allows himself once more to transform the unthought element (i.e., the "large Void in my Heart") into a new ideal. As he writes to Southey in April 1800, "The time returns upon me, Southey! when we dreamt one Dream, & that a glorious one – when we eat together, & thought each other greater & better than all the World beside, and when we were bed fellows. Those days can never be forgotten, and till they are forgotten, we cannot, if we would, cease to love each other" (1:586): the darkness of their breakup has vanished.[11] Preserved in this new ideal is a relation that no longer exists in a material sense – a relation that has been purchased at the cost of its material sense. Instead, Coleridge suggests that the memory of the "one Dream" and its accompanying day-to-day realization can contain in suspension the love they cannot share. This is a relation that attempts to maintain both forms of

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[11] There is a materiality that skirts the edges of Coleridge's memory here as he attempts to shift the deep, quotidian intimacy of his and Southey's eating and sleeping together into a "dream" register that ultimately neutralizes its excessive or even potentially erotic content.

desire by positing the social form as the hope of the transcendent form's future
fulfillment.

Transcendence in Coleridge's Early Poetry

Although the hope surrounding pantisocracy itself retreats, leaving a wreck of

broken and twisted relationships in its wake, Coleridge does not abandon the initial

impetus of discovering a social form capable of sustaining transcendent desire. Instead of

a concrete political system, however, Coleridge leans upon poetry to articulate this

vision. In particular, his development of "the conversation poem" represents a key

strategy for continuing the experiment begun with pantisocracy.[12] While pantisocracy

pictures a society that mirrors transcendent desire expressed as novelty and possibility,

conversation marks a more pronounced distinction between the transcendent and the

social. Rather than a straightforward implementation or marshaling of transcendent desire

as a social reality, conversation posits the transcendent as an object from which Coleridge

can derive a (social) ethos of radical vulnerability and openness. To be radically

vulnerable with another person is to give the other the power to deny or affirm the self.[13]

It is a way of rendering the other *other*, and thus it releases the transcendent desire

encrypted within sympathy, as I explored in Chapter 1. This process of encryption, I have

argued, occurs when a transcendent desire comes up short in the face of the impossibility

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[12] Although he only subtitled one poem a "conversation poem" ("The Nightingale"), critics have used the category to talk about a range of poems that tend to avoid supernatural themes and are addressed to close friends. Frederick Burwick lists the poems typically included in the set as: "The Eolian Harp" (1795), "Reflections on having left a Place of Retirement" (1795), "This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison" (1797), "Frost at Midnight" (1798), "The Nightingale" (1798), "Dejection: An Ode" (1802), and "To William Wordsworth" (1807) ("Coleridge's Conversation Poems" 168).

[13] Although not about Coleridge, Anne-Lise François's *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* offers a very useful and comprehensive description of the related notion of passivity understood in a productive rather than conventionally negative sense.

of its being fully represented, let alone satisfied. This experience of being obstructed

produces an anxiety that initially prompts a turn to more socially sustainable and stable

structures of signification. Thus, in his dissatisfaction with Southey, Coleridge had been

able to mitigate the effects of anxiety through an appeal to a more robust sense of the

object of desire. Yet, as I also suggested regarding the affect of anxiety for Romantic

writers, there is an amenability to the work of the negative in their writing and thought

that allows it to function productively as well. This productivity does not get fully

explored until "Christabel" and later; however, even with the conversation poems,

Coleridge is increasingly interested in developing strategies for drawing upon the

productive side of anxiety rather than simply circumventing it as he seems to do with

pantisocracy.

For Coleridge, "conversation" functions as a kind of monologue performed in the

presence of an unrealizable other.[14] It is a self-revelation to the other, yet without an

accompanying expectation that this revelation will be reciprocated or even accepted. To

transplant Wordsworth's wistful encounter with his sister Dorothy in "Lines Composed a

Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" into a Coleridgean register would require that his

declaration, "May I behold in thee what I was once" (121), become emphatically a

question and one in earnest. In conversation, Coleridge enters into a bond with the other

person in an intimacy that is potentially traumatic. As Emmanuel Levinas writes, "To

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[14] Along these lines, Stephen Miller suggests that Coleridge was more precisely a "monologist" than a "conversationalist" (180). He cites as support William Hazlitt's description of Coleridge as "the only person who can talk to all sorts of people, on all sorts of subjects, without caring a farthing for their understanding one word he says – and *he* talks only for admiration and to be listened to, and accordingly the least interruption puts him out" ("On the Conversation of Authors" 1:74; qtd. in Miller 180). Similarly, Madame de Staël is reported to have said, "[A]vec M. Coleridge, c'est tout à fait un monologue" (qtd. in Holmes 2:340).

approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry from it" (*Totality and Infinity* 51).[15]

In this section, I will begin with one of Coleridge's earliest conversation poems, "The Eolian Harp" (1795) in order to demonstrate the careful structure Coleridge gives to his transcendent desire, instantiated here as the one Life. Not only does he locate this structure prior to the social relationships in which he finds himself, but he also entertains the idea as something with universal and even theological implications.[16] Following the failure of his attempt to realize transcendent desire within a social frame, this more careful exploration of the transcendent – especially through the One Life philosophy – aims at developing not simply an ideal like "duty," but an expansive Truth in the sense described by Slavoj Žižek in his discussion of the "*meta-physical* dimension" as one in which "the infinite Truth is 'eternal' and *meta-* with regard to the temporal process of Being" (*Ticklish* 151). Further developing this sense of the anterior relation, "Frost at Midnight" (1798) introduces the concept of multiple social forms, including forms that Coleridge might hope to imagine for his son, Hartley. This shift helps him to circumvent the constraints he encountered in "The Eolian Harp." By positing the film on the grate as a "companionable form," Coleridge marks the primacy of alterity in characterizing the object of desire. That is, rather than emphasizing the passivity of the subject, the poem works to draw out the unaccountable in the other. The implication is a greater attendance

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[15]Cf. David Haney, *The Challenge of Coleridge*, for extensive connections drawn between Coleridge and Levinas.

[16] This approach was common to several conversation poems, as Avery F. Gaskins argues, following M.H. Abrams, in connecting the conversation poems with the seventeenth-century metaphysical poets, whose tone and even form these poems often seem to reflect. Gaskins suggests that the poems take the form of meditations inflected by the "philosophical and theological views" over which Coleridge was wrestling during the time of their composition: "He was trying to decide whether to be fully committed to writing or to the ministry of the gospel, and as a result, often attempted to make his poems serve a holy purpose" (628).

to the difficulties entailed in attempting to relate with "the Incomprehensible" via an expression of desire, whether that be social or transcendent. "The Nightingale" (1798) takes up more directly the relation of transcendent and social forms of desire, yet emphasizes ultimately the impossibility of such a transition or integration. In that poem, it is the otherness of the birds' song that exceeds the maiden's ability to enter into relation with the birds. Nevertheless, Coleridge continues to hope that this obstacle may be overcome in the case of his son. In each case, the solitary speaker of the conversation poems emphasizes a particular phenomenology of desire: a declaration of the speaker's lack in the face of an other who is often absent and, if not absent, always silent. Never receiving a response, however, the hopeful poems also pave the way for Coleridge's later work, in which the speaker—unlike the Ancient Mariner, whose curse also gives him power—discovers the insuperable gap between himself and the object of his desire. This ultimately disables his radical posture with a dejection that is both productive and increasingly traumatic.[17]

Although Coleridge does not explicitly include the One Life in "The Eolian Harp" until its 1828 iteration in *Sibylline Leaves*,[18] the idea is already half-formed in the penultimate stanza of the poem's manuscript version, in which he muses:

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[17] Indeed, although I am not taking it up here, having already discussed it in my opening Preface, the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1797-98) might serve as a useful gloss on the transition from the conversation poems into Coleridge's later work. In the first place, the wedding-guest's social desire to join the wedding partly resembles the conversational mode Coleridge takes for granted in the early poems. Just as the wedding-guest "beat[s] his breast" when "he heard the loud bassoon" ("Rime" 31-32), so does Coleridge lament the "Beauties and feelings" he has lost because of the injury imprisoning him in the famous lime-tree bower of the poem ("Lime-Tree" 3). Unlike the wedding-guest, however, who "cannot choose but hear" ("Rime" 18), the speaking subject of conversation poems that appear more as monologues than dialogue retains the ability to desire and to hope. Above all, it is this capacity for hope that will undergo severe rethinking in the work Coleridge produced towards the end of his life.

[18] In the 1817 version of this poem, Coleridge describes a very apposite view of "a world like this" in which "even the breezes, and the common air, / Contain the power and spirit of Harmony" (27-29); nevertheless, he does not include the famous lines containing "the one Life" until the later edition. That said, he may have used the term as early as 1799, during his time in Germany. Seamus Perry notes that

> And what if all of animated nature
> Be but organic Harps diversely fram'd,
> That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
> Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
> At once the Soul of each, and God of all? (44-48)

The pantheism of this sentiment barely lingers before Coleridge moderates himself under Sara's "more serious eye" (49). What marks Sara's reproof as abrupt, however, is that Coleridge introduces this idea of a pervasive relation ("the One Life") in the form of a question. By overdetermining the significance of her husband's speculation, Sara both gives weight to it and undermines the retraction that Coleridge offers in response. The speculative quality of his initial suggestion requires an intervention from the outside to give it force. In the first place, Coleridge conceives of the idea of the One Life as "a thought uncall'd and undetain'd" and just one of "many idle flitting phantasies" (39, 40). Its ephemeral character emphasizes the sense that it arrives from outside – "uncall'd," which is to say, prompted by something other than the speaking subject. At the same time, neither can the idea be simply a passing thought rising "[o]n vain Philosophy's aye-babbling spring" (57), as he suggests later. Despite his assertion that it is a "flitting phantas[y]," the idea's domination of the poem lends it a gravity that belies Coleridge's defensive backpedalling. After all, the "wild and various" (42) thoughts are already contained in the pre-established scene of the poet, stretched out, and "tranquil mus[ing] upon tranquility" (38). In this self-figuration as a "subject Lute" (43), Coleridge counterposes his physical body ("my indolent and passive brain" [41]) against an exterior intellectual multitude from which he receives this very "thought uncall'd" (40). The account of this reception arranges itself around the central question, "And what if," which

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"Carlyon, one of his companions in Germany in early 1799, recalled that 'his concentrated definition of Spinozism was, "Each thing has a life of its own, and we are all one life["]'" (*Uses of Division* 115-16).

as a speculation figures for Coleridge the social form conversation must take if it is to serve as a vehicle for desiring transcendence. Such a form allows the multiple vectors that compose this conversation to remain in suspense: the self's transcendent desire for what he will call the "Incomprehensible," the self's social desire for the social other, and, underlying it all, the repeated references to a world apart from these desires.

The relational implications of the kind of speculation Coleridge entertains here are made immediately obvious in the poem. On the one hand, the question disturbs the social order of the family unit. Although she does not respond in recorded words (and thus allows Coleridge to maintain the monological character of the conversation), Sara "[d]arts" "a mild reproof" with her eye, thereby "holily dispreis[ing] / These shapings of the unregenerate mind" (50, 49, 54-55). The interruption of the social gaze of judgment (itself a form of desire) marks Coleridge's speculation as being in conflict with the social. On the other hand, when Coleridge declares that "never guiltless may I speak of him, / The Incomprehensible! save when with awe / I praise him, and with Faith that inly *feels*" (58-60), he is offering an explanation that, rather than accounting for this judgment, reintroduces the relational mode that prompted the judgment in the first place. In imagining this harmonious union of the receptive mind (notably, characterized in physical terms) with the transcendent, all-pervasive, "intellectual breeze," Coleridge inadvertently undermines the sufficiency of the dogma he rehearses in the closing lines describing God, "[w]ho with his saving mercies healed me, / A sinful and most miserable man, / Wilder'd and dark" (61-63). The relational structure of Sara's dogma conceives of a self infinitely in the debt of God and demands therefore that Coleridge "walk humbly" (52). Furthermore, by associating this structure with Sara's judgment, Coleridge suggests

that the social order itself is partly characterized by just such an attitude of self-abnegation. Yet Coleridge's own explanation, which he suggests through juxtaposition is in keeping with this dogma, contradicts such an active (if destructive) role for the self. Instead, any encounter with "[t]he Incomprehensible" fails unless it is preceded by "awe": in other words, it fails unless the other precedes and permeates the self. In this way, the speculative orientation ("And what if ...") that precedes the social judgment (of "hol[y] disprais[e]," a phrase that we should note implies the paradoxical claim to, in fact, *comprehend* the Incomprehensible, which would only be possible if the self preceded that other) more closely approaches the radical passivity of Coleridge's self-correction than does the appeal to humility.

Written three years later, "Frost at Midnight" continues this sense of an anterior relation that somehow resists even as it informs the social realm of the day-to-day. Yet, rather than opening with a domestic social setting, as "The Eolian Harp" does with its description of "My pensive Sara" (1), "Frost at Midnight" begins with the other – the frost – "perform[ing] its secret ministry" (1). This reorientation enables the rest of the poem to extend into regions of thought that are barred in Coleridge's earlier attempt. In the first place, the emphasis on the alterity of this object of desire underscores the secondary, responsive character of the desiring subject's relation to it. The "secret ministry of frost" (72), which resonates with the earlier idea of the Incomprehensible, gestures towards inscrutable operations that invite a response from the observer. A similar invitation is implied in "The Eolian Harp" and produces Coleridge's initial interest, Sara's rejection, and Coleridge's subsequent demurral; however, the prominence of Sara's response and the overall speculative character of the poem subjects the reality

of the Incomprehensible to the response, rather than the other way around. In "Frost," this

order has been rectified and the object of desire is allowed to remain ultimately distinct

from the subject's imagining of it. Furthermore, the options for responding to it are

presented in stark terms: either one may respond like those from the "populous village"

(11) or one may respond like those who "shalt wander like a breeze" (54).

Coleridge describes the response of the first person (his youthful self) to this

secret ministry in oblique relational terms: as a liminal desire for the unknown, imaged in

the poem by the "film, which fluttered on the grate" (15) and which is conveniently

called a "stranger."[19] Coleridge's boyhood "hop[e] to see the *stranger's* face" (41), which

affects him so physically, represents an extension of what he describes in one version of

the poem as "the living spirit in our frame, / That loves not to behold a lifeless thing" (20-

21).[20] The film in the grate activates his relational desire, which cannot abide a "sole

unquiet thing" (16). Thus its associated "dim sympathies," which "[m]ak[e] it a

companionable form" (18, 19), do not belong to the film itself, as in a pantheistic model,

but rather originate in a space that has given both subjects and objects in the world the

desire for others. This view leads Coleridge to describe himself as always on the lookout

for *strangers*. Yet what he desires even more is to cultivate the second response in his

son, whom he hopes "shalt learn far other lore" (50) – namely, the "eternal language,

which thy God / Utters, who from eternity doth teach / Himself in all, and all things in

himself" (60-62). He is asking that his son be guided by the wind itself as an embodied

Eolian harp. The realm into which he hopes his son will be caught up is the world of the

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[19] Notably, this response is identical to that of one reared in "the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim" (52).

[20] E.H. Coleridge cites these lines as appearing in the version printed in the *Poetical Register*, 1808-9 (1812).

"one Life," "the harmonious interrelationship of free individual and immanent One"
(Perry 79).

Notably, the contrast Coleridge depicts between himself and his son has less to do
with the scope of their transcendent desire than it does the conditions that facilitate its
expression. Thus, as with "The Eolian Harp," Coleridge is able to imagine a social world
charged with a transcendent tone. Like Blake's grain of sand, Coleridge perceives even
the film in the grate as a potential access point into the Incomprehensible, which harbours
an alterity the extent to which he has not yet understood. By raising his son Hartley
outside of "the great city" (52), he hopes to give him much greater opportunity for
encountering the transcendent. Nevertheless, as we see in the poem's circling back to the
initial image of the frost's secret ministry, this knowledge of the "eternal language" that
speaks the interrelatedness of all things can emerge even for one like Coleridge himself.
Although an awareness of it depends upon "that solitude, which suits / Abstruser
musings" (5-6), it is still present in the thick social context of the "inmates of [his]
cottage" (4), the "populous village" (11), and the "numberless goings-on of life" (12).
Still, while this promise of access in spite of social demands gives the poem a comforting
quality, Coleridge's closing description of the frost as "Quietly shining to the quiet
Moon" (74) reasserts the materiality of this "secret" world that cannot be fully
assimilated into the symbolically driven world of the social.

Coleridge deepens his inquiry into the limits of transcendent desire and its
possibilities for community in the only poem he himself called "A Conversation Poem":
"The Nightingale." The poem opens with an anecdote that we might read as the inversion
of Coleridge's hopes for Hartley in "Frost at Midnight." Instead of one who learns to

speak "that eternal language," which implicitly precedes and transcends the self, we

encounter

> some night-wandering man whose heart was pierced
> ...
> And so, poor wretch! filled all things with himself,
> And made all gentle sounds tell back the tale
> Of his own sorrow[.] (16, 19-21)

Coleridge's sounding of "dim sympathies" with the film in "Frost at Midnight" contrasts

sharply with this solipsistic poet who sees himself everywhere reflected in nature. Indeed,

it is telling that in "The Nightingale" Coleridge suggests (in remarkably similar language

to that used in "Eolian Harp") that such a poet "had better far have stretched his limbs /

Beside a brook in mossy forest-dell, […] Surrendering his whole spirit" (25-26, 29). The

result, he insists, will be that "his fame / Should share in Nature's immortality [...] and so

his song / Should make all Nature lovelier, and itself / Be loved like Nature" (30-31, 32-

34).

The continuum that begins in "dim sympathies" and ends in "surrender" is a kind

of sharing, much like Jean-Luc Nancy's notion of "partage." Brian Holmes describes the

multiple meanings of "partage" in Nancy's work as including not only "sharing," but also

"an incessant parting that persists in all sharing, precluding any fusional communion, as

well as any 'shareholding' or commerce in indivisible shares" (396 n.10). Insight into this

primordial sharing is the "different lore" that Coleridge mentions in his address to

Wordsworth and Dorothy in the next stanza – and, presumably, it is the same "lore" that

he hopes his son will learn in "Frost at Midnight." Against it, he positions the "meek

sympathy" of poets who in all likelihood will ignore his warning and "lose the deepening

twilights of the spring / In ball-rooms and hot theatres" (36-37). These two versions of

relation – either a "dim" sympathy or a "meek" one – differ primarily in terms of their structural emphasis. The former emphasizes an other that transcends the intellectual and emotional limits of the self – its dimness descriptive of the necessary obscurity of a relation with that which is truly other. The latter emphasizes the self and, more precisely, a social self embedded only in a world whose primary purpose is to reflect the self's projections. The meekness of their sympathy points to the paucity of their desire.

The relational ontology towards which Coleridge asks poets to orient themselves in passivity finds an apposite image in his description of "a grove / Of large extent, hard by a castle huge, / Which the great lord inhabits not" (49-51). Presented as a space explicitly *outside* the social (that is, in this case, feudal) realm, the grove is a field of unimpeded conversation:

> But never elsewhere in one place I knew
> So many nightingales; and far and near,
> In wood and thicket, over the wide grove,
> They answer and provoke each other's song,
> With skirmish and capricious passagings,
> And murmurs musical and swift jug jug,
> And one low piping sound more sweet than all—
> Stirring the air with such a harmony... (55-61)

One may enter into such a field, as Coleridge suggests in his description of the "most gentle Maid / Who dwelleth in her hospitable home / Hard by the castle" (69-71). Nevertheless, although "she knows all their notes" (74), she is only able to *watch* as "Many a nightingale perch giddily / On blossomy twig still swinging from the breeze, / And to that motion tune his wanton song / Like tipsy Joy that reels with tossing head" (83-86). The discovery that conversation at its limit is synonymous with the underlying relation that he had speculated about in "The Eolian Harp" is accompanied by the realization that this realm cannot contain the desiring subject.

Žižek argues that "[d]esire emerges when drive gets caught in the cobweb of Law/prohibition" (*Plague* 43). Likewise, the passivity we witness in all of these poems – from meek speculation and self-censoring under Sara's reproof in "The Eolian Harp" to his submissive attitude towards his son (who "would place his hand beside his ear, / His little hand, the small forefinger up, / And bid us listen" [94-96]) in "The Nightingale" – is provoked by a law that commands such an ongoing fidelity to the social order. Thus Coleridge – and the maiden in the poem – is refused leave to pass over into the "tipsy Joy" of full-fledged conversation. Instead, the social restrains him in each instance, demanding that he frame his transcendent desire within the limits of a realizable imaginary. At this early stage, Coleridge does not seem to view these demands negatively. Although he certainly perceives these constraints as limitations, there is a dialectical quality to his one-way conversations, in which he attempts to revise and rework his transcendent desire in response to such social pressures. His goal, as we see in his hopes for Hartley, is to reimagine the social altogether, as inherently inflected by transcendent desire. Yet, as he presses his understanding of transcendent desire still further, as he does in "Christabel," the social appears inherently opposed to the capaciousness such desire posits.

"Christabel" and the Social Catalyst of Materiality

With both pantisocracy and the conversation poems, Coleridge sought a harmonization of the social and his transcendent desire. Where pantisocracy fails because of its inability to navigate the rifts Coleridge encounters in his ideal of duty and virtue, the conversation poems give him the opportunity to posit a more developed idea of what

is required of the desiring subject in desiring the transcendent other. His effort to understand this relationship between desire and alterity continues to occupy Coleridge's thought in work such as "Christabel." As was also the case with the poems discussed above, Coleridge explores the way different social forms interact with the demands of the transcendent; however, what "Christabel" suggests is that the social itself is generated by an inability to encounter the radical alterity of materiality, figured in the poem by Geraldine's body. Unlike Coleridge's earlier efforts, therefore, "Christabel" represents a more sustained critique of the social. Critics have connected the counter-social character of the central relationship of "Christabel" to, among other things, Coleridge's own contemporaneous considerations of the cultural aftermath of the French Revolution. For example, James Mulvihill describes the complex parallels between England's "fear of invasion" and the fears explored in the poem's narration. Andrea Henderson similarly suggests that the poem reflects the contemporary anxiety about how to respond to the French Revolution. She writes, "The problem that those characters [in the poem] face is that in the world of 'Christabel' the only alternative to stifling tradition is terrifying indeterminacy" (883). The poem's complex exploration of the relation between affect and social life takes precedence in these readings and invites reflection on the depiction of a conflict of the imagination: the social in tension with what lies outside or beyond the social. Indeed, the broader psychological implications of these readings complement my argument about the poem.

In the poem, Christabel is a desiring subject seeking a transcendent relation and harbours a desire that is marked variously throughout as excessive and socially subversive. As her foil, Geraldine serves to reveal both the nature of Christabel's desire

and that desire's fraught status within the social realm. Throughout (and especially in Part I), an idea of the transcendent as that which not only exceeds expression, but inherently resists expression, similar to the unthought "novelty" of Coleridge's initial idea of pantisocracy, comes under review as does its (im)possibility apart from social forms. Ultimately, the event of excessive desire – a darkly sympathetic moment between Christabel and Geraldine that has been called everything from mysterious to perverse to abusive – remains unrepresentable and therefore incommensurate with the social's total domination of the scene in Part II. As in Michel Foucault's reading of the Cartesian cogito, about which he writes that it leaves open a space beyond mere thought, a space which was aligned with all that "I am" besides thinking (cf. *Order* 326), Christabel's desire cannot be assimilated into the social order of her father's house, which has also attempted to structure her self-understanding as we see in the many comments made by the biased narrator. The poem's internal analysis of the interactions of desire with the socializing process proves useful, therefore, for establishing the terms of my larger argument, especially in distinguishing between social sympathy as the ratification of social desire and dark sympathy as both symptomatic of transcendent desire and fatal to it.

The initial series of events in the poem exemplifies the trajectories that these desires take. Having been kidnapped by five bandits who have threatened an imminent return, Geraldine asks Christabel (on more than one occasion) to "[s]tretch forth thy hand." Yet Christabel initially (if implicitly) refuses to do so. Instead, she asks for a story: "How camest thou here?" (76). The story that Geraldine tells, as Karen Swann notes, represents an oblique response to Christabel's questions about "identity and

origins," and may be summarized as, "I am like you, and my story is like your own" (151). It is only once Christabel has this story in mind that she is able to offer protection to Geraldine. This desire for story resembles Hume's description of how sympathy arises. As Hume writes:

> When any affection is infus'd by sympathy, it is at first known only by its effects, and by those external signs in the countenance and conversation, which convey an idea of it. This idea is presently converted into an impression, and acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself, and produce an equal emotion, as any original affection. (204)

The idea conveyed begins in the understanding, but grows under the influence of feeling. In Christabel's case, this narrative so grips her that she imagines her role in protecting Geraldine as a kind of completion of Geraldine's story, promising that her father will "guide and guard you safe and free / Home to your noble father's hall" (110-11). Christabel throughout has a sense of sharing an experience with Geraldine, so that when they make it back into the safety of the castle walls, she cries, "Praise we the Virgin all divine / Who hath rescued thee from thy distress!" (139-40). In sympathizing with Geraldine's narrative, Christabel attempts to make it her own.

This effort is presented in the narration as socially disruptive – and it is evident from the opening lines that this poem is concerned at least in part with the role social forms ought to play in organizing or structuring desire for the other. A strongly marked narrative voice identifies its support of the existing feudal organization early on when it asks accusingly of Christabel, "what makes her in the wood so late, / A furlong from the castle gate?" (25-26). The inappropriateness of her behaviour is underscored by a brief remark about Christabel's privilege as a daughter "[w]hom her father loves so well" (24). More pervasively, the narrator establishes the setting by locating "the castle clock" (1) at

the centre of all the events. To be on the side of the Baron is to "maketh answer to the clock" (9), which we later discover is the Baron's existential mechanism, "knell[ing] us back to a world of death" (333). The socially sustaining work of the clock is also explicitly tied to the work of sympathy, as Geraldine declares: "I thought I heard, some minutes past, / Sounds as of a castle bell. / Stretch forth thy hand (thus ended she), / And help a wretched maid to flee" (100-103). This clock-governed social matrix constitutes the dominant narrative framework for the poem.

Throughout, the narrator explicitly pits Geraldine as a threat to this narrative, imperiling social stability. Perhaps the most telling of the narrator's signals to us that Geraldine is supposed to represent a counter-social force is the unwitting effect she has upon the castle guard dog. For, when the narrator asks, "What can ail the mastiff bitch," he is asking a question specifically about a disturbance in the dominant social narrative's clock-time. As we see in the opening stanza, this "toothless mastiff" is the paradigm for "mak[ing] answer to the clock" with his regular "sixteen short howls, not over loud" (9, 12). By prompting an unprecedented "angry moan" (148) and thereby disturbing the social realm's regularity, Geraldine reveals her potential for establishing a new narrative entirely – a potential that irresistibly attracts Christabel both at the social and transcendent levels of desire. As Henderson observes, "the contention that Geraldine can be understood as the embodiment of social disruptiveness — incomprehensible novelty — encoded as sexual and moral indeterminacy immediately raises the question of why such a mystification should be necessary" (883).[21] While it is obvious that the narrator's pointed suspicions about Geraldine are meant to signal her as not belonging to the social

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[21] Notably, Henderson uses two of Coleridge's key terms for what I have been calling the transcendent object of desire: namely, "the Incomprehensible" and "novelty."

of which he understands himself to be a criterion of normality, his emphasis on her physicality and status as an object of desire (especially Christabel's desire) suggests that the true source of Geraldine's conflict is to be found in the contradicting premises for relationship that she enables Christabel to think.

Against the narrator's claims and Christabel's hopes, Geraldine begins to assert her own form of desire once she is safely within Christabel's bedroom. The effect of this is not only to dispute the normative status of the castle social imaginary, but also to differentiate her own counter-social desire from the desire that Christabel displays, the object of which I want to align with the transcendent. In the first place, Geraldine engages in a ritual of toasting her host, declaring: "All they who live in the upper sky, / Do love you, holy Christabel! [...] for the good which me befel, / Even I in my degree will try, / Fair maiden, to requite you well" (227-28, 230-32). The ritualistic qualities of this speech gain some explanation when they are read alongside the narrator's epigrammatic close to the Conclusion to Part I, which repeats the idea of this surveying cloud of witnesses: "But this she knows, in joys and woes, / That saints will aid if men will call: / For the blue sky bends over all!" (329-31). In both cases, Geraldine and the narrator appeal to an imaginary meant to mask over one of the key implications of materiality, which is the terrifying uncertainty it implies as pure contingency. As Anya Taylor writes, "The sky will still be blue whether the child suffers or not," yet the idea allows us to be "[s]uspended in our judgments" (67). As a form of ritual that shares its vocabulary with such a promise (and which the narrator's repetition reveals to be complicit with the social), Geraldine's toast attempts to establish the scene of desire upon a social footing. Yet her ostensibly good intentions fail because she cannot account for

the excessiveness of the desire that follows. Indeed, as I have already suggested,

Geraldine's values throughout (and especially in Part II) should not be understood as

antithetical to those of Sir Leoline. Despite the narrator's characterization of her as a

threat, she is not attempting to tear down the social order, but instead to establish one of

her own (that is, one not organized under the Baron). Rather, it is Christabel who

discovers the limits of sympathy in the face of materiality, for it is her desire for

Geraldine that unravels the socializing intentions of both her father and her object of

desire.

This desire is depicted, notably, as sexual, and critics have very rightly focused on

the charged erotics of the poem, particularly in its first part.[22] Throughout, the desire for a

relation that is greater than the social motivates much of the action. Thus, as we have

seen, Christabel, dreaming of her lover, meets a beautiful woman, and carries her across

the threshold of her home. She brings Geraldine into her room unannounced, shares wine

with her, and prepares for the intimacy of "shar[ing] [her] couch," as she puts it earlier

(122). The drama is undoubtedly one of courtship (Taylor 64) – or even seduction – from

their first meeting. Nevertheless, it is *also* a drama of social expressions of desire (which

is to say, "appropriate" expressions), as Christabel seeks to "comfort fair Geraldine"

(105), "beseech[es]" her "courtesy" (121), and even "devoutly crie[s]" (137) with the joy

of having arrived safely in the castle court. In the bedroom, these parallel desires enter

into conflict, revealing their incompatibility as Christabel looks to Geraldine to provide

an unassailable ground for her personal narrative and Geraldine refuses. The event

reveals an excessive desire stripped of the social structures that have served to temper and

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[22]Anya Taylor breaks these readings down into those who "see the heroine Christabel initiated into love" and those who "see her as a more or less innocent Eve falling into the snares of a demon from preternatural realms or a Satan" (*Erotic Coleridge* 60).

contain it thus far. Christabel's gaze upon Geraldine undressing is the climactic moment of her radical vulnerability, a moment just prior to the loss of the supplemental social tone, in which she manifests her complex desire in a posture of passive waiting and expectancy. Indeed, we do not even know what Christabel's own response is to what she sees, since the narrator so immediately interrupts to inform the readers that it is "[a] sight to dream of, not to tell!" (253).[23] After Christabel makes her observation, however, there is no reciprocation; rather, Geraldine, affronted, casts a spell on her so that she cannot reveal what she has seen. If the conversation poems imagined radical passivity as a way of accessing the transcendent object, such as the One Life, then "Christabel" represents a pointed criticism of this posture.

Part of the reason that the poem is forced to criticize this posture of vulnerability is because of how Coleridge's earlier experiments failed to account for the unforeseeable influence of alterity. Indeed, the libidinal disconnect between Christabel and Geraldine is occasioned by the work of materiality in the poem, where materiality is an absolute alterity that escapes description. Not only does it figure obliquely as Geraldine's unseen body, but it also figures as an unexpected physicality of consciousness. Thus, after her toast, Geraldine tells Christabel to go undress, further asserting the social role she hopes to create as an alternative mother, but Christabel finds that she cannot obey: "But through her brain of weal and woe / So many thoughts move to and fro, / That vain it were her lids to close" (239-41).[24] This passage recalls Hume's famous description of the mind as

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[23]Significantly, the only dreamer we have encountered so far is Christabel herself, who "had dreams all yesternight / Of her betrothed knight" (27-28), inviting us to ask whether this declaration on the narrator's part is not also an injunction to his lady Christabel that she keep her dreams to herself. Andrew M. Cooper glosses this line as deriving from "the prudish voyeurism of the Part I narrator" (96).

[24]Alan Richardson notes that "[t]he use of 'brain' to connote mind is rare in English poetry before the 1790s" (55).

"a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement" (163). Hume's account of the mind derives from his radical scepticism and his sense of the unstable character of human understanding. To deal with this unmanageable multiplicity, Hume introduces sympathy. Our perception of the other provides us with a stable impression around which to organize our selfhood as a similarly stable idea. Likewise, we are told that, unable to close her eyes due to this encounter with her own physicality, "half-way from the bed [Christabel] rose, / And on her elbow did recline / To look at the lady Geraldine" (242-44). Yet the connection Coleridge makes between Christabel's awareness of bodily processes that she cannot account for and her sympathizing gesture discloses immediately the more-than-social motivation of this act of looking. This inward sense prompts her sudden "defi[ance]" (260) of the dictate of the social to go to bed – here, ventriloquized by the replacement-mother, Geraldine. Her transcendent desire for a narrative that might provide her with a stable selfhood outside the social leads her to attempt to look upon her sympathetic other. And in this moment of excessive desire, the constraints of social sympathy come into clear view:

> Beneath the lamp the lady bowed,
> And slowly rolled her eyes around;
> Then drawing in her breath aloud,
> Like one that shuddered, she unbound
> The cincture from beneath her breast:
> Her silken robe, and inner vest,
> Dropt to her feet, and full in view,
> Behold! her bosom and half her side ——
> A sight to dream of, not to tell!
> O shield her! shield sweet Christabel! (245-54)

Notably, this "beholding" does not *reveal* so much as it gestures towards an encounter with alterity: in the moment of looking, materiality affects the imaginative

space of sympathy. A manuscript version of the scene has Christabel behold a more conventionally monstrous sight: "her bosom and half her side – / Are lean and old and foul of hue" (252-53) – phrasing to which Coleridge returns in Part II as part of that section's social emphasis. In the published version of Part 1, by contrast, it is an incommunicable sight, a sight that exceeds the possibility of sympathy as "the communication of sentiments," which, in its incommunicability, profoundly disrupts Christabel's self-understanding, hitherto grounded upon such sympathy. Indeed, what has entered into sympathy is both the unaccountable materiality Christabel discovers within herself as she attempts to sleep and the unspeakable materiality she beholds in Geraldine. Like Godwin's "magnetical sympathy," this is a relation that precedes subjectivity. This particular sharing does not confirm the identity of either woman, but rather it undermines both by drawing them into the expressly non-identical field of alterity.

An urgent question that the scene raises is the significance of Coleridge using the *female* body in particular as his figure of the trauma of materiality. The role of the problematic narrator may mitigate this question somewhat by recalling the social imaginary that the narrator is attempting to set up as a backdrop for the two women's actions. This imaginary frames the revelation of Geraldine's body to Christabel, so that the traditionally patriarchal and misogynistic rhetoric of the social is reinforced by extension. The narrator's reaction to Christabel's assertive activity in the forest—and the implicit irony with which the reader is meant to read the narrator's commentary—is suggestive of a critique at work in the poem. Furthermore, critics have noted the way in which Geraldine is positioned as a highly charged site of representation specifically.[25]

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[25] For example, Dennis Welch writes, "Although this poem is 'entirely domestic,' as one early reviewer suggested (Matthew 435-36), many of its critics see in Christabel and her relationship with Geraldine a

Thus, on the one hand, the fact that the female body is aligned both with alterity and with horror can be read as an extension of Coleridge's ironically extended critique of the social in the voice of the social. Nevertheless, on the other hand, this reading is naïve and far from complete unless it is accompanied by a recognition that Coleridge is struggling with a similar dynamic to the one he encountered with pantisocracy. As was the case with pantisocracy, in which the instability of the unthought understood as both "incomprehensible" and "novelty" gives way to the ideal of duty, Coleridge's deployment of the female body as a figure for alterity represents a reliance upon stabilizing frameworks capable of managing the expansiveness of his desire. Unlike his approach to pantisocracy, however, Coleridge is at least partly aware of his capitulation in the figure, as demonstrated by his alteration from the manuscript's explicit description of Geraldine's body to his occluded description in the narrator's voice. The implication of this modification is that it preserves the transcendent character of Christabel's desire for the duration of the encounter, thereby leaving open the possibility that it continues as unthought, despite the narrator's protests.

Indeed, witnessing Geraldine's material body disrupts Christabel's initially totalizing objectives. For, in her unaccountable physicality, Geraldine reveals the boundlessness of Christabel's own desire. Yet such a disruption, rather than marking totality as impossible (as in Hume), here serves to elaborate and better articulate the nature of that totality: for Christabel, totality *is* infinity. Moreover, in this final moment before Christabel's undoing, Geraldine herself seems balanced on a knife's edge as she

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neurotic struggle to cope with sexual maturation. To Roy Basler, for example, Geraldine represents 'sexual necessity' that draws the repressed Christabel toward irrational behaviour (25-51). To Charles Tomlinson, Geraldine represents the 'fatal woman' of the Gothic tale, an agent symbolizing guilt and neurosis in Christabel (105, 107). Susan Luther asserts that the protagonist projects her guilty feelings of sexuality onto the ghost Geraldine in a subconscious wish to grow up by a 'self-imposed martyrdom' (50-86)." (163-64).

meets Christabel's gaze, uncertain how to react: "Deep from within she seems half-way / To lift some weight with sick assay, / And eyes the maid and seeks delay" (257-59). Having discovered Christabel's desire, Geraldine "seeks [to] delay" the extreme relation that threatens to ensue. Contained within the social vehicle of sympathy, Christabel has successfully communicated her own radical vulnerability to Geraldine, who now reflects this vulnerability in turn. Yet the consequence of such a repetition is an unasked-for, shared traversal of fantasy, which draws both Geraldine and Christabel into the realm of drive, figured here as the realm of the unconscious. Geraldine attempts to delay this relation because, unlike Christabel, her desire is not infinite in scope, but aims only at being "lord of thy utterance" (268). She desires only to supplant one narrative with another and is uninterested in a transcendent relation beyond narrative such as Christabel seeks. As in pantisocracy, we may note the socializing tone of this desire. The curse Geraldine casts upon Christabel forces her to submit to a single, monolithic narrative, making her unable, like Cassandra, to articulate her experience for others. If the transcendent and the social have thus far been parallel components of a complex and dynamic relational desire, Geraldine's curse represses the transcendent and encrypts it within a sympathetic narrative that is no longer adequate to the full scope of desire at work in the scene. This inadequacy translates, on the one hand, into Christabel's subsequent traumatized silence and, on the other hand, into her being cast out of the social realm of her family as Geraldine takes her place in Part II.

If the (non-)revelation of materiality in Part I shuts down Christabel's transcendent desire by catalyzing the need for social limits, it also allows the desire for the other to take on new intensities that subsequently respond to these limits. In Part II,

relational desire is depicted both in the form of conventional sympathy and in what

Coleridge calls "forc'd unconscious sympathy" (609).[26] The first form of sympathy

appears in the account of a ruined friendship between Sir Leoline and Lord Roland, the

man Geraldine claims as her father. The Baron's fraught history has important libidinal

parallels to his daughter's experience. Like Christabel, the Baron's "brain" (413) comes

into opposition with the "constancy" of the "realms above" (410). This material site for

thought stores a "madness" (413) that is incompatible with the friendship of his youth.

Exchanging insults, the two friends part ways (415-18). Yet the rift that remains, a shared

wound similar to what we find in Godwin's writings, suggests that the desire that linked

them to one another ran deeper than a merely social friendship:

> But never either found another
> To free the hollow heart from paining—
> They stood aloof, the scars remaining,
> Like cliffs which had been rent asunder. (419-22)

This account of the aftermath of dark sympathy following the failure of its social

reinforcements repeats the scene of the previous night in which a similar affront takes

place ("Then suddenly, as one defied, / [Geraldine] Collects herself in scorn and pride, /

And lay down by the Maiden's side!" [260-62]). Likewise, it repeats the image of a

shared wound: "Thou knowest to-night, and wilt know to-morrow, / This mark of my

shame, this seal of my sorrow" (269-70). Even as the disclosure of dark sympathy

anticipates the breakdown of its social enframing, the void it foresees does not

correspond to desire, but rather to drive. Thus the now-friendless Baron greets "[e]ach

matin bell" with the bleak reflection that it "[k]nells us back to a world of death" (333).

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[26]The closest the second part comes to describing transcendent desire is in the half-formed dream that Bracy the bard recounts. Reflecting inversely the varnished social narrative of the Conclusion to Part I, the dream reveals the traumatic truth of what has unfolded, but through a kind of anamorphosis.

The implosion of desire (such as we also see, for instance, in Audley Mandeville's melancholia) does not leave room for any form of sympathy – and, especially, not dark sympathy, which seems to depend in Coleridge's work upon an *excess* of desire. Nevertheless, the social appears able to reconstitute the void left by desire. In a beautiful moment of such reconstituted sympathy, Sir Leoline "stood gazing on the damsel's face: / And the youthful Lord of Tryermaine / Came back upon his heart again" (428-30). Unfortunately, this imagined reunion is founded upon a lie.

By contrast, when Christabel discovers herself under the influence of "a forc'd unconscious sympathy," there is no resolution of desire. This ongoing suspension indicates both that this unique form of sympathy resides outside the social and also that it relies upon some form of the dynamic of passivity Coleridge developed in his earliest conversation poems. Furthermore, the mechanics of "forc'd unconscious sympathy" elude the understanding of the narrator: "The maid, devoid of guile and sin, / I know not how, in fearful wise, / So deeply she had drunken in / That look" (599-602). The ongoing work of transcendent desire in this scene remains necessarily "incomprehensible" to the narrator. Yet, if transcendent desire is present, then it must nevertheless be expressed within the constraints of dark sympathy because it has been evacuated of its content and is sustained through the combined pressures of the social and of the memory of materiality. Between, on the one hand, the confusion of the narrator (and the Baron's equal disturbance at the sight of Christabel's "dizzy trance" [589]) and Christabel's own ongoing recollection of "no sight but one" (598), on the other, the look Geraldine makes towards her that is "somewhat of malice, and more of dread" (586) and "of dull and treacherous hate" (606) can be taken as an event paradoxically responding to Christabel's

desire for sympathy. As we saw with *Mandeville*, the traumatic blow that Clifford finally

delivers to Mandeville gets taken up into a similar event of dark sympathy, signified

forever afterwards by the wound across Mandeville's eye. Likewise, while this "forc'd

unconscious sympathy" does not result in a physical wound, it joins victim and

perpetrator together in an interwoven dynamic dramatized by both women taking the

roles of Eve and the serpent interchangeably. Nevertheless, like Coleridge's momentary

dark sympathy with Southey after the collapse of their friendship, it must be described as

only an event. After all, Christabel attempts to reintegrate the social in the following

stanza, as she throws herself at her father's feet to entreat him to send Geraldine away. As

with Geraldine's curse, the social builds (or re-builds) itself upon the ruins of an

unmanageable encounter with materiality.

As I have tried to show in my discussion of Christabel's desire for Geraldine, the

social is intimately tied to the destabilizing experience of materiality. Drawing upon the

mechanisms of desire that resist the void that such an experience attempts to open up, the

social constructs itself upon the trauma of the encounter. Nevertheless, for Christabel,

what has led her to this encounter in the first place is her transcendent desire for

Geraldine. Her subsequent discovery of the alterity that lies within her object of desire

leads to her subjection to a curse, the origin of which is Geraldine herself. Just as

Coleridge discovered the difficulties of socializing the transcendent in his pantisocratic

experiment, so does Christabel realize that even counter-social desires, such as she

perceived in Geraldine and with which she resonated, are still social and must therefore

ultimately fail to satisfy. A notable difference between these realizations, however, lies in

Coleridge's recognition of the obstacle posed by materiality. The odd Conclusion to Part

II reflects upon this obstacle from another perspective, discussing the radical limitations imposed upon feeling by phenomenality, so that even "love's excess" (664) can be skewed and twisted into "words of unmeant bitterness" (665) by an imaginary that is unable to sustain the transcendent. Coleridge's effort to allow the unthought character of Christabel and Geraldine's relationship to remain unthought may have played a role in the poem's ongoing incompletion (despite his having plotted the remainder of the poem).[27] Nevertheless, Coleridge continued to search for a community capable of supporting his transcendent desire—even if only in an absolutely attenuated form. His 1802 poem, "Dejection: An Ode," marks the beginning of this journey.

Dejected Desire in Coleridge's Later Poetry

The fragmented state in which "Christabel" remains suggests that Coleridge could no longer realize the resolution he had depicted in many of his conversation poems. (Admittedly, this resolution often seems like a ruse even in these earlier poems, whether it is Sara's "more serious eye" in "The Eolian Harp" or Coleridge's hope—and implied self-dissatisfaction—in "Frost at Midnight" that Hartley would "learn far other lore" [50].) As I have suggested, this inability results partly from his attempt to push radical passivity to its limit, thereby discovering in it the oppressive edge of transcendent desire: namely, its point of intersection with materiality and its function in actually generating the social. Hence, the attempt to embody a transcendent philosophy like the one Life in

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[27] Coleridge had envisioned the poem having five parts, yet he never completed it. Coleridge's inability to finish the poem has been the subject of much critical reflection. In his early study, *The Road to Tryermaine*, for instance, Arthur H. Nethercot declares his goal to be "to hunt down that 'elusive clue' and even to capture the quarry that left it" (vi). Nethercot speculates on the identity of Geraldine, the implications of the various scenes in the poem, and includes, among others, James Gillman's synopsis of what would have happened had the poem been finished, though he does not give it much credence.

the world or to represent transcendent desire poetically often runs up against expressions of materiality that Coleridge found ways of displacing, usually by aligning the transcendent with the ideal or metaphysical rather than with the unthought or meta-physical. Thus, for example, Coleridge can resolve the problem of Southey's anti-pantisocratic backsliding by reasserting (and rendering more emphatic and absolute) the idealistic principles of pantisocracy. With "Christabel," however, Coleridge articulates a dimension of transcendent desire that cannot be re-assimilated—a limit to the possibility of transcendent desire imaged darkly as the "sight to dream of, not to tell" and represented as an event that persists even after it is submerged beneath the multiple narratives of Part II. Like Mandeville's wound, the sight Christabel has encountered structures everything that follows from it. Thus Geraldine teaches Christabel that, after transcendent desire is rendered absolute in the face of the void of materiality, all possible forms of satisfaction (even, in Christabel's case, that of speech) will be denied to the desiring subject. To desire the transcendent is ultimately to discover its inaccessibility—at least for the one who desires it.

This discovery produces what Coleridge calls "dejection," which I will posit as a category of "dark sympathy" because of its liminal position between transcendent and social desires and the central role failure plays in its development. The social relationships that Coleridge explores in the early conversation poems and that Christabel entertains at least upon first encountering Geraldine cannot overcome the pressure of an absolutely transcendent desire. This pressure leads inevitably to an encounter with the materiality that transcendent desire implies. Thus, for example, Coleridge's submission to the domestic scene at the end of "The Eolian Harp" occurs not only because he is able to

elevate the disapproval of his spouse to a transcendent register by calling her "Meek Daughter in the family of Christ" (53), but also because of the subject-exploding possibility implied in his question about whether the soul itself might in fact only be a resonance—a reverberation—of an incomprehensible exteriority that precedes it, even as "God of all" (48). The social, in this case, is his only reprieve; however, the poem itself indicates that there will be a return of the repressed even if he does not realize it. With "Dejection," Coleridge begins to come to terms with the effect of this social reprieve. Even Coleridge's inability to decide upon an addressee for this so-called "conversation" poem, as I explore at greater length below, suggests that the category of the social has come under suspicion. Thus he continues to perceive the backdrop of alterity that he described in his earlier conversation poems; however, he finds himself cast out from any relation with it.

This perception of alterity, I am arguing, signals an ongoing investment in community – particularly in the bare, inoperative sense Jean-Luc Nancy describes. When J. Hillis Miller glosses Nancy's "community" as the sense that "[w]e cannot help but share our existence with others" (21), he describes the way such community reveals the incidental nature of the desiring subject. Coleridgean dejection, however, recalls how such a disclosure is also a revelation of powerlessness, emerging out of a profound sense of separation. This sense of separation thus inflects the idea of community with what Jacques Derrida calls, after Paul de Man, "true 'mourning'" (*Memoires* 31). Derrida writes:

> True "mourning" seems to dictate only a tendency: the tendency to accept incomprehension, to leave a place for it, and to enumerate it coldly, almost like death itself, those modes of language which, in short, deny the whole

> rhetoricity of the true (the non-anthropomorphic, the non-elegiac, the non-poetic, etc.) (31)

Derrida's definition describes well the movement Coleridge seems to make away from a fascination with "the Incomprehensible" (which is also an attempt to submit it to the phenomenal frame of, for instance, the Eolian harp metaphor) to the mere acceptance of it. Yet this schema of "true mourning," which involves both introjecting the other's memory while also respecting the alterity of the other, is, Derrida admits, ultimately impossible, "even though it is *in part* a hard and undeniable necessity" (35). The dynamic of attempting a true mourning and failing is one that Coleridge exemplifies in his late poetry.

As a way of drawing out Coleridge's ongoing attraction to community, even if framed by the anti-social affect of dejection, I want to read three of Coleridge's later poems: "Dejection: An Ode," "Constancy to an Ideal Object" (1804-7? 1822?), and "Love's Apparition and Evanishment" (1833). These poems are united in their articulation of an unbridgeable gap between the desiring self and the object of desire. While each one posits different reactions to this impasse, the poems all reflect a view of transcendent desire as radically attenuated. "Dejection," indicating its relatively early position, maintains a hope that the materiality of the other, which has made community impossible for Coleridge, might not have the same effect on others. "Constancy," with its third-person description of the figure of the woodman assuming the position of a transcendently desiring subject, renders the fear about the desire for alterity somewhat more universal by asking the fatal question (though also not answering it): "And art thou nothing?" (25). By the end of his life, Coleridge's optimism is nearly gone, as he indicates with the cruel and cynical image of the "lone Arab, old and blind" in "Love's

Apparition and Evanishment." Waiting for "the aid, which Heaven alone can grant" (7), the figure does not seem aware of the sheer desperation of his position. If the material underpinnings of the "image with a glory round its head" in "Constancy" remain hidden from the woodman, though revealed to the reader, they are even more pervasive throughout "Love's Apparition and Evanishment" as precisely this threat of death, which returns us once more to the question of mourning that Derrida raises. Nevertheless, the poem's structure, framing a snapshot of Coleridge himself steeped in dejection between two metaphors, reveals that the mobility of dejected desire persists even in this darkness. Indeed, where "Christabel" closes with our heroine unable to speak and Coleridge, in the Conclusion to Part II, questioning whether speech even has the ability to express transcendent forms of desire, these instances of dejected desire in Coleridge's later poetry suggest a renewed attempt to face such obstacles.

As many critics have noted, "Dejection: An Ode" serves well to distinguish the "conversation poems" that precede it from the much darker poems – conversational and otherwise – that Coleridge will write over the last three decades of his life.[28] Coleridge himself encourages this interpretation, with his nostalgic remembrance of "a time when, though my path was rough, / This joy within me dallied with distress" (76-77) as opposed to his present experience of a dark "habit of my Soul" (93). As I have tried to show above, prior to around 1800, Coleridge's poetry and life experiments are often driven by the possibility of integrating transcendent desires with the social realm. Thus the early conversation poems I have discussed regularly acknowledge a transcendent condition— sometimes figured as the "One Life"—and attempt furthermore to inflect Coleridge's

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[28] For example, Seamus Perry writes: "'Dejection' (*PW* I:362-8) is sometimes seen as marking a decisive turn in Coleridge, away from the objective interest in experience allowed for by the One Life, and toward the subjectively unifying life of the sovereign mind" (*Uses of Division* 143).

social context with that transcendent condition, such as he attempts with marriage in "The Eolian Harp" or with childrearing in "Frost at Midnight." "Dejection: An Ode" marks the commencement of a shift in Coleridge's thinking, where the hope he has of belonging to or locating such a society begins to wane. While the dominant reading of the poem takes it as a description of what J.C.C. Mays calls (borrowing from the poem itself) Coleridge's "loss of the shaping spirit of imagination" (2:696), I want to focus on its status as a conversation poem and thus return to the relational structure he introduces in his previous work. Read in this way, the poem does not mark the end of hope's role in Coleridge's exploration of desire. As he writes in the final stanza, he continues to hope for his addressee, even if he can no longer hope for himself: "To her may all things live, from Pole to Pole, / Their life the eddying of her living soul!" (135-36). Nevertheless, this hope for others is also a holdover from the passivity of the earlier conversation poems and thus – in light of his critique of passivity in "Christabel" – becomes increasingly tenuous as his sense of the effects of materiality develops over the latter part of his career.

The first complete version of what comes to be called "Dejection: An Ode" was written on April 4, 1802 as a letter addressed to Sara Hutchinson, and it was later published—now addressed to the generic, "Edmund"—in the *Morning Post* on the day of Wordsworth's marriage to Mary Hutchinson (October 4, 1802). Wordsworth himself also made an appearance in one of its iterations before Coleridge finally settled on "Lady" as the title for his conversation partner in the final printed form, appearing in 1817. The poem describes the speaker's past experience of transcendence, which he can no longer feel. If this transcendent condition corresponds to "Joy" and "Life," then the condition under which he now suffers is "[a] stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief / Which finds no

natural outlet, no relief" (22-23). He calls this experience "Reality's dark dream" (95), or simply "dejection." These terms—"Joy" and "Dejection"—serve as two poles that Coleridge has set up to describe his affective existence. Moving between the two is another term that has appeared again and again throughout his poetry: "hope," which he uses in three places in "Dejection" alone. Where "Joy" and "Dejection" correspond, respectively, to the possession or lack of the transcendent object, "hope" is the catalyst and engine directing Coleridge towards the former and away from the latter.

As we see with pantisocracy's "Sublime Hope," these themes have currency earlier in Coleridge's work. Thus, in "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" (1797), Coleridge desires that his friend Charles Lamb "Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood, / Silent with swimming sense" (38-39). Notably, with "Lime-Tree," this hope for the other is also a hope for the self, so that he is able to add in the closing lines, "'Tis well to be bereft of promis'd good, / That we may lift the soul, and contemplate / With lively joy the joys we cannot share" (65-67). In "Dejection," while Coleridge similarly hopes that the addressee may "ever, evermore rejoice" (138), the "afflications [that] bow me down to earth" (82) have transformed his encounter with the corresponding breeze of "The Eolian Harp." Not only does he determine that "I may not hope from outward forms to win / The passion and the life, whose fountains are within" (45-46), but he also discovers that these resources have been "rob[bed]" (83) from him.

Nevertheless, although he no longer finds joy in the transcendent other, it continues to inform his self-understanding. Ironically, the chief victim of his separation from the transcendent is the social. Throughout "Dejection," social forms are repeatedly shown as broken or breaking down. For example, the wind (described now as "a scream /

Of agony by torture lengthen'd out" [97-98]) gives him to think "the Rushing of an Host in rout, / With groans of trampled men, with smarting wounds—/ At once they groan with pain, and shudder with the cold!" (111-13). As Godwin demonstrates so well, violence offers a useful gesture to materiality because of its visceral and non-reflective content.[29] Thus, as he permits the transcendent object he desires to remain other, an exercise that involves refusing to phenomenalize materiality in terms that allow a relation to form, he also refuses to have recourse to the social as Hume did. The second image Coleridge offers recalls the materiality (or we might say in this instance, "mater[n/i]ality") of "Christabel." With the image of a lost child who "now moans low in bitter grief and fear, / And now screams loud, and hopes to make her mother hear" (124-25), Coleridge depicts the anxiety that arises from an encounter with materiality similar to that experienced by Christabel under Geraldine's curse. Not only the transcendent potential of the mother and child bond, but also its social corollary, are overwhelmed by the solitude imposed by the alterity Coleridge discovered in allowing the object of his desire to remain unthought. As with Freud, the longing that Coleridge felt in the dark has become a kind of fear of the dark. Following a suspicion of the social in any form that began in "Christabel," Coleridge traces its limit in "Dejection" in order to show its inability to sustain a transcendent desire for the other in its materiality.

Having determined the impossibility of integrating the transcendent and the social, Coleridge explores strategies for gaining proximity to the other via an alternative understanding of community. The turn to the addressee in the closing lines of the poem

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[29] Along these lines, Georges Bataille observes, "*Violence, excess, delirium, madness* characterize heterogeneous elements to varying degrees" ("Psychological Structure" 142). According to Derrida's definition of it as "all that resists appropriation," materiality is synonymous with such heterogeneity, which Bataille goes on to note is, in its reality, "that of a force or shock" (143).

helps to uncover the dark sympathy that motivates him. As we have seen in other conversation poems, the transcendent other that Coleridge desires occupies a complex relation with the social other to whom he addresses the poem itself: on the one hand, it draws the addressee towards Coleridge by serving as the impetus for the poem; on the other hand, it separates the addressee insofar as the addressee is generally unable to enter into the transcendent desire as Coleridge presents it. In "Dejection," however, the transcendent other as Coleridge now understands it—"Thou Wind, that rav'st without" (99)—is at odds with the object that Coleridge wants the "Dear Lady" to desire. Indeed, the implication throughout is that what Coleridge understands now as a profound alterity is the true reality behind the "Joy" he preaches to his addressee. Yet his hope is still tempered with a fear that the trajectory of desire he has journeyed is inevitable for those who desire the other, as we see in his comment that "small thoughts have I of sleep: / Full seldom may my friend such vigils keep!" (126-27). The closing stanza reveals furthermore that the addressee is already on this path, as she is suffering like Coleridge has: "Visit her, gentle Sleep! with wings of healing, / And may this storm be but a mountain-birth" (128-29). Thus, despite the poem's suggestion of separation and Coleridge's claims of solitude, a suffering, "dejected" community is already being described in between the appeals to the joyful transcendent desire Coleridge wishes he could recall. In the end, his hope for the other stalls their mutual descent into melancholy, creating a dark sympathy that permits Coleridge to posit a transcendent object of desire that he gains indirect access to through the suspension of the other's similar incapacity to desire it.

"Dejection" establishes conditions under which the transcendent other can remain in a position of potential desire, even as it also records Coleridge's serious assessment of the nature of the transcendent object he desires. To accomplish this, Coleridge mobilizes both his anxiety as well as the implicit anxiety of his addressee and emulates a transcendent desire that circumvents the limits of materiality that he gestures towards in his description of the wind's madness. Although he recognizes that he himself cannot manage this madness and shape it once more into the joy that he remembers feeling, his hope that his addressee might be able to amounts ultimately to a rejection of the unthought. In "Constancy to an Ideal Object," this strategy is no longer available to him as he has abandoned the conversational mode in favour of an objective mode from which he only just escapes via his unanswered question, "And art thou nothing?" (25). His investigation in the poem into the nature of transcendent desire brings him to the brink of rejecting the reality of its object altogether, yet his refusal to decide on the "reality" of desire – his own or another's – allows a similar suspension to take place to that which he enacts in "Dejection." Like Geraldine's hesitation before rejecting Christabel's invitation to be desired as a transcendent object, Coleridge uses the central question of this poem to explore the role such hesitation plays in facilitating transcendent desire.

Coleridge frames the "yearning Thought" (7) that drives "Constancy" within a dynamic that moves between transcendent and social modes of desire, so that the absolute characterization of it as "[t]he only constant in a world of change" (3) is undermined and questioned by socializing descriptions of it as "loveliest Friend" (16). This dynamic appears again in reverse a few lines later when Coleridge declares his desire "['t]o have a home, an English home, and thee!' / Vain repetition! Home and Thou are one" (18-19).

Moving from an understanding in which he draws a distinction between the social and the

transcendent, Coleridge goes on to collapse this distinction in favour of identifying a

transcendent object of desire. Indeed, his realization at the end of the first stanza is that it

is precisely this transcendent characteristic that makes "[t]he peacefull'st cot" (20) more

than just "a becalmed Bark" (22). The transcendent gives the social meaning, as he had

discovered in his conversation poems. However, the important question that leads into the

second stanza, "And art thou nothing?" (25), represents a shift in thought from the

conversation poems into the realm of dejection. To ask this question after noting the

transformative role of the transcendent in the effective unfolding of social desire is to

interrogate the reality of "home" and all other social forms.

Despite this ambivalence about the transcendent character of his object of desire

(and, complexly, his social addressee), this second stanza discerns ultimately that the

transcendent dimension Coleridge repeatedly perceives is related to a materiality he

cannot assimilate. This other is not simply "nothing" (25), but rather it is also an "other"

that exceeds the one who observes it. Notably, the subject desiring this other is described

as a "woodman," a figure that appears in several of Coleridge's poems, including the

"Dejection" ode. There, addressing the "Wind, that rav'st without" (99), Coleridge

suggests *contra* his appeal only a few years earlier to the innate harmony that unites the

wind with the harp or the spirit of the imagination with the mind, that the underlying

materiality of inspiration is better fit for a "pine-grove whither woodman never clomb"

(101) than for any lute. By distinguishing the site of nature from the human observer,

Coleridge makes a similar move to the one he would later make with "Constancy," where

the natural phenomenon stands apart from the described experience of the woodman that

the poem observes. This reinforced separation—which is notably hidden from the

woodman himself—recalls the separation of the maiden from the nightingales and is also

in keeping with the trajectory Coleridge's thought takes beginning with "Dejection." The

woodman's observation of the "image with a glory round its head" (30), like the

"yearning Thought, that liv'st but in the brain" (4), is an experience of relation, or at least

of desire for the other. When he appears in both "Dejection" and earlier,[30] the figure of

the woodman functions generally in opposition to transcendent desire—hence his

necessary absence from scenes of potentially transcendent quality. Even in "Constancy,"

the ironic position of the narrator in relation to the ignorant woodman serves to question

the woodman's understanding of what constitutes the transcendent. The glow he

worships, Coleridge indicates discreetly in a scientific footnote, is a mere trick of

nature.[31] Because of the vantage point Coleridge offers the reader, this "trick" serves as a

symbol for the unknown in nature, which is itself an expression of materiality's alterity.

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[30] Two earlier instances of the woodman may serve to showcase the development of Coleridge's figure in his poetry. In "France: An Ode," written in the spring of 1798, Coleridge mentions the woodman in similarly absent terms. Instead of imagining this absence as liberating the Dionysian scene of materiality envisioned in "Dejection," however, the woodman who does not appear participates in a stanza meant to invoke "those objects in Nature, the contemplation of which had inspired the Poet with a devotional love of Liberty" (CP 1:463). In this situation, the speaker describes himself winding through the woods "Where, like a man belov'd of God, / Thro' glooms, which never woodman trod, / … / Inspir'd beyond the guess of folly / By each rude shape, and wild unconquerable sound!" (10-11, 13-14). Before its appearance in "Dejection," the figure of the woodman also appeared in one of Coleridge's earlier poems, "The Raven" (1798), as an antagonistic force. Having described the wanderings of the titular Raven and his "Wife," Coleridge introduces "a Woodman in leathern guise: / His brow, like a pent-house, hung over his eyes" (24-25). Prefiguring the doomed mariner about whom Coleridge would write later that same year, the Woodman wordlessly destroys the Raven's home and children to gather wood for building a ship. When the ship sinks in a storm, the Raven discovers that "REVENGE WAS SWEET!" (42). Unlike the woodman in "Dejection," whose absence is what would make the "pine-grove" a suitable venue for the "scream / Of agony by torture lengthen'd out" (97-98), the Woodman's own actions are what prompts "the sea-shriek of their perishing Souls" (39) in the earlier poem.
[31] In his biography of Coleridge, James Gillman describes Coleridge's attempt in 1799 to witness the "spectre of Brocken" – the phenomenon he describes in "Constancy" – during his visit to Germany. For his account of the phenomenon, he quotes from a "Mr. Jordan" who describes the experience in a manner that resonates with the poem: "there appeared before me, though at a great distance towards the Worm mountains, the gigantic figure of a man, as if standing on a large pedestal" (142).

If the poem is partly an attempt to explore the nature of the object of transcendent desire, then it is also an attempt to document the experience of that desire. In the case of the woodman, Coleridge describes what might be called (after Schiller) a "naïve" experience of the transcendent desire for the other. Yet his own description of desire as it unfolds over the course of the poem cannot be undone by the extended simile of the woodman. Instead, it remains suspended in the question that opens the second stanza and in the promise of the title itself: that Coleridge's commitment to the ideal object will remain "constant." As we have seen, however, this constancy undergoes several permutations over the course of Coleridge's career: from the relentless commitment to "duty" in pantisocracy, to the radical passivity advocated in the conversation poems, to the unasked-for engagement of "forc'd unconscious sympathy" in "Christabel," to the ambivalent retention of a hope for the other and not the self that he deploys as a feature of dejected desire. The trajectory of this development is one that moves towards an increasing attenuation of what it means to be "constant." Indeed, as we can see in the closing line of "Constancy," which draws attention to the woodman's mistake ("Nor knows he makes the shadow, he pursues!" [32]), the implication is that the true nature of the unthought is in fact irrationality and ignorance. To be constant to a community with that which might in fact be nothing, the poem implies, is a kind of superstition that jars against the rationality embodied by the poem's footnote. Yet this suggestion is also not a rejection. Indeed, it appears that Coleridge's constancy remains to the end of his writing career, though by that time it has narrowed in duration and substance to an *event* of desire only. In this way, the object of desire and its expressibility in light of the inscrutable materiality Coleridge asserted in "Christabel" can finally be aligned in such way that

the unthought becomes possible without turning over immediately either into more stable and social idealisms, on the one hand, or into simple ignorance, on the other.

Where Coleridge compares his transcendent desire with that of the "enamoured" (but also deluded) woodman in "Constancy to an Ideal Object," his later self-fashioning as a "lone Arab, old and blind" ("Love's Apparition" 1) in "Love's Apparition and Evanishment" reflects a further conceptual shift from the active pursuit of the transcendent object to an increasingly resigned acceptance of that object's inaccessibility. The figure of the Arab, who also appears in "The Blossoming of the Solitary Date-Tree," is drawn from a number of sources, including Book 5 of Wordsworth's *The Prelude* and the *Travels* of James Bruce.[32] This figure expresses Coleridge's feeling of nomadism not only in his own life generally, but also as a defining characteristic of the Romantics. Yet, notably, the poem does not describe a *wandering* nomad, but rather one in stasis: a person "[s]ome caravan had left behind / Who sits beside a ruin'd well" (2-3). Abandoned by the wandering caravan of Romanticism, the Arab has also lost his sight, a feature that recalls (if it also inverts) the condition Coleridge claims for himself in "Dejection." There, he describes his diminished capacity: "I see them all so excellently fair, / I see, not feel how beautiful they are!" (37-38), which implies that true poetic vision has abandoned him, leaving him "gaz[ing]—and with how blank an eye!" (30). Similarly blind and alone, the lonely Arab comes to serve as a figure of dejected desire.

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[32] For Wordsworth, see *The Prelude* (1805): "He seemed an arab of the Bedouin tribes; / … Much rejoiced / The dreaming man that he should have a guide / To lead him through the desart" (5.78, 81-83). The connection between Coleridge and James Bruce was first made by Lane Cooper in a 1906 article, "The Abyssinian Paradise in Coleridge and Milton." Cooper's observation has been taken up several times since, including in E.S. Shaffer's *'Kubla Khan' and the Fall of Jerusalem*, where Shaffer writes in an endnote of Coleridge's use of "Bruce's descriptions of Arab nomadism" (329n.42).

Tilottama Rajan writes of "Love's Apparition and Evanishment" that it is distinguished by "the absence of a sympathetic auditor, which confirms the separation of vision from allegory by exiling conversation into soliloquy" (*Dark Interpreter* 238). While I have suggested that all of Coleridge's conversation poems are monologic to begin with, Rajan's observation underscores the shift in *intention* that seems to be at work in this poem as well. Although the conversation poems did not contain dialogue, they had a dialogic intent, positing an addressee outside the self. With "Love's Apparition and Evanishment," the addressee is Coleridge himself.[33] Like Christabel, his restfulness is disturbed (and he wonders if his vision is "a transient sleep, perchance, / Flitted across the idle brain" [13-14]); however, unlike in that poem, where Christabel's eyes are forced open to behold the other in its unaccountable materiality, Coleridge finds that "a trance, / Turn'd my eye inward" (16-17). This failure of the poem to transport him into the space of the other might stem from its use of allegory, which Paul de Man argues was, for Coleridge, "purely mechanical, an abstraction whose original meaning is even more devoid of substance than its 'phantom proxy,' the allegorical representative; it is an immaterial shape that represents a sheer phantom devoid of shape and substance" ("Rhetoric of Temporality" 191-92).[34] In other words, allegory does not appear to go far enough.

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[33] To take up Rajan's later work on *Romantic Narrative*, we might posit an analogous distinction between "the lyrical consciousness," which is "present to itself, able to bypass the reflective and reflexive mode of language in song, or at least to make language the true voice of feeling" (12), and a peculiarly Romantic form of "narrative" as "a process in which the self discloses its difference from itself" (14). Thus, although the conversation poems appear as narratives in the conventional sense of positing a world with multiple actors, their monologic character makes the potential interlocutors secondary to their expression of a feeling that language is enabled to carry unproblematically; by contrast, Coleridge's later poetry inquires into the ways alterity can surface and disrupt even from within the self.

[34] De Man is here quoting from *The Statesman's Manual*.

Yet this inability to orient him towards what Levinas might call "welcoming" the other is in keeping with what the impulse of dark sympathy has come to mean for Coleridge. Like the community of "impossible mourning," dark sympathy catalyzes a paradoxical relationship in which, on the one hand, the other gets appropriated into the self's understanding of itself and its relations and, on the other, the other remains irreducibly other. As Derrida writes, "If there is a finitude of memory, it is because there is something of the other, and of memory as a memory of the other, which comes from the other and comes back to the other" (29). The memories Coleridge recalls stir the possibility of reigniting the kind of transcendent desire that he entertains in his conversation poems; however, the threat of death brooding over the poem – figured as the doomed Arab, the drooping flower, and the corpse of Hope – refuses such optimism. Nevertheless, in each instance, the poem repeatedly gestures to a moment in which that possibility of relating to the transcendent other seems realizable. Whether it is the Arab gazing towards heaven (7), Coleridge's experience of having his "eye [turned] inward" (17) by a "transient sleep" passing across his brain (13-14), or Love's (futile) kiss upon her sister's lips (24), the *event* of desire each moment expresses posits a community characterized by uncertainty, passivity, and risk. These elements of materiality not only resist appropriation into the dominant social narrative, but also refuse to coalesce into the kind of imaginary we might see in either the One Life or pantisocracy.

Instead, as both this poem and "Constancy to an Ideal Object" demonstrate, the momentary recovery of this relational proximity *qua* inoperative community also makes it "die anew" (28). If Coleridge's tendency earlier in his career was to substitute a stable metaphysics for the capaciousness of the unthought, then his later work following

"Christabel" allows the unthought to merge with the finitude of death, an important idea that Mary Shelley will also develop. The darkness of dejected community results from the gradual, decades-long attenuation of Coleridge's idealism. Moreover, this decline begins early on with his deep attraction to what Seamus Perry calls "the uses of division," which ensures that idealism appears for him never as a straightforward unity, but rather as an attempt to think "multeity" – a set of relations. Unable to develop a sustainable imaginary for idealism, Coleridge turns to face the "sight to dream of, not to tell" at the heart of any idealism and discovers community – understood as mere being-with – in the midst of his failed transcendent desire.

If dark sympathy in Coleridge's poetry appears as a momentary surfacing of hope in the midst of dejection, then his growing recognition of the way materiality wholly encompasses him is largely responsible. Differently from Godwin, the destabilizing impact of the materiality of desire for Coleridge is initially an experience he works to avoid. His thinking has been driven by imaginaries such as pantisocracy or those he describes via conversation; the realm of drive on the underside of such desire erodes the efficacy and pervasiveness of these imaginaries and prompts him to retreat into a pseudo-transcendent mode characterized by its abstraction, rather than its limitless scope. What "Christabel" and Coleridge's later poetry suggest, however, is that the object of transcendent desire cannot be separated from materiality. As a vehicle for the imaginary, transcendent desire is not identical with materiality; however, its definition as potentially infinite necessitates that it overlap with the radical inscrutability of materiality. To return to the opening discussion of traversing the fantasy from desire into drive, we may note

that Coleridge's attraction to forms of desire is forced to recognize how desire itself can be undermined by an insufficient attention to drive. The fantasy of his desire, appearing as the harmony of a life in the pantisocracy or as the primordial unity of the one Life, demands that all outlying elements be encompassed by it. This includes the experience of that which exceeds his ability to re-present it. Such experience, as Žižek reminds us, emerges from the realm of drive. Desire seeks to satisfy itself with a remainder still left over to perpetuate that desire through difference: that remainder emerges as a result of Law or prohibition. As we have seen in "Christabel," drive circumvents such symbolic constraints in a moment of pure *jouissance*, which is then recapitulated within the social framework of desire; however, this recapitulation signals the epochal shift of the event of materiality that has preceded it. With his later poetry, Coleridge takes up this event as the starting point for community, rather than desire. "Dejection," therefore, can be read as bidding farewell to his emphasis upon transcendent desire, which he further deconstructs in "Constancy." When, in "Love's Apparition and Evanishment," he observes the destructive effect of love upon hope – of an idealized social desire upon transcendent desire – he is expressing a more developed position on the nature of the bare community he has resigned himself to: namely, that community is not the expression of transcendent desire, but of its failure.[35]

For both Godwin and Coleridge, all concrete forms of relation persistently fail to accommodate the sheer scope of desire posited by sympathy. In the extreme relations Godwin forges between Falkland and Caleb, or Mandeville and Clifford, and the

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[35] As we see in prose writing, such as *Aids to Reflection* (1825) or *On the Constitution of Church and State* (1829), Coleridge continued to reflect upon social forms of desire; however, unlike his early attempts, Coleridge has relegated this work of reflection to the "abstruse research" he posits in "Dejection" as that which protects him from the effects of materiality.

unspeakable relation we see between Christabel and Geraldine in Coleridge's poem, a potentially sympathetic union loses its socializing restriction, revealing a violent and totalizing energy. This energy produces the figure of the misanthrope for Godwin and, in Coleridge's later work, what he called "dejection" or "reality's dark dream." For Mary Shelley, this dark energy of materiality suggests itself as the grounds (or *ungrund*) for community itself. As I hope to show, the issues sympathy raises form a central problematic throughout her work. This problematic retraces the conflict sympathy implies for the Romantics between its social manifestation and what seems to be its transcendent core. By imagining worlds in which Coleridge's "sight to dream of, not to tell" takes on a central and defining place within the psychological – or even literal – landscape, Shelley forces events of dark sympathy to occur, obstructing any attempt to retreat into the safety of an imaginary – either social or transcendent – and facilitating a more extended reflection on the nature of a community that lies beyond desire.

CHAPTER FIVE
**"[T]he thorny truth of things": A Community Beyond Desire in *Frankenstein*,
Matilda, and *The Last Man***

> "... I know, at least I have often suspected, that you have a
> tendency, partly constitutional perhaps & partly owing to
> the turn of your philosophy, to look over-intensely at the
> dark side of human things..."
> — Letter from Leigh Hunt to Mary Shelley (SC 6:845)

I have been arguing that sympathy takes on an agonistic quality in the Romantic

period, instantiating a tension between, on the one hand, the conflicting, though both

imaginary, fields of sociality and transcendence, and, on the other hand, a newfound

sense of radical otherness and its effects. Mary Shelley takes up this uneven triad of

sociality, transcendence, and materiality in her novels, developing an account of

community that attempts to face materiality directly. In the previous chapters, I have

attempted to show that Godwin's and Coleridge's respective articulations of this

encounter I am calling dark sympathy emerge partly under the pressure of a more robust

sense of alterity, inaugurated via the materialist paradigm of the eighteenth century and

the materiality it gestures towards. Shelley posits a similar event, while also exploring the

accompanying tendency to resist this materiality, which her work suggests has the

dangerous potential of allowing an ideology of the aesthetic to substitute for a more

limitless desire. For Paul de Man, an ideology of the aesthetic aligns with the tendency to

accept as unproblematic the category of the aesthetic as a bridge for getting from ideas to

life in the world.[1] In other words, aesthetic ideology mistakes imaginaries – even

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[1] In his reading of Kant's third critique, Paul de Man contrasts Schiller and Kant to describe a similar movement to the one that Shelley's novel charts from a sublime in support of the social to a sublimity that not only undermines it, but leaves subjectivity itself also in ruins, providing, I want to suggest, the grounds for an alternative form of community. For de Man, Schiller silently revises Kant's theory of the sublime by

transcendent imaginaries – as somehow complete and true to life. This chapter reads

Shelley's deployment of dark sympathy in three of her novels as developing a critique of

such aesthetic ideology as merely an amplified form of desire that fails to take account of

materiality. Against such a false transcendence, Shelley posits an analogy between

transcendence and the very materiality that aesthetic ideologies seek to deny. I will focus

on Shelley's first two novels, *Frankenstein* and *Matilda*, in order to sketch out her inquiry

into the limits of sympathetic desire and to establish the place of this radical alterity,

which haunts the edges of the transcendent in her thought.[2] In *The Last Man*, I will argue

that Shelley returns to the site of the social in order to determine the possibilities that may

remain for any sympathy—even a dark one that lingers after the end of all human

relations.

Of all the characters that appear here, the nameless Creature of Mary Shelley's

Frankenstein perhaps embodies best this dissertation's central argument about the

shifting his terms from an asymmetrical set of ideas appearing as the mathematical and dynamic sublime, which de Man describes as "shot through with dialectical complication" ("Phenomenality and Materiality" 73), to the straight-forward and totalizing polarity of the theoretical and practical sublime. The Schillerian concept of the sublime (which de Man describes as "psychological" as opposed to Kant's "philosophical" approach ["Kant and Schiller" 141]) exists within a tropological system, which appears at least partly analogous to the Lacanian Symbolic order. Through the trope of chiasmus (which de Man identifies as a central trope in Schiller's style [135]), Schiller offers up the imagination as a mechanism that overcomes the limits of representation, "remedy[ing] our incapacity" (146), by segregating the intellect from the threat of reality. De Man's theory of aesthetic ideology will prove important for my reading of *The Last Man*, as this novel focuses especially upon the relation of aesthetics to materiality within the context of the sublime.

[2] My decision to discuss *Matilda* rather than *Valperga* is largely pragmatic due to the size and complexity of the latter novel. Both works offer a picture of the deep problems associated with social desire and align the transcendent form of desire with the materiality of grief and trauma that cannot be expressed. Indeed, *Valperga* accounts more extensively for this latter point than *Matilda*, as Euthanasia experiences a dark sympathy for Beatrice fuelled in part by the trauma the latter has experienced in a way that Woodville never does with Mathilda. Likewise, I have omitted discussion of Shelley's later novels, *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* (1830), *Lodore* (1835), and *Falkner* (1837), as the critical question of their role in Shelley's larger corpus extends somewhat beyond the scope intended for the chapter. (For a brief review of how "critics have narrativized [Shelley's] corpus" (11), see Tilottama Rajan's introduction to *Valperga* [11-13].) Nevertheless, of these, *Falkner* could be read as articulating a dark sympathy between Elizabeth and Falkner, which is suggestive particularly in light of Betty Bennett's argument about "Shelley's Reversioning of Elizabeth from *Frankenstein* to *Falkner*," as Elizabeth of *Frankenstein* never seems to experience this in any way.

Romantic era's engagement with a problem eighteenth-century philosophy ultimately

evades: that, at the limits of sympathy, a desire for the other persists. Thus, for instance,

Victor's pursuit of his Creature across the ice fields of the north—intent on his

destruction, even as he preserves him by telling their story to Robert Walton—exhibits

several characteristics of dark sympathy. These reverberate to the end of the novel, where

the Creature is permitted to give a closing defense and in effect gets the last word.

Offering no comment, Walton only observes the final "darkness and distance" (244) into

which the Creature disappears, suggesting an openness to the inscrutable, material quality

of the Creature. This openness circles around the (im)possibility of sympathizing with the

Creature and suggests, though Shelley does not take it further in her first novel, an

alignment between the absence of desire and community. As we have seen elsewhere, the

desire for the other as transcendent often gets submitted compulsively to a desire for the

other in its social role, which is to say a phenomenal or even imaginary form. Coleridge's

pantisocratic experiment, for example, follows this trajectory. The philosophical

confidence in this strategy of desire faces increased challenges over the course of the

eighteenth century, as the idea of transcendence begins to merge with what Jacques

Derrida calls "all that resists appropriation" ("Typewriter Ribbon" 353), or materiality.

The result is that the socializing drive of the eighteenth century, epitomized by sympathy,

repeatedly comes up against the socially inassimilable reality that Mary Shelley describes

as "the thorny truth of things" (*Last Man* 360).

     In her introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, Shelley recounts how the

initial idea for her novel prompted a recourse to the language of sympathy. She writes,

"Swift as light and as cheering was the idea that broke in upon me. 'I have found it! *What*

terrified me will terrify others" (358; emphasis mine). Predicating the universal appeal of her idea upon an assumption of shared identity, Shelley not only takes sympathy as the *modus operandi* of her writing practice, but also organizes that sympathetic exercise around a mutual anxiety—the terror of the other. While Shelley suggests a pivotal role for sympathy in facilitating human social understanding, she also recognizes its limits and inherent artifice. In that same introduction, she describes her "affection for [the novel], for it was the offspring of happy days" (358). Those days involved "many a walk, many a drive, and many a conversation, when I was not alone" (358)—days very unlike the bleak present Shelley implies for herself.

A similar opposition appears in the fictional introduction of *The Last Man*, where she writes: "My labours have cheered long hours of solitude, and taken me out of a world, which has averted its once benignant face from me, to one glowing with imagination and power" (7). This movement into a world of the imagination is a movement into an earlier time of sympathy, as she avers: "For awhile my labours were not solitary; but that time is gone; and, with the selected and matchless companion of my toils, their dearest reward is also lost to me" (6). By extension, such a movement implies a departure from the actual, present time. With the loss of her life with Percy, Shelley suggests that she has also lost the foundation that might give meaning to the work of her imagination. As she had written a few years earlier, only months after Percy's death, "When I meditate or dream on my future life, one idea alone animates me – I think of friends & human intercourse – if I do not say, 'how flat & unprofitable!' – I weep to think how unstable all that is" (*Journals* 2:430). In the wake of such extreme loss, Shelley uncovers the horizon of sympathy's possibility. There remains a temporary

power in "[l]iterary labours, the improvement of my mind, & the enlargement of my ideas" to "elevate me from my lethargy" (*Journals* 2:431-32), which resembles Coleridge's initial use of suspension as a method for avoiding dejection; nevertheless, the sympathetic content of these occupations is distinguished from an idea of sympathy that can no longer be sustained. Shelley's personal experience of this divergence reflects a long-spanning critical investigation of sympathy and its limits, as I have tried to show in previous chapters. Her exploration of this experience in her writing takes these ideas about the dark side of sympathy still further.

Against Transcendence in Frankenstein

Critics have regularly drawn attention not only to Shelley's interest in sympathy, but also to her peculiar take on it. By far, *Frankenstein* has attracted the most critical attention both generally and with regards to the subject of sympathy. David Marshall, most prominently, argues that *Frankenstein* "specifically focuses on the causes and effects of sympathy's failure" (181). While Shelley affirms in that novel a generally sympathetic character for human relations, she diverges from the eighteenth-century moral philosophers in what she takes to be sympathy's greatest asset and its central idea: an emphasis upon alterity. The potentiality this entails is at the same time that which grounds sympathy and enables it to be more than just mere sociality. Along these lines, I want to argue that *Frankenstein* introduces a dark sympathy that is, on the one hand, deeply connected with the desires of its three narrators: Robert Walton, Victor Frankenstein, and the Creature. On the other hand, the novel also resists the work of dark sympathy by permitting a nostalgia for the social to foreclose upon it. Thus, in the first

place, I will explore briefly how Shelley's use of framing narratives enables her to introduce the question of sympathy as an orienting theme for the novel—and, furthermore, how the framing narratives showcase sympathy's troubling limits as the narratives of each frame rub up against each other in competition for approval. I will then focus on each of these narratives to show how they depict the intersection of sympathy with social and transcendent forms of desire and, ultimately, with drive. Walton is compelled by sympathy, yet is ultimately unable to distinguish between social and transcendent desire, imagining that his ambition resembles Victor's. Never fully facing the materiality that accompanies transcendent desire, he is forced to return to the social realm at the close of the novel. By contrast, Victor could be read as the antithesis of a sympathizing subject: not only does he reject his Creature's appeals for sympathy, but he also rejects Walton's. Yet, if Victor fails to sympathize, then to what does he direct his transcendent desire? As I will argue below, his transcendent desire is ultimately directed towards the void of his own identity, which he expresses through the ambivalence of his desire itself. When this ambivalent desire intersects with the void in identity that is signalled by the Creature, an event of dark sympathy occurs as he perceives for a moment the impossibility of that desire. Nevertheless, although she depicts moments of dark sympathy throughout to emphasize desire's insatiability, Shelley does not ultimately allow this dark sympathy to express its full implication. Instead, as I have suggested, the novel remains only *open* to materiality, as it remains oriented by Walton's entrenched (if also unwanted) position within the social realm.

Jeanne Britton argues that, if the novel seems to depict the failure of sympathy, it also performs sympathy successfully through its narrative approach, as each narrating

voice sympathizes with the voice it frames (3). At the heart of the novel is the Creature's

story, embedded within his creator's narrative, which is also embedded within the letters

of Robert Walton to his sister—each of these narrators trust implicitly the imaginative

vision that has been passed on to them, and they seek to replicate it faithfully. On the one

hand, Shelley borrows this form from writers such as Godwin. As we see in *Caleb*

Williams, for instance, Caleb as a first-person narrator is able to incorporate the

experience of his rival, Falkland, via the narrative of Falkland's servant, Collins. On the

other hand, a key difference between the two approaches lies in the status each one gives

to these narratives. In *Caleb Williams*, Caleb openly admits his active involvement as an

editor, inviting us to question his reliability in light of the larger mystery of the novel. He

writes: "I shall interweave with Mr. Collins's story various information which I

afterwards received from other quarters [...] To avoid confusion in my narrative, I shall

drop the person of Collins, and assume to be myself the historian of our patron" (66).

This manipulation of the text is notably absent in *Frankenstein*. Instead, Robert

Walton makes a point to describe the fidelity with which he records Victor's tale: "I have

resolved every night, when I am not engaged, to record, as nearly as possible in his own

words, what he has related during the day" (62). Victor likewise adopts the voice of the

Creature without any reference to the mediation this transfer implies: "I consented to

listen; and seating myself by the fire which my odious companion had lighted, he thus

began his tale" (128). In both cases, the force of sympathy operates on the narratives as

an implicit mark of their authenticity. The Creature's story affects Victor despite the fact

that it is being re-narrated by Victor himself retrospectively. He explains to Walton: "The

latter part of his tale had kindled anew in me the anger that had died away while he

narrated his peaceful life among the cottagers" (169). Similarly, Walton describes to his

sister the future plans for the manuscript of Victor's story: "This manuscript will

doubtless afford you the greatest pleasure: but to me, who know him, and who hear it

from his own lips, with what interest and sympathy shall I read it in some future day!"

(62). Britton observes that "*Frankenstein* offers a version of sympathy that is constituted

by the production and transmission of narrative as compensation for the failures of face-

to-face sympathetic experience" (3). Likewise, the over-determined appeals that each

narrator makes to his respective auditor regarding the effectiveness of the narrative itself

aims to cover over the indeterminacy each one faces in actually sympathizing.

For the reader as well, the respective narratives posit themselves as deserving of

sympathy;[3] however, in the movement between these narratives, as we see in Victor's

description of how his anger was "kindled anew" (169) by the narrative, the reader

encounters the limits of sympathy. Although the narratives explicitly invite sympathy, the

very boundaries that separate them also expose sympathy's ambiguities, including the

impulse to sympathize with that which is potentially unsavoury or even villainous. For

example, even after discovering Victor's complicity in the deaths of his loved ones and

the other disturbing incidents composing the biography, Walton continues to sympathize

with him, observing how Victor's "fine and lovely eyes were now lighted up with

indignation" (231).[4] Indeed, by comparing the individual narrator's self-determined

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[3] Alan Rauch writes: "Shelley's narrative technique is an inclusive one, conscripting the reader into a participatory process that is diametrically opposed to Frankenstein's isolationist and exclusionary methodology" (229).

[4] Cf. Jonathan Lamb's interesting discussion of what he calls (after Milton's introduction of the term) "horrid sympathy." This "requires a transit from the realm of the human into another unprecedented zone of experience, where a bond is formed with alien thoughts and feelings" (98). Nevertheless, I would distinguish "horrid sympathy" from dark sympathy because of how it serves as an extended mode (rather than an event), which involves "the loss of ownership which Milton distinctly represents as a transfer of authorship, a loss of symmetry, and a breakdown of narrative" (96).

framing of how he wishes to sympathize with his selected object of desire to the way the

text seems to suggest he should be relating to that object, we can take up the ambiguity of

sympathy in a manner that can be extended into Shelley's similar investigation in

Matilda. Unlike *Frankenstein*, however, *Matilda* represents a sustained gazing into the

dark materiality of this ambiguity, from which there can be no retreat.

In Victor, Captain Robert Walton believes he has found a kindred spirit. He writes

to his sister: "I said in one of my letters, my dear Margaret, that I should find no friend on

the wide ocean; yet I have found a man who, before his spirit had been broken by misery,

I should have been happy to have possessed as the brother of my heart" (60). Walton

finds himself attracted to Victor for a number of reasons, chief of which is a "sympathy

and compassion" for the stranger's "constant and deep grief" (60). He imagines, as

sympathy insists he must, that Victor "must have been a noble creature in his better days,

being even now in wreck so attractive and amiable" (60). This assumption, founded upon

sympathy, says more about Walton than it does about Victor – for, as we come to

discover, Victor is not really so "noble" as he is ambitious, and herein lies the true source

of Walton's partiality. Earlier, when he is describing his desire for a friend, Walton

specifies: "when I am glowing with the enthusiasm of success, there will be none to

participate my joy [*sic*]; if I am assailed by disappointment, no one will endeavour to

sustain me in dejection" (53). This language of "success" and "disappointment" is

explicitly linked with Walton's demand: "I desire the company of a man who could

sympathize with me; whose eyes would reply to mine" (53). If sympathy involves an

imaginative exchange in which the self comes to understand itself through the assessment

of others, Walton discovers in Victor an expansiveness that he hopes to emulate. Walton describes his first impressions of Victor, lately come aboard his ship:

> I never saw a more interesting creature: his eyes have generally an expression of wildness, and even madness; but there are moments when, if any one performs an act of kindness towards him, or does him any the most trifling service, his whole countenance is lighted up, as it were, with a beam of benevolence and sweetness that I never saw equalled. But he is generally melancholic and despairing. (58)

While Victor presents Walton and his men with a *mysterium* that must be disclosed, articulated through a litany of emotions, Walton works throughout to overcome this by offering Victor's actions an explanation. As we have already seen, the locked trunk in *Caleb Williams* and the "sight to dream of, not to tell" in "Christabel" both posit plenitudes-figured-as-voids at the heart of the darkly sympathetic relations they depict. By contrast, in Victor, Walton sees his own wide ambition reflected back to him as potentiality.

Hence, what is the nature of Walton's desire for Victor and, perhaps of equal importance, how does Victor want to be desired? Walton's attraction to Victor's expansiveness and ambition suggests that he desires Victor transcendently, as an other defined by its limitless scope. Notably, however, the text does not seem to agree with Walton's assessment of his desire. In the first place, Victor appears to reject this kind of desire, asking for only a social connection with Walton. While he calls Walton "my friend" (231) in places, it is clear that he does not mean what Walton means by this word. Instead, he tells Walton directly: "when you speak of new ties, and fresh affections, think you that any can replace those who are gone?" (233). Secondly, where other examples of transcendent desire (including those found in the novel itself) repeat the incapacitating event of dark sympathy that we see in Christabel when her desire is pressed to the limit,

Walton never suffers this. Instead, when he finds his ambition truncated by a reluctant crew, Walton declares, "It requires more philosophy than I possess, to bear this injustice with patience" (237). Walton's desire for Victor, which he characterizes as deriving from the same transcendent orientation he perceives in him, is ultimately only a "philosophy," or "aesthetic ideology." In that same passage, we see the terms he uses to describe the experience of having his desire denied: "Thus are my hopes blasted by cowardice and indecision; I come back ignorant and disappointed" (237). In all cases, he is describing conditions whose value is determined by the social (what he calls soon after, his "hopes of utility and glory" [237]).

Where Walton imagined himself to desire the transcendent, while remaining entrenched within the social, Victor is unclear about what and how he desires. In particular, in the course of his self-exultations at having discovered "the cause of generation and life" (80), Victor is ambivalent about whether the desire that motivates him is transcendent or social in character. In imagining a "new species" that "would bless me as its creator and source" (82), he both posits a society for the future and positions himself as the transcendent object of his creation's desire. He has, it would seem, a transcendent desire for the social and a social desire for the transcendent. In the first place, this uncertainty is useful for providing the initial mediation between Walton/the social and the Creature/materiality. Victor's uncertainty about how he should desire is passed on to the reader and thus further problematizes the sympathy that is meant to unite the narratives. His ambivalence also makes possible a suspension of judgment regarding the Creature, despite the fact that Victor makes clear that he wants to destroy him. Because Victor's intentions are unclear – does he want to destroy the Creature as a way

of fulfilling his pursuit of transcendent desire, or does he want to destroy him for the sake

of society as a whole or in vengeance for his losses – the reader cannot fully sympathize

with him or fully enter into agreement with him about what should happen to the

Creature. Thus, against Victor's own obvious intentions, the text reveals the deeper level

at which he is connected with his creation. At the base of this indeterminacy, moreover, is

Victor's inability to come to grips with materiality, which might also serve as the catalyst

for his dark sympathy with the Creature.

      Victor's incapacity is depicted with startling clarity in his fear of the Creature he

has spent years making. Despite having anxiously anticipated the moment of life for his

creation, Victor reacts violently to the event itself: "I had worked hard for nearly two

years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived

myself rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but

now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and

disgust filled my heart" (85). In the context of the scene as a whole, Victor

psychologically inhabits an indeterminate space, depicted in the novel by his "traversing

my bed-chamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep" (85) and a short while later,

"walking up and down" the courtyard, "listening attentively, catching and fearing each

sound" (86). The affective content of this indeterminacy is anxiety, which Melanie Klein

contends, "originates in the fear of annihilation" (29). As I have suggested, this anxiety

may be linked to the restricted status of transcendent desire within the confines of the

social. Hence, again, it expresses the uncertainty about the nature of Victor's desire. The

dream Victor has almost immediately following the birth is also suggestive of this theme

of libidinal ambiguity. On the one hand, the dream articulates a latent desire for the

social: "Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt" (85).

These streets figure as the social world that Victor believes he has left behind. Yet re-

entry into that social life, exemplified in his embrace of Elizabeth, results in a revelation

of another desire: as many critics have noted, the desire to transcend the mother and

create life without recourse to reproduction.[5] Ultimately, the indeterminacy of his desire

produces a similarly indeterminate object of desire. In the first place, Victor's description

immediately after witnessing his creation posits the Creature's materiality as what

Kristeva calls the "abject," which she argues "is radically excluded and draws me

towards the place where meaning collapses" (2). As abject, the Creature profoundly

disrupts both Victor's social world and his understanding of the transcendent. Kristeva

writes of it as "[i]maginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up

engulfing us" (4). As we also saw in the case of Geraldine's abject body, such an

experience of "beckoning" and "engulfing" can also serve as the grounds of a new social

altogether, one built precisely upon the desiring subject's inability to face such

overwhelming materiality. As George Haggerty writes,

> Frankenstein's creature, sensitive, intelligent, loving, an alter ego, as it
> were, of whom he could take pride, comes to seem gargantuan, misshapen,
> scarcely human, and grotesque, and, in almost direct proportion to the
> ways in which he is treated, violent, excessive, and threatening not just to
> Victor's circle of intimates, but to culture itself. (42)[6]

Ultimately, Victor's ambivalence feeds into his transcendent desire. Indeed, it

serves to define transcendent desire as Godwin's Fleetwood does, "want[ing] something"

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[5] Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar pick up on the work of Ellen Moers and of Marc Rubenstein to note how, "after much study of the 'cause of generation and life,' after locking himself away from ordinary society in the tradition of such agonized mothers as Wollstonecraft's Maria, Eliot's Hetty Sorel, and Hardy's Tess, Victor Frankenstein has a baby" (232).

[6] Timothy Morton sees Shelley as gradually "nudg[ing] the idea of culture away from […] the all-encompassing, grave, and aestheticized authority of layers upon layers of tradition" (263) towards a sense of culture as "neutral medium" or space of contact "which opens to encompass as many participants as possible" (265).

(233), but not knowing what. In other words, his ambivalence provides the grounds for expressing desire as a kind of undecidability. Nevertheless, the novel cannot permit such undecidability. An interminable pursuit of the Creature, endlessly retreating into the North, would ably figure this form of transcendent desire and its fraught relation to materiality. Yet Victor's death in the presence of Walton makes this impossible and serves as another instance of how the novel chooses to withhold the full impact of dark sympathy. Victor's death also ensures that there is no final interaction between him and his creature, such as we see in *Caleb Williams* between Falkland and Caleb. This circumvention of an encounter permits Walton (and the reader) to retain an open view, even imagining the grounds for possibly sympathizing with the Creature. Walton's initial response to the Creature had been "a mixture of curiosity and compassion" (240); however, he attempts to reject these feelings in order to render the Creature abject once more. In the midst of Walton's attempt to narrate the Creature out of his grief and back into guilt ("It is not pity that you feel; you lament only because the victim of your malignity is withdrawn from your power" [242]), though, he is interrupted: "'Oh, it is not thus – not thus,' interrupted the being" (242). The interruption stays Walton's refusal to sympathize and gives the Creature the opportunity to remind the socially susceptible Walton of the gaps in his sympathy:

> I did not satisfy my own desires. They were for ever ardent and craving; still I desired love and fellowship, and I was spurned. Was there no injustice in this? Am I to be thought the only criminal, when all human kind sinned against me? Why do you not hate Felix, who drove his friend from his door with contumely? Why do you not execrate the rustic who sought to destroy the saviour of his child? (243)

These words touch precisely upon an area for which Walton has been seeking sympathy from his silent sister, having had his own "craving" recently obstructed. By allowing the

Creature to have the last word – and a single narrative, rather than one in conflict with his creator's – Walton creates the conditions for sympathy to continue, despite the novel's own reminders of the ways in which sympathy must ultimately fail.

The crux upon which sympathy fails elsewhere in the novel is the materiality embodied by the horrible and fascinating Creature himself, whose narrative occupies the central place in the novel. Indeed, the seemingly paradoxical idea that such an embodiment could have a narrative or could express desire is precisely at the heart of what makes sympathy impossible for Victor and others in the novel. The De Lacey scene, which marks an important turning point for the Creature as his first extended contact with others, draws together several of these issues. In the first place, Shelley uses the blank slate represented by the Creature to explore the idea of narrative itself as a placeholder for identity. Such identities, she implies, are constructed from the exercise of sympathy, so that the desires of others come to cover over the profound otherness the desiring subject discovers within itself. The other result of this reliance upon narrative is that the symbolic realm is never confronted as alien or irreducibly different: instead, the imaginary is treated as a natural bridge to things as they are. By tracing the development of this aesthetic ideology through the experience of the Creature, Shelley offers a key to the earlier appearances of this ideology in the desires of Walton and Victor. In both cases, desire in all forms – both social and transcendent – remains enclosed within an imaginary that materiality does not ultimately pierce. Indeed, the inextricable connection between the Creature's desire and his capacity for expressing it suggests that the materiality of the Creature is never truly encountered by either Walton or Victor. Rather, in each case, the desiring subject remains within the realm of desire. An important exception to this

entrenchment in the novel is the sudden revelation of the Creature to the De Lacey patriarch, which uncovers both the utterly destabilizing force of materiality and the event of community that it instantiates. Although the novel does not take this discovery further – preferring, as we have seen, to remain ultimately within desire – Shelley will investigate the encounter with materiality at greater length in subsequent work discussed below.

David Marshall shows how, "as he watches the *drame bourgeois* and *tragédie larmoyante* of the De Lacey family, the monster plays the role of the ideal sympathetic spectator in a theatre" (214). In this way, Shelley seems to explore more directly Smith's theory of sympathy than Hume's. Marshall sets the stage of sympathy as the Creature gazing unnoticed through "a small and almost imperceptible chink, through which the eye could just penetrate" (*Frankenstein* 134), upon the inhabitants of the home arranged like a "tableau de famille" (Marshall 214). The unilateral conditions under which this experiment in sympathy takes place very much follow the kind of spectatorship model advanced in Smith's work. As Smith writes early in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, "By the imagination we place ourselves in [the other's] situation" (4). For Marshall, it is precisely "[t]he theatrical conditions of sympathy" that "seem to dictate sympathy's failure, either by leading sympathy to the limits where it must discover its own impossibility, or by underlining its epistemological barriers" (216).[7]

I want to suggest that the sympathy that leads the Creature into this symbolic realm of language emerges out of his already existing feeling of affinity for the life he

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[7] Britton points usefully towards John Bender's revision of Marshall. She writes, summarizing Bender, that "though Smith's language is theatrical, sympathy is, by its nature, narrative" (8). While this observation is helpful in terms of the broader operations of sympathy in the novel, Marshall's use of "theatrical" remains relevant for the De Lacey scene in particular. Bender makes this argument in *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England*, Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987.

discovers in the cottage. Moreover, partly *because* theatrical sympathy is enmeshed in "representations" (216) that transform and limit such feelings, the urgency that immediately precedes the cold reality of difference disclosed at the catastrophic ending of the scene represents a brief re-emergence of this desire. Notably, this semiotic desire – described exclusively in terms of affect and emotion ("sensations of a peculiar and overpowering nature: they were a mixture of pain and pleasure" [134]) – mostly lies outside Marshall's analysis. Nancy Yousef comments that Marshall offers "an evocative reading that nevertheless ignores the novel's paradoxical use of an acquired aesthetic sensibility to represent a first moment of untutored responsiveness" (158). For, as Yousef reminds us, the scene is part of a much larger exploration of the nature of development. She writes, "The creature's first glimpse of the cottagers from his dark hovel is not that of one unacquainted with human manners but the informed gaze of a sensitive observer" (158). Yousef argues that the Creature's own narrative contextualizes his semiotic experience of the desire for the other within a larger social construct, figured not only in his reading of Milton, Goethe, and others, but also in his personal exemplification of the social theories of Locke and Rousseau. Thus the Creature's observation of the De Lacey tableau is supported and supplemented by readings of such cultural artefacts as *Paradise Lost*, *Plutarch's Lives*, Volney's *Ruins*, and *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. He draws attention to his experience of reading: "I can hardly describe to you the effect of these books. They produced in me an infinity of new images and feelings" (152). As he goes on to describe, these books provide him with a way of understanding himself. For instance, of *Paradise Lost* he says: "I often referred the several situations, as their similarity struck me, to my own" (154). The result is that the Creature establishes an anterior backdrop of

desire for himself constructed out of the desires of others – sympathy, in this way, is made to precede itself.

Having entered into the realm of desire, the Creature develops strategies for maintaining such desire. Although he contrasts it explicitly with his fear of "the barbarous villagers" (136), the longing he experiences to join the De Lacey family offers an imaginative screen for mitigating such dark emotions. Drawing together his burgeoning social desire for others and his desire for knowledge, which has driven his actions thus far, the De Lacey family and the Creature's watching of them form a closed circuit of sympathy, which the Creature wants only to close more tightly through his full inclusion. Thus, for example, in his conversation with the blind patriarch of the De Lacey family, the Creature equivocates, struggling to keep their discussion at an abstract level. For every one of De Lacey's concretizing questions ("... are you French?" "Are these Germans?" "Where do these friends reside?"), the Creature seeks to suspend the details. He attempts to avoid addressing his physical condition, which has thus far been treated as a site of horrible materiality by others, inviting De Lacey instead to enter into a given imaginary: "But let us change the subject. I am an unfortunate and deserted creature; I look around, and I have no relation or friend upon earth" (158). As the violent conclusion of the scene indicates, the Creature may well be right to avoid the material. Furthermore, although it is not successful because of this sudden entrance of De Lacey's family, the Creature is able to evoke feelings of sympathy in his auditor. Thus De Lacey promises: "I also am unfortunate; I and my family have been condemned, although innocent: judge, therefore, if I do not feel for your misfortunes" (159). Yet De Lacey makes this declaration as if Smithean sympathy were unproblematic, as if Smith's early recognition

that "our senses will never inform us of what [our tortured brother] suffers. They never

did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person" (3) did not in fact carry the seeds for

invalidating sympathy from its inception. Social desire, this scene suggests, will fail in

the face of the absolute uncertainty represented by the other.

In this culminating scene, two key manifestations of this materiality of the

unknown surface: De Lacey's blindness and the Creature's grotesque appearance.[8]

Notably, neither of these materialities "appear" in the sense that they are represented – as

well they cannot. We do not gain insight into the cause of De Lacey's blindness; he was

blind even when the family lived in Paris. With the exception of his general dependence

upon his children, De Lacey does not seem to experience his blindness as a disability.

Indeed, the Creature does not immediately realize the old man's blindness, as De Lacey is

so supported by "the love and respect which the younger cottagers exhibited towards

their venerable companion" (136). The fact of his blindness instead erupts into view as

the condition of possibility for the Creature's making contact: "I had the sagacity enough

to discover, that the unnatural hideousness of my person was the chief object of horror

with those who had formerly beheld me" (157). In choosing to enter the social field

precisely at the moment when his materiality is the least threatening, the Creature further

confirms his ideological investment in the aesthetic. The promise of this approach is

underscored in De Lacey's own assurance that, "I am blind, and cannot judge of your

countenance, but there is something in your words which persuades me that you are

sincere" (159). And, of course, the Creature is being sincere – within certain limits. The

Creature could have overcome his reticence and attended to De Lacey's demand for

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[8] The Creature's encounter with the materiality of Felix's strength is cast here in an explicitly non-material
mode as a "supernatural force" (160).

concrete detail, or he could have pursued the alternative he later proposes of "familiariz[ing] the old De Lacey to me, and by degrees have discovered myself to the rest of his family, when they should have been prepared for my approach" (161). Had he done this, the possibility is raised that the threat he poses may have been averted and a slow sympathy forged through the gradual slippage of blindness into a new understanding. Yet this idealistic (naïve) view is only possible if the symbolic world of the social never has to encounter the materiality of the other, as Walton desires. The Creature's plan depends upon a long, slow modulation of narrative, an accumulation of interpretive strategies and figural tactics, which his conversations with De Lacey would produce for the others. He imagines the success of his social desire to rest upon a textual self-fashioning and, in general, this approach is at work in the circuit of desire that motivates the De Lacey family.[9] On the contrary, as the wordless scene of violence that follows Felix's entry into the room indicates, materiality once revealed cannot be allowed to co-exist with the imaginary of their home and, once De Lacey's "blindness" about the Creature's constitution has been removed, his only reaction is one of horror.

The sympathy that momentarily precedes this scene has notably occurred in the dark – that is, in the literal darkness of De Lacey's blindness, which allows him to suspend, as Coleridge does in the conversation poems, any judgment that might block or obstruct relation – and also in the phenomenological darkness of the Creature's material otherness to himself. This latter sense gets represented in the Creature's description of how Felix "with supernatural force tore me from his father, to whose knees I clung," an impossible or absurd image of the violent underside of sociality, given what we know of

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[9] The textual-affective tenor of their family is revealed in the names: Felix as happiness; Agatha as goodness; and Safie as wisdom or possibly purity.

the Creature's immense size. Yet, at this moment, the Creature is psychologically a child and his physical posture reflects this self-understanding. The implication of this psychological inversion seems that such an introjection derives not from the bleak backdrop of existence (as in Nietzsche), but from society itself.[10] Shot through with social desire, the scene of violence generally depicts the social and transcendent desires of the cottage's inhabitants turning in upon themselves in an effort to protect the imaginary within which they both find expression. A non-imaginary transcendent desire for the other surfaces finally as dark sympathy in this climactic scene, when De Lacey shouts in response to the Creature's plea: "Great God! [...] who are you?" (160). Still residing in darkness, De Lacey comes face-to-face with the momentary rending of the social construct in which he had found some sense of security.

Caught up in De Lacey's words, "who are you," is the sense of having passed momentarily out of one realm of experience into another, as indicated by his exclamation, "Great God!" His questions up to this point have been pointed and certainly aimed at discovering the Creature's identity, yet only in terms of finding a ground from which to sympathize. He thus addresses the Creature with the kind of invitation to social sympathy that we also saw in Christabel's initial encounter with Geraldine: "If you will unreservedly confide to me the particulars of your tale…" (159). Once the Creature's self-restraint is removed by the entry of Felix, De Lacey suddenly realizes that the stakes are in fact much greater than mere sociality. Not only is he now asking about the stranger's identity in the absolute, rather than the relative social sense, his question also draws attention to the much more fundamental influence his blindness has over his

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[10] In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche writes: "The Greek knew and felt the terror and horror of existence. That he might endure this terror at all, he had to interpose between himself and life the radiant dream-birth of the Olympians" (42).

circumstances; that is, he discovers by means of his blindness the radical alterity that exists beyond the secure walls of his family unit.

Slavoj Žižek describes the novel as an example of how

> the inaccessible/traumatic Thing-beyond-representation itself becomes 'subjectivized' [...] the Thing is first constructed as the inaccessible X around which my desire circulates, as the blind spot I want to see but simultaneously dread and avoid seeing, too strong for my eyes; then, in the shift towards drive, I (the subject) 'make myself seen' as the Thing – in a reflexive turn, I see *myself* as It, the traumatic object – Thing I didn't want to see. (*The Ticklish Subject* 365)

Not only does this shift happen to De Lacey, but also to his family as each member is pressed beyond the scope of their social function to become expressions of affect and pure emotion. Unlike the movements of desire we encounter in Walton and Victor, which produce a forward movement in their respective narratives, the effect of an encounter with drive, which their vision of the Creature facilitates, is a break with narrative altogether. The Creature recounts the chaotic scene: "Agatha fainted; and Safie, unable to attend to her friend, rushed out of the cottage. Felix darted forward […] and struck me violently with a stick" (160). The social illusions that have hitherto rendered the cottagers only sad or melancholic disperse to reveal not simply gentleness in Agatha, but extreme sensibility; not only an oppressed spirit in Safie, but terror; and not only resentment in Felix, but outright violence. The Creature's appearance has also effectively concluded the narrative of the cottage, as Felix indicates to his landlord: "The life of my father is in the greatest danger, owing to the dreadful circumstance that I have related. My wife and sister will never recover their horror. I entreat you not to reason with me any more" (162). Felix's desire to "fly from this place" and from his landlord's "reason" (162) originates in the disruption the Creature has made to the functioning of their social desire.

If this is the possible result of an encounter with materiality, then it is perhaps not surprising that the novel shuts down Victor's transcendent desire and ends aboard the ship, with Walton, returning to the safe shores of the social realm. Yet, as I have shown, the novel has also raised enough questions about the demands of the other and the cost of desiring it to omit any final statement from Walton as the representative of the social. While the effect of giving the Creature a final defense is to invite the reader to sympathize with him, the horror at the heart of *Frankenstein*, captured in De Lacey's at once terrified and fascinated cry, presses upon any attempt to take up materiality as itself an object of desire. Indeed, the novel implies that this option is ultimately not available to the desiring subject. As we see exemplified by the De Lacey household and reflected in the circuit of desire that Walton establishes for himself with Victor, the realm of desire is closed. Nevertheless, if desire remains impervious to materiality in this novel, suggesting that De Lacey's cry comes from some other place entirely, Shelley's subsequent work creates scenarios that explore the possibility that materiality might nevertheless produce other effects. Yet, to press her understanding of what both transcendent desire and also that which exceeds desire, namely, the materiality of drive signify for community, Shelley will need to create situations in which access to the social has been cut off.

The Materiality of Relation in Matilda

In *Matilda*, Shelley can attend much more closely to the transcendent question of "who are you," since the novel's central conceit involves an expulsion from the social realm and an exploration of the form of human desire that remains. Discussing the novella, Pamela Clemit suggests that "most critics have read this story of incestuous love

between father and daughter as an uncontrolled expression of private anxieties

concerning Mary Shelley's relationships" with Godwin and her husband ("Changing

Conception" 64). The implication that this is merely a kind of "psychobiography," which

at some level it surely is, assumes a version of transcendent desire that I have thus far

suggested Mary Shelley was suspicious of throughout her work, namely, a desire that is

merely an epiphenomenon of social desire, amplified aesthetically even as it is also

stripped of its anchoring in reality. After all, if the story represents primarily a working

through of "private anxieties," then we might expect a movement towards resolution,

reflecting (as opposed to informing) the developmental trajectory of most novels, rather

than one that tracks towards what Mary Jacobus calls "unreadability" (201). Indeed, the

novel's textual history suggests just such a movement towards negativity; unlike the

Creature, whose social desire only ceases after the death of his maker, Shelley's novel is

transformed from the hopeful and didactic *The Fields of Fancy* into the much bleaker

Matilda. Clemit and others suggest that it is possible to link Shelley's revising of *The

Fields of Fantasy* into *Matilda* by means of "evidence that Mary Shelley planned to

publish *Matilda* for Godwin's benefit" (67); however, the evidence usually advanced in

support of this position is the date she began writing the revision – November 9, 1819,

which happened to be the same day she heard about Godwin's loss of a lawsuit.

Tilottama Rajan argues that it is "preposterous to assume that even Godwin would

publish a text which, however, disguised […], was clearly a daughter's accusation against

her father" ("Mary Shelley's *Mathilda*" 49). She suggests that "[t]he transmission of the

manuscript to Godwin is, rather, a part of a highly overdetermined psychic text" (49).

That is, the novel does more than work through Shelley's demons: it attempts to exorcise

them altogether by mobilizing its very materiality in the direction of Shelley's desire.

Ranita Chatterjee continues Rajan's argument in her suggestion that, "[f]or Shelley, the

manuscript of *Matilda* itself becomes the vicarious path to a new self, the old self

allegorically represented by the character of Mathilda" (144). In response to the novel,

Godwin suggested that "there ought to be, at least if [it] is ever published, a preface to

prepare the minds of readers" (qtd. in Clemit 67-68), underscoring the fact that he is

choosing to remain ignorant about its status as an accusation. As Rajan suggests, *Matilda*

functions in this respect as what she calls a "textual abject," which she distinguishes from

the abject in its more general sense by suggesting that the non-textual does not make

itself available for incorporation or recovery as the textual might.[11]

I would like to take up this idea in order to suggest that the aspect of *transmission*

in the textual abject might give insight into the work of dark sympathy for Shelley.

Shelley's desire for the Other, expressed in the form of her novel, is not only directed

towards Godwin, but also towards all that Godwin represents, including her dead mother,

her childhood, her ambition, England, and a life in which the horrible losses she has

experienced might not have occurred. This desire breaches the bounds of what the Novel,

as an artefact of aesthetic ideology, deems to be possible for desire. Shelley's original

version, *The Fields of Fancy*, closed with Mathilda submitting to such an impoverished

conception of transcendence, as she imagines herself "listening to lessons of Wisdom

which will one day bring me to him when we shall never part" (406). By contrast, the

revised ending closes with an ambiguous statement: "Farewell, Woodville, the turf will

soon be green on my grave; and the violets will bloom on it. *There* is my hope and my

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[11] Rajan gives as an example of the (non-textual) abject, "the creature in *Frankenstein*" that "is associated with monstrosity and filth" (45). Yet we might note that such associations are not present for De Lacey in his moment of radical uncertainty.

expectation; your's [*sic*] are in this world; may they be fulfilled" (67). With only italics to mark an implied transcendent meaning, Shelley's narrator finds her hope both in the future world where she anticipates meeting her father and, more explicitly, in the fact of her death and the impact of its sheer materiality upon the world. This hope of the textual abject lies expressly outside of the social – at remove not only from Woodville's world, but also from the aesthetic world of *The Fields of Fancy* in which "lessons of Wisdom" might succeed in facilitating passage between worlds.

As Clemit notes, Shelley wrote *The Fields of Fancy* between August 4 and September 12, 1819, following the deaths of her children, the most recent being William in June of that year ("Changing Conception" 65). That the same horrific psychobiographical conditions that later gave birth to the traumatic expressions in *Matilda* also form the background for *Fields* suggests that Shelley's revisionary choices are artistic in nature. In particular, I want to suggest that this earlier work can be read as an experiment in the aesthetic ideology she has touched upon in *Frankenstein*. This reading finds support partly in one of its sources, Mary Wollstonecraft's unfinished *Cave of Fancy* (1787),[12] which proposed a series of tales as vehicles for educating the reader. Similarly, *Fields* takes as its setting the "part of these Elysian Gardens" "devoted to those who as before in your world wished to become wise & virtuous by study & action here endeavour after the same ends by contemplation" (354). This work of education that the story attempts represents an effort to manage the transcendent desire the narrator expresses upon discovering that the spirit Fantasia may be able to lead her to the Elysian Fields: "The Elysian fields — I exclaimed with a quick scream — shall I then see? I gasped & could not ask that which I longed to know" (353). Unlike in *Matilda*, where

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[12] Janet Todd calls Shelley's *Fields* a "reworking of her mother's unfinished tale" ("Introduction" v).

that desire is allowed to expand until it intersects with the full force of materiality, the story's first iteration involves an attempt to submit desire to an aesthetic ideology that might enable it to unfold productively. As Marc Redfield notes regarding the relationship of subject formation and aesthetic education, "the subject of aesthetics comes into existence by identifying with an exemplar" (21). *The Fields of Fancy*'s failure, which *Matilda* attempts to rectify, occurs in its attempt to substitute social desire in the place of the transcendent; as the final line of the story indicates, the social cannot take the desiring subject far enough. Thus, as we have seen, in death, the speaker declares: "I am here not with my father but listening to lessons of Wisdom which will one day bring me to him when we shall never part" (406). By contrast, when Woodville attempts to provide Mathilda with similar lessons, the great gap between his social desire and Mathilda's transcendent desire becomes clear.

Articulating this emphatically transcendent desire in *Matilda* requires Shelley to establish clear boundaries to mark the contrasting social realm. An important representative of social desire, as I have already suggested, is Mathilda's last friend, Woodville. While the novella's earlier discussion of Mathilda's father's friends also explores the appearance and effect of social desire, Woodville, whom Shelley earlier called Lovel, Welford, or Herbert (*Matilda* 350 n. 19), brings together several of the novel's earlier images of social relation and activity. He embodies a sociality that is charged with the aesthetic, and thus offers a useful counterpoint to the anti-social transcendent desire that Mathilda expresses, emphasizing how idealism can be co-opted back into sociality. Moreover, Woodville, as a stand-in for Percy Bysshe Shelley,

presents an alternative social vision in the form of an ethical responsibility. He introduces

this theory after Mathilda has invited him to commit suicide with her. He responds,

> I will never desert life untill [*sic*] this last hope is torn from my bosom, that in some way my labours may form a link in the chain of gold with which we ought all to strive to drag happiness from where she sits enthroned above the clouds, now far beyond our reach, to inhabit the earth with us. (59)

Woodville's social program builds upon a more collaborative optimism about human

progress than appears in *Frankenstein*, yet he relies upon the same grounding mechanism

as Victor or Walton; for, at the heart of his ethics is a faith in the success of sympathy. He

argues, "if I can influence but a hundred, but ten, but one solitary individual, so as in any

way to lead him from ill to good, that will be a joy to repay me for all my sufferings,

though they were a million times multiplied; and that hope will support me to bear them"

(59). Moreover, this movement "from ill to good" need not be permanent. As he suggests

to his melancholic friend, "if you beheld on lips pale with grief one smile of joy and

gratitude, and knew that you were parent of that smile, and that without you it had never

been, you would feel so pure and warm a happiness that you would wish to live for ever

again and again to enjoy that same pleasure" (60). The suggestion that the sympathetic

event is sufficient to serve as the basis of what is a transcendent question – the propriety

of existence – is undermined radically only moments afterwards. For, although these

"were indeed words of fire and produced a warm hope in me" (60), it ultimately "was

only a momentary relief" (60): the society into which Woodville aims to draw Mathilda

relies upon an elision of the question about existence in favour of an amplification of the

event of sympathy.

If this implied mark of insufficiency in Mathilda's reaction indicates the boundaries of social desire, then this novel also charts the attempts by characters to pass out of social desire altogether. Mathilda herself is a strange case as she does not appear to reside within the social realm even prior to her father's disclosure of the secret. For instance, she barely notices the attentions of her suitor, "the young man of rank," or of others, desiring instead her father with an excessiveness that foreshadows the father's excessive desire for her.[13] When she hears of her father's planned return, she declares in an ambiguous moment, which foreshadows her father's own declaration, "He will love me!" (15). Raised – like so many Romantic protagonists – to regard the Wordsworthian Sublime as somehow normative, Mathilda begins in transcendent desire, rather than discovering it retrospectively in the suspension of social desire.[14] As I will argue below, Mathilda's initiation into the realm of the social occurs, not when she discovers her father's love for her, but rather when she discovers his self-understanding of it as incestuous. Indeed, incest represents the term around which the social-transcendent conflict turns in this novel.

Unlike Mathilda, the father begins explicitly within a social order—namely, near the top. Born into wealth, he is—like the rejected suitor—"a man of rank" (6) and, especially as he grows up, is motivated by the views of his friends. He possesses a "social temper" that "could never enjoy itself if every brow was not as free from care as his own" (7). Moreover, he embodies the ideological mentality of social constructs in his

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[13] This possible foreshadowing serves as the central point for much of the criticism examining the nature of Mathilda's desire – see especially Chatterjee and the essay by François and Mozes.

[14] The Sublime, unlike the Beautiful, does not require a social reference, which might – as it does in the case of Kant's idea of the *sensus communis*, which he links with the judgement of taste – involve "a faculty of judging which in its reflective act takes account (*a priori*) of the mode of representation of everyone else, in order, *as it were*, to weigh its judgement with the collective reason of mankind" (Kant 123).

"consider[ing] queer and out of fashion all opinions that were exploded by his circle of intimates" and being "dogmatic and yet fearful of not coinciding with the only sentiments he could consider orthodox" (7). The ostensibly transcendent core of this social desire – another desire, "one secret hidden from these dear friends" (7), somehow in conflict and yet also inversely aligned with his social desire – is his love for the daughter of "a gentleman of small fortune" (7), Diana. The love is somehow caught up with every aspect of his selfhood, except its social dimension:

> It was a passion that had grown with his growth; it had become entwined with every faculty and every sentiment and only to be lost with life. None knew of their love except their own two hearts; yet although in all things else, and even in this he dreaded the censure of his companions, for thus truly loving one inferior to him in fortune, nothing was ever able for a moment to shake his purpose of uniting himself to her as soon as he could muster courage sufficient to meet those difficulties he was determined to surmount. (8)

The description of the father's transfer of affections from his social group to Diana alone is a scene of sexual initiation: "Diana had torn the veil which had before kept him in his boyhood" (9). Yet this passing out of the social realm of his school-days into the maturity of his marriage proves to be just one form of sociality supplanting another. This new realm of what appears—if nothing else, for its intensity—to be the expression of a transcendent desire for the other is, in fact, organized by the same aesthetic ideology that guided Walton and Victor. Shelley describes the false horizon the father inhabits as harbouring a subterranean darkness: "Thus my father, born in affluence, and always prosperous, clombe without the difficulty and various disappointments that all human beings seem destined to encounter, to the very topmost pinacle [*sic*] of happiness: Around him was sunshine, and clouds whose shapes of beauty made the prospect divine concealed from him the barren reality which lay hidden below them" (9). The great fall

that follows signifies for Shelley a discovery of the truly transcendent core of relational

desire. Her account of this fall, which occurs for both parties in the course of Mathilda's

pursuit of her father to his death, establishes the terms for analyzing a transcendent desire

that might successfully escape the social.

The action of the pursuit scene originates in the father's declaration of his love for

Mathilda. Anne-Lise François and Daniel Mozes draw attention to the form this catalyst

takes, comparing it to another representation of fatal violation from the previous century:

"Clarissa allows herself to die because of an act done to her body while she was

unconscious, Shelley's heroine insists on the immateriality of the action – a speech act –

which produces her own death" (60). While the events of the pursuit scene unfold out of

that immaterial event, it is only when the father's guilt manifests itself in writing

(something that Judith Barbour, writing about this novel, calls "the repression of

presence" [102]) that he resolves to commit suicide and that Mathilda takes on the role of

incestuous daughter ("he was my lover" [37]). In fact, rather than marking a beginning of

her new life, the immaterial speech act marks an ending. Critics have described the scene

as Shelley's exposition of the limits of Wollstonecraft's egalitarian vision. Anne Mellor,

for instance, writes, "Father-daughter incest thus becomes the most obvious flaw in Mary

Shelley's vision of the egalitarian bourgeois family, the point at which the inherent

inequality of the family is starkly revealed" (199). Mathilda's life with her father is a

more than imperfect rendering of Wollstonecraft's ideals in *Vindication*. François and

Mozes write,

> Wollstonecraft advocates the cultivation of 'modesty' or 'a reserve of
> reason' founded upon knowledge. In *Matilda*, we find, indeed, a father
> who tries to protect his daughter from knowledge, and a daughter who
> demands that she should not be shielded from it. Yet when the daughter's

> demand for 'education' is met, the result is not Wollstonecraftian virtue.
> The truth does not empower Mathilda. (67-68)

Rather, I would like to argue that this scene of disclosure repeats the event in *Frankenstein*'s De Lacey episode in which the patriarch encounters the blank face of the Creature's alterity. In the moments leading up to her father's confession, Mathilda adheres to a Godwinian principle of sincerity, insisting to her father: "Speak that word; it will bring peace, not death […] Yes, speak, and we shall be happy; there will no longer be doubt, no dreadful uncertainty; trust me, my affection will soothe your sorrow; speak that word and all danger will be past and we shall love each other as before, and for ever" (27). Mathilda's ideology of the spoken word, which precedes the scene of reading that seems to fall under the purview of what de Man calls the "materiality of the letter," insofar as it represents an invitation for her father to enter into the presence implied by speech, is a subset of the aesthetic ideology I have identified here as giving rise to a false transcendence. The problem is that the presence into which Mathilda invites her father to enter is primarily a socially determined presence, so that when he finally discloses his secret, "My daughter, I love you!" (28), his transcendent desire becomes a more readily identifiable social desire called incest. This translation of desire requires, therefore, that he follow up his declaration with further explanation both in speech and, finally, in writing. The social presence he has been forced to adopt proves inadequate. He tries to express this sense of inequivalence in his letter, "It is a strange link in my fate that without having seen you I should passionately love you. [...] At length I saw you. You appeared as the deity of a lovely region, the ministering Angel of a Paradise to which of all human kind you admitted only me" (33). The language here is of Dante's love for Beatrice, as the father himself notes, and his love remains for him a "sinless passion" that

appears to resume the false horizon he earlier inhabited with Mathilda's mother, what he

calls, "a fool's paradise of enjoyment and security" (34). From the father's perspective,

his desire for Mathilda cannot be called incestuous at this point. This changes, he writes,

"when I saw you become the object of another's love; when I imagined that you might be

loved otherwise than as a sacred type and image of loveliness and excellence" (34). The

transposition of his transcendent desire into a social context does not simply modify, but

in fact evacuates the transcendent implication entirely, even retrospectively. The father's

desire for his daughter is and has always been incestuous.

Against the ideology of the spoken word, which promises the father a

comprehensible presence with his daughter under the auspices of his love for her, the

father rapidly discovers the limits of that social presence. He explores these limits in the

letter he writes to her, which (like Walton's final letter) unfolds more or less in "real-

time." It is broken into three parts, each of which charts a movement towards the choice

of suicide. The movement it describes can therefore be taken as providing a

psychological foreshadowing of the pursuit that ensues and that culminates with

Mathilda's own desire for death. In the first part, he explains the history of his love for

her, both apologizing for "betray[ing] your confidence" and "endeavour[ing] to pollute

your mind" (32) and promising to "expiate these crimes" through separation (32) and

"remorse" (35). As he describes his past in this section, he emphasizes his former role as

"parent and only friend" (32). The second, much briefer, part of the letter follows his

standing outside her door. He assumes she is asleep, yet we know from what Mathilda

has already said that she "heard a gentle step ascending the stairs; I paused breathless,

and as it approached glided into an obscure corner of the room" (31). Her father allows

himself to call down a benediction upon what he assumes is his sleeping daughter – an act that appears extremely problematic in light of his ongoing desire for her: "Peace, Hope and Love be thy guardians, oh, thou soul of my soul: thou in whom I breathe!" (36). The sentence that begins the final part of his letter demonstrates that the ambiguity of the preceding declaration is no longer supportable within a social context: "I fear that some expressions in it might displease me" (36). On the surface, this third part appears to reiterate the main features of the first part: insisting on their separation, on his guilt, on her need to move on beyond grief, if possible. Nevertheless, his closing declaration of "a gratitude that will never die, and that will, indeed it will, outlive guilt and remorse" (36) suggests a realization that his earlier hope ("if remorse may expiate guilt, I shall be guiltless" [35]) is impossible. He does not imagine a reunion after death as he does in the first section; instead, he dwells upon an abstract reconciliation that he might gain through the speech-act of Mathilda's forgiveness.

The three parts of the letter appear to reflect the distinct roles the father assumes for himself: first, as caregiver; second, as lover; and finally, as lawgiver. His passage through each of these roles reflects a similar dialectic at work in sympathy. Like sympathy in its conventional sense, the image of the father as caregiver joins together social and transcendent impulses in the form of what Julia Kristeva calls "the non-desiring but loving father" (248). In her discussion of the analyst's responsibilities during treatment, Kristeva describes how

> the analyst interprets his desire and his love, and that sets him apart from the perverse position of the seducer and from that of a virtuous Werther as well. […] By ensuring a loving Other to the patient, the analyst (temporarily) allows the Ego in the throes of drive to take shelter in the following fantasy: the analyst is not a dead Father but a living Father; this non-desiring but loving father reconciles the Ideal Ego with the Ego Ideal

and elaborates the psychic space where, possibly and subsequently, an analysis can take place. (*Kristeva Reader* 247-48)

Mathilda's father, in his self-interpretation and self-narration for his daughter, presents his love for her as transcendent and pure and yet also doomed from the outset – a tragic combination that he feels gives him "some claim to your compassion" (33). The field into which he calls both himself and Mathilda is expressly social, despite his claim that "I will wander away from you, away from all life – in the solitude I shall seek I alone shall breathe of human kind" (35), which recalls the promise of Frankenstein's creature. Sociality, as we have seen, is primarily an imaginary mode, rather than physical one. Undergirding the transcendent inflection of his social desire, then, is the aesthetic ideology Mathilda raises earlier in her entreaty that he speak. His regular allusions to Dante and, more generally, the narrative form of this part of the letter further suggest that it represents his attempt to redress the insufficiencies of his earlier speech to her. Yet, in the second section of the letter, the ruse the narrative is meant to play fails as he allows a counter-transference to problematize his self-image as loving father. In imagining Mathilda to be asleep, he overdetermines the libidinal content of his love for her, revealing once more a transcendent desire whose containment within the social is impossible. The father's brief disclosure of his ongoing passion for Mathilda ends abruptly under the influence of the final persona, the father as lawgiver. As Žižek suggests of the relationship between desire and drive, "[d]esire emerges when drive gets caught in the cobweb of Law/prohibition" (*Plague* 43). Resolving to separate himself from her forever, the father now writes, "although I have forfeited your filial love, yet regard them [these last words] I conjure you as a father's command" (36). Over against the second persona he has briefly assumed, he reasserts in the third part of the letter his

patriarchal duty in a series of commands issued to the daughter he expects will pardon
him ("you will forgive me" [36]).

In this final section the father underscores his guilt – as he had in the first section
– as a remainder of a desire that contradicts the social order. That he seeks forgiveness
suggests that this transcendent desire remains encrypted within the social. More than this,
however, he also raises the possibility that Mathilda is guilty too. The first section of his
letter suggests that he has "deprive[d]" her; "cast [her] out shelterless"; "blasted" her
hopes; "destroyed" her "peace and security"; "set the seal of distrust and agony on [her]
heart and brow"; and "endeavoured to steal away her loveliness to place in its stead the
foul deformity of sin" (32-33) – all actions that appear to fall under the categories with
which he opens his letter: "I have endeavoured to pollute your mind, and have made your
innocent heart acquainted with the looks and language of unlawful and monstrous
passion" (32). In other words, the father himself is responsible for precipitating her fall
from innocence. In the third section of the letter, by contrast, he is less direct in assuming
this responsibility. Repeatedly, he asks her to "[r]esolutely shake of[f] the wretchedness
that this first misfortune in early life must occasion you" and insists that she "let not this
check for more than a moment retard your glorious course" (36). The impersonality of his
phrasing, in which he gestures at the event without at the same time claiming
responsibility for it, posits a new social context, which both he and his daughter now
inhabit. Thus, in ordering Mathilda to remain "ignorant of my destination," he levies a
rhetorical accusation against her: "You will not follow me, for when I bannish [*sic*]
myself would you nourish guilt by obtruding yourself upon me? You will not do this, I
know you will not" (36). The guilt he mentions seems mostly likely to be his own, yet he

also implies through his interdiction and language ("obtruding") that to follow him against his wishes as the lawgiver would be not only to incur guilt, but to "nourish" a guilt that is already present in the form of her existing desire for him.

The trajectory the father takes in his letter reflects the critical trajectory of sympathetic desire in Romantic writing. As the narrative meant to inspire sympathy (as in section 1) fails to account for a transcendent desire that it cannot contain (as in section 2), it is forced to substitute a purely social exchange of desire (as in section 3's exchange of the "gift" of grief for pardon) in light of the impossibility of retaining that transcendent desire. Yet, as in the Romantic critique of sympathy, the outcome of this trajectory is not satisfaction. Rather, an element of that earlier transcendent desire remains both for Mathilda and her father. Mathilda recognizes the unconscious significance of her father's letter ("The words of his letter by which he had dissuaded me from this step [of following him] were those that determined me" [36]), and her psychoanalysis of it points her towards his unspoken intention: "the more I studied the letter the more did I perceive a thousand slight expressions that could only indicate a knowledge that life was now over for him" (37). She discovers, in other words, a drive towards death in her father, which she adopts herself in the second part of the novel. Yet, before she will submit herself to such a drive, Mathilda determines against her father's wishes to pursue him.

It is unclear what Mathilda's objective is in pursuing her father. The chief reason she gives is that "he must yet live for if he were dead all would surely be black as night to me!" (37). This disposition continues her previous obsession with her father, yet her desire for him has now become devoid of any positive character as we see in her prayer, which describes the diminishment of her desire: "Oh! God help me! Let him be alive! It

is all dark; in my abject misery I demand no more; no hope, no good: only passion, and guilt, and horror; but alive! Alive!" (37). Mathilda's own uncertainty about the object of her pursuit recalls the blindness of De Lacey, which inadvertently permits him a closer proximity to the Creature's materiality and enables him to overlook those aspects of the Creature that still express his materiality (e.g., his voice, his halting narrative, his sudden and unannounced appearance, his overall mystery). Likewise, Mathilda's retention of a single imaginary, the hope that her father will live, and self-abnegating abandonment of all other imaginaries for herself enables her to put off the inevitable encounter with the materiality of her father's desire for her. Yet, differently from De Lacey, for whom the dark sympathy of his question, "who are you," is an event that can hardly be called productive, the ruins of Mathilda's transcendent desire for her father, expressed now as the bare, unqualified hope that he will exist, are sufficient to support her movement into the unknown.

Her prayer also depicts her incorporation of the father's implicit accusation. Thus, if he remains alive, Mathilda will be able to share with her father the social relation of grief and pardon he has envisioned for them. Yet, even as she finds "one word, that half screaming was perpetually on my lips; Alive!" (37), at another level, she resists that desire that he live. This resistance is evident both from her repeated remark that "I did not weep" (also, "No tears fell yet I sobbed" [37]; "I shed no tears but my eyes wild and inflamed were starting from my head" [39]) and from the important role her earlier dream of her father's death plays in directing her steps. This resistance, I want to suggest, is a symptom of a transcendent desire. Like her father's desire for her, Mathilda's desire for her father eludes linguistic description to the extent that it remains distinct from social

desire. While the character of this desire has been explored at length in psychoanalytic readings of the novel, I want to return to what Mary Jacobus calls "the trace of the unrepresentable" (201) in order to gain a better understanding of the material constitution of that trace. For, if a fundamentally ambiguous guilt expresses the affective content of Mathilda's transcendent desire, her decaying body marks its place. The broader implications of this innovation for a theory of dark sympathy reside in its showing the place of overlap between materiality and the desire for the other, a dimension that Shelley will take to its limit in *The Last Man*.

In the second part of *Matilda*, guilt functions as a lubricant for Mathilda's interactions with the world. If this was originally a function to be taken up by sympathy, as Mathilda's intimations of desiring sympathy suggest ("I began again to wish for sympathy" [46]), then guilt does not fall into the same trap sympathy does of collapsing into a merely social desire, eliminating the transcendent. (Notably, she discovers in Woodville's intense social sympathy the irony "that I who in solitude had desired sympathy as the only relief I could enjoy should now find it an additional torture to me" [56].) Rather, like misanthropy in Godwin or dejection in Coleridge, guilt – even (or especially) "guilt that lacks a name" (61) and is inscribed upon Mathilda's decaying body – offers a negative space within the social order that escapes its complete determination. Rajan writes that incest in the novel "operates not just as part of a Symbolic economy, but also on the border between the Symbolic and the semiotic" ("Melancholy" 50). By extension, the guilt that ensues from this incestuous desire intersects this border, appearing not only in the context of the Symbolic order, yet also deriving its force from the misapprehension of semiotic energy. Similarly, Mary Jacobus describes Mathilda's

melancholic sense of guilt "as a failure of 'symbolization' – the failure to find adequate forms of literary representation for the affect that underlies it" (173).

François and Mozes have explored the implications of this failure of symbolization in their essay on agency and gender in Shelley's novel. Specifically, they are interested in exposing the indirect agency someone like Mathilda can possess; that is, the way in which she can be seen as guilty in the eyes of society, despite having done nothing wrong directly. They argue that "Mathilda is a mental actor in this text and thus capable of the 'agent's regret' that drives the latter two-thirds of the novel" (66). Modifying a distinction made by Anne Mellor between a masculine Romanticism that "assimilat[es]" through violence and an idea of the feminine as "socialization," they suggest that *Matilda* "present[s] a narrative in which erotic subjects do indeed elide the recognition of otherness and threaten to become mirrors to one another, but not because the masculine succeeds in absorbing and conquering the feminine. Rather, each character is destroyed by the violence of his or her own passions" (70). Shelley gains this equivalence by submerging direct action within a much more widespread passivity. Not only does Mathilda devote herself to becoming "a youthful Hermitess dedicated to seclusion and whose bosom she must strive to keep free from all tumult and unholy despair" (44), but the father also cannot be said to have "acted directly" in declaring his love for his daughter. Instead, through a kind of passive aggression, Mathilda presses her father to reveal his secret. He suggests that a more effective and direct path to discovering this secret would be if she "tore my heart from my breast and tried to read its secrets in it as its life's blood was dropping from it" (27). From his perspective, he is a victim of circumstances ("I was betrayed into this net of fiery anguish" [33]). The significance of

this diffusion of an ambiguous guilt in the novel is that, although it is contingent upon the social order's acknowledgment of it, it depends upon more than just the *point de capiton* of society's agreed taboo against incest. Rather, it requires a vehicle in which to inhere.

The father's movement in his letter from desiring forgiveness and reparation to a resolution of suicide indicates his growing awareness of an inverse relation between the imaginary and materiality. He suggests as much to Mathilda before divulging the secret in his invitation that she tear out his heart. The benefit of this violent approach is that "you may console me by reducing me to nothing – but your words I cannot bear" (27). The words that he cannot bear are, as I have suggested, part of a false transcendence that Mathilda has yet to recognize. His preference for a bloody death that draws attention to his physical body puts this materiality in contrast to the textual promise Mathilda extends. After she enters into her melancholy, she discovers a similar opposition, which reaches its culmination in Woodville's attempt to dissuade her from suicide. As I have suggested, Woodville's ethic presupposes the power of the aesthetic to organize lives within a smooth continuity. Her invitation to Woodville, "to accompany me in this dark journey" and to "find [his deceased betrothed] Elinor and what I have lost" (57), signifies her entertainment of a similar textuality, alluding to the myths of Proserpine, Orpheus and Eurydice, as well as to the framing narrative of the novel's previous iteration as *The Fields of Fancy*. She describes death in conventionally literary terms ("we shall find light after we have passed the dark valley," referring to Psalm 23 [57]) and also in terms of the literature of Shelley's family, as we see in Mathilda's italicized quotation of Mary Wollstonecraft's mother's last words, "*A little patience, and all will be over*" (57), which

Wollstonecraft used in her own work.[15] Yet, as in the closing scene of *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, in which the melancholic protagonist (and also the reader) is brought face to face with the gruesome physical effects of his suicide, Mathilda's attempt to gain Woodville's support through sympathy fails because she does not truly want what his impoverished version of sympathy offers. As we see in a defining moment of particular insensitivity, Woodville is not speaking the same language as Mathilda; he "bade me take cheer, and to encourage what happy thoughts I could, untill [*sic*] time and fortitude should overcome my misery, and I could again mingle in society" (61).

The final chapter of the novel discloses more completely the novel's vehicle for the transcendent desire that cannot occupy the social realm: Mathilda's dying body. Following Mathilda's departure, she continues for a time under the aesthetic ideology Woodville has left behind to console her. She "pictured to [her]self a lovely river such as that on whose banks Dante describes Mathilda gathering flowers" (62), and, although her imaginings are interspersed, finally, with real tears, "I wept, but gently, lest my sobs should disturb the fairy scene" (63). This visionary mood is pierced as she attempts to enter more fully into the role of Dante's Mathilda by stooping to pluck a flower, "on that bleak plain where no flower grew" (63). This scene of awakening is one of dis-enlightenment, or rather of occlusion. Not only does she see "no object that told me where I was," she discovers that "I had lost myself" (63). The accidental nature of her situation, which will lead to her death, as opposed to her romantic plan of suicide, puts her under the dictates of blind necessity. Shelley's association of Mathilda at this point

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[15] Godwin noted this in his *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (53).

with the Ancient Mariner is thus poignant.[16] Like the Mariner, Mathilda discovers a

much larger framework at work in spite of herself. If both may be taken as literary

manifestations of Hume's image of the radical skeptic adrift in a Cartesian sea of doubt,

then, where Coleridge suggests that the social cannot stymie the effects of transcendent

desire, which merely continue to haunt it, Shelley suggests that there may not be any

possible return to the secure shores of sociality. Instead, she anticipates a more complete

reconciliation with her transcendent desire in the form of death.

The literary references she makes during this period are telling for charting a

movement out of false transcendence towards a more totalizing desire. Finding in the

moon a "presence [that] gave me a hope" that she might find her home, she invokes it

with early lines from Coleridge's "Christabel," which appear themselves to be a critical

parody of the Gothic tradition; in other words, rather than immersing herself in an

ideology of the aesthetic, she mobilizes temporarily an ironic treatment of the aesthetic.[17]

The second reference she makes, during her address to the sun and the earth, is to

Wordsworth's "A slumber did my spirit seal." In positing herself as "[r]olled round in

earth's diurnal course" (8), Mathilda abandons her subjectivity and aligns herself – or

rather her body, now bereft of self – with the necessary unfolding of the earth's

processes. This shift in her thinking allows her to "find it sweet to watch the progressive

decay of my strength" (65). Against the threat that this decay raises, Woodville has

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[16] Clemit, in the Pickering edition of *Matilda*, notes the allusion to Coleridge's poem in Mathilda's statement, "When I awoke it rained," which Clemit suggests points to line 300 of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (63 n. c). Also see François and Mozes, pp. 70-71, who make a similar comparison between Mathilda and the Mariner.

[17] Mary Jacobus suggests that, in the novella, "Quotation becomes a figure for melancholic and incorporative acts of reading; these texts impinge from the past with an unsymbolizable message because they have been 'devoured' in piecemeal fashion" (198). This reading overlaps with my own insofar as we both wish to point to Mathilda's awareness of the limits of the aesthetic. I want to emphasize moreover that Mathilda's recourse to the aesthetic is prompted primarily for Woodville's sake as an effort to communicate along social lines at least in her dying.

insisted that she must "Hope and your wounds will be already half healed: but if you

obstinately despair, there never more will be comfort for you. Believe me, my dearest

friend, that there is a joy that the sun and earth and all its beauties can bestow that you

will one day feel" (62). For Mathilda, hope resides by contrast in the disinterested

continuation of earth's processes, "the turf will soon be green on my grave; and the

violets will bloom on it" (67). In leaving behind a narrative for Woodville, she engages

the social on her own terms, continuing in a transcendent desire for her father the

fulfillment of which does not depend upon its successful invocation of sympathy. This

new understanding of hope, a theme which has been central to my exploration of

sympathy, gets taken up once more and with a much greater scope in Shelley's post-

apocalyptic novel, *The Last Man*. As Coleridge suggests in his late poem, "Work without

Hope," "Hope without an object cannot live" (14); however, Shelley's fourth novel posits

a world in which the *object* – all objects, save one – continues alone. Instead, imagining a

world without people, without *subjects*, she enquires into the possibility of a hope for the

other (perhaps a more precise way to describe the transcendent desire for the other) that

precedes the self.

The Last Man*: Hope and the Remains of Sympathy*

Where Shelley's first two novels explored the question of the fate of

transcendence in the face of the socializing impulse, *The Last Man* asks about what

happens to us "*in the wake of* society," as Jean-Luc Nancy describes community

(*Inoperative Community* 11; emphasis original). The central social imaginary that appears

in the novel—the ideal society at Windsor—fails to satisfy transcendent desire; however,

the novel also suggests a more developed means of orienting oneself towards materiality. In *The Last Man*, materiality is signified by the plague, which functions as an insuperable obstacle to the successful formation of imaginaries or, as Peter Melville describes it, as "a coldly indifferent or absolute form of otherness in itself" (141). In the face of the end of humanity, this group of friends comes to resemble the description Nancy offers for community as "the presentation to its members of their mortal truth (which amounts to saying that there is no community of immortal beings: one can imagine either a society or a communion of immortal beings, but not a community)" (15). Indeed, the novel as a whole can be read as the unfolding of such a "presentation" of death—an unfolding that similarly tracks the group's movement from society to something more like community.[18]

Unlike *Frankenstein* and *Matilda*, *The Last Man* contains a complex social nexus at its heart in the tight-knit group of Lionel, Perdita, Adrian, Raymond, and Idris.[19] They are related to each other by blood, friendship, marriage, and politics, and in this way epitomize the Romantic concept of sociality. Critics have noted the novel's function as a *roman à clef*, in which characters such as Adrian and Lord Raymond appear as "faint portraits" (in Shelley's words [*Letters* 1:577]) of Percy and Lord Byron, respectively.[20] The members of the group may be mapped provisionally onto a continuum stretching

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[18] Peter Melville draws attention to the clash in the novel between the North Americans and Adrian's troops as an example of how an encounter with death forms "what becomes a reconstructed community through the commonality of death" (166-67). Yet this imagined community should perhaps be more properly called a society as the positive outcome of such a "reconstruction" implies that the encounter with death has been re-narrated through an imaginary (similar to that described by Adam Smith in his discussion in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* of sympathizing with the dead [16]) in order to suspend the threat that death must necessarily imply.

[19] Charlotte Sussman writes, "Although *The Last Man* is named for the ultimate solitary individual, Mary Shelley's novel devotes much of its energy to representing human aggregates, to imagining populations" (286).

[20] Anne Mellor (248 n. 21) points to two early readings: an article by Walter E. Peck (196-219) and also Elizabeth Nitchie's book, *Mary Shelley—Author of "Frankenstein"* (68-75, 94-95, 102-4). Lee Sterrenburg writes that "[t]he novel is, in fact, so obviously a *roman à clef* that critics sometimes tend to see it as little else" (327).

from the most intimate form of social desire to its most amplified. Thus, if Idris advances

a domestic desire for family, as we see first in her concern for her brother and then in her

maternal preoccupation with her children and husband, then, at the other side of the

spectrum, we might find her brother Adrian, who comes to adopt a "[s]trange ambition"

in aiming to "save one of [England's] mighty spirits from the deadly shaft" (247).

Between these poles, Perdita, Lionel, and Raymond shift positions as the novel

progresses.

If Adrian occupies a place seemingly impervious to materiality, then the character

of Lord Raymond offers by contrast a fruitful starting point for discussing the rise and

fall of the Windsorian social imaginary. From the beginning, Raymond embodies a more

straightforward political sociality. Yet the influence of Perdita, for whom he initially

refuses to pursue the position of Lord Protector ("He had exchanged a sceptre for a lute, a

kingdom for Perdita" [93]), tempers this tendency with a transcendent inflection.[21] Once

he resolves to pursue the position after all, the conflicting dimensions of his political

sociality emerge more fully:

> Thus, while Raymond had been wrapt in visions of power and fame, while
> he looked forward to entire dominion over the elements and the mind of
> man, the territory of his own heart escaped his notice; and from that
> unthought of source arose the mighty torrent that overwhelmed his will,
> and carried to the oblivious sea, fame, hope, and happiness. (117)

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[21] Shelley regularly describes Perdita in transcendent terms. Her desire for Raymond in particular appears
transcendent: "She erected a temple for him in the depth of her being, and each faculty was a priestess
vowed to his service" (92). After she discovers Raymond's secret connection to Evadne, this transcendent
desire inverts: "'Vase am I,' she thought, 'vase brimful of despair's direst essence'" (135). In searching for
Raymond in Greece, she reveals that her transcendent desire for him has come to depend upon an
introjection of Raymond's own socially determined ambition: "He would rather have died such a death,
which will be recorded in history to endless time, than have lived to old age unknown, unhonoured. Nor
can I desire better, than, having been the chosen and beloved of his heart, here, in youth's prime, before
added years can tarnish the best feelings of my nature, to watch his tomb, and speedily rejoin him in his
blessed repose" (211-12). Perdita chooses this false horizon for herself in a manner similar to Mathilda,
whose solitude and especially suicidal tendencies derive in part from the narrative her father has given to
her.

The apparently transcendent dimension of his sociality, which overlaps with Robert Walton's idea of "glory," comes up against "the territory of his own heart," which Shelley describes as "unthought of," and which seems to be synonymous with the passions, particularly as they are depicted in Hume's epistemology. Yet, where Hume would suggest interposing sympathy as a means of *controlling* the passions, Raymond exchanges both his domestic and political social contexts for a martial social context in Greece that will attend more closely to his ambitious desire by putting his national sympathies to work *mobilizing* his passions.

Lionel's opposition to Raymond's conduct is based upon his ideal "that steady adherence to principle was the only road to honour; a ceaseless observance of the laws of general utility, the only conscientious aim of human ambition" (150). While the content of the latter part of his ideal is socially oriented, the overall form and thrust of it is transcendent and may foreshadow Lionel's status as the Last Man, a figure of the inverted place Shelley envisions for the subject as a spectre haunting materiality. By contrast, Adrian's immediate support of Raymond's action further underscores the implicit sociality of his aesthetically transcendent disposition. Thus, when he quotes Christ in support of this perspective, "*there are many mansions in my father's house*," in order to argue "that the modes of becoming good or great, varied as much as the dispositions of men, of whom it might be said, as of the leaves of the forest, there were no two alike" (150), Adrian is advancing an idealistic pluralism (grounded, as we see here, in the aesthetic validation of biblical literature) quite distinct from the constancy that Lionel insists upon as the subject's necessary responsibility towards the other.

The scene of struggle that both Raymond and Lionel imagine is one that resembles the conflict of scepticism that Hume posits as he attempts to rid his system of insubstantial spaces of transcendence. Thus both perspectives identify an aspect of their social imaginary with "illusion" and suggest an alternative beyond the veil. For Lionel, the illusion is the "splenetic fit" that has caused Raymond to renounce the Protectorate and abdicate his responsibilities to Perdita. The alternative course is a return to self-mastery: "Master yourself, Raymond, and the world is subject to you" (152). Implicit in this approach is a resumption of social sympathy ("our love, honour, and duty will again be manifested towards you" [152]), which suggests that at this early point in Lionel's development he continues to hold sociality out as a means of satisfying desire – even transcendent desires (i.e., "the world" in subjection). Raymond identifies the illusion as one that Perdita has projected onto him: "With [Perdita] it was pretty enough to play a sovereign's part; and, as in the recesses of your beloved forest we acted masques, and imagined ourselves Arcadian shepherds, to please the fancy of the moment" (153). The charge Raymond levies against Perdita is that her transcendent desire is false, suggesting, "I know, though she does not, how false the veil is which she has spread over the reality" (154). The greater perspective Lionel's narrative affords the reader on the situation makes this moment into a potential point of critique of what Anne Mellor calls "masculine Romanticism," in which the immoral positions of its chief representatives (Adrian-Percy and Raymond-Byron) are revealed.[22] The implication is that the scheme Raymond plans to escape Perdita—his dramatic "return to Greece" (153)—is not transcendent either, but

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[22] Mellor argues: "In social terms, the novel pits [Shelley's] ideology of the egalitarian bourgeois family against those human and natural forces which undermine it: male egoism, female masochism, and death. In political and philosophical terms, *The Last Man* first undercuts the dominant systems of government of the early nineteenth century and then shows that all cultural ideologies are but meaningless fictions" (144).

rather represents a continuing investment in sociality under the guise of something greater.

Mitigating this potential critique, however, is the darkly sympathetic light in which these figures are often cast. Thus, what ultimately pierces the veil that Raymond's transcendent action attempts to weave is his death in the ruined and vacant city of Constantinople. Lionel posits this opposition between false transcendence and materiality in his description of Raymond's corpse – recalling once more the way the body serves Shelley as a vehicle for expressing materiality:

> Yesterday those limbs were worth an universe; they then enshrined a transcendent power, whose intents, words, and actions were worthy to be recorded in letters of gold; now the superstition of affection alone could give value to the shattered mechanism, which, incapable and clod-like, no more resembled Raymond, than the fallen rain is like the former mansion of cloud in which it climbed the highest skies, and gilded by the sun, attracted all eyes, and satiated the sense by its excess of beauty. (207)

These final lines recall the similarly social father of Mathilda, whose joyous marriage to Diana and inherited wealth seemed to elevate him to a heavenly realm that obscured the dire reality below.[23] Like that father, Raymond discovers too late "the hurricane that tears me" (194) between the entwined social desires for Perdita, his friends, and glory, and the starkly distinct transcendent desire to complete "the will of fate" (194). Encountering this new impulse in spite of himself, he says, "I know not why; I seem to myself to be entering a darksome gulph; the ardent spirit of the army is irksome to me, the rapture of triumph null" (184). This impulse leads him towards a realization of his impending death,

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[23] As noted earlier, Mathilda describes: "Thus my father, born in affluence, and always prosperous, clombe without the difficulty and various disappointments that / all human beings seem destined to encounter, to the very topmost pinnacle of happiness: Around him was sunshine, and clouds whose shapes of beauty made the prospect divine concealed from him the barren reality which lay hidden below them. From this dizzy point he was dashed at once as he unawares congratulated himself on his felicity. Fifteen months after their marriage I was born, and my Mother died a few days after my birth" (10).

that "[f]rom the many-peopled earth, from the sympathies of man, from the loved resorts of my youth, from the kindness of my friends, from the affection of my only beloved Perdita, I am about to be removed" (194). Raymond strives to retain a social desire in the form of glory ("to lose all—to lose with life and love, glory also! It shall not be" [194]), yet this aesthetic satisfaction is also denied to him as his followers "shr[i]nk back" from the task of entering Constantinople. Finally, any majesty involved in his entrance evaporates as the city falls, killing him. Attempting to conjure security or hope from what appears to be a sublime vision of the city's destruction, Lionel writes: "For a moment I could yield to the creative power of the imagination, and for a moment was soothed by the sublime fictions it presented to me" (200). This false transcendence fails to sustain him, however, as "[t]he beatings of my human heart drew me back to blank reality" (200). Lionel describes this blank reality as a kind of object without a subject, in which, "I called aloud for him—through the darkness of night, over the scorching ruins of fallen Constantinople, his name was heard; no voice replied—echo even was mute" (200).

Lionel opposes his encounter with blank reality to the "sublime fictions" that no longer satisfy. As these false hopes wither with the death of Raymond, the novel's treatment of the sublime more generally also deserves close attention. There are several moments of an explicitly sublime character, and these come to be increasingly associated with the figure of absolute materiality: the plague. The most marked scene of the sublime occurs as Adrian and the others make their way towards Geneva by way of the Jura. In the course of describing the presentation of nature's "unrivalled beauties in resplendent and sudden exhibition" using expressly sublime language ("the yawning abyss" [418], "scaleless altitude," "unattainable ether," "vast immensities," "jagged crags" [419]),

Lionel describes an experience that suspends the horror that has preceded it: "Carried away by wonder, I forgot the death of man, and the living and beloved friend near me" (419). As we see in the scene that follows the remnant's encounter with the sublime in nature, Lionel's retrospective scepticism proves accurate. He describes their discovery of a father and daughter at an organ in a church in which she plays Haydn's "New-Created World" (420). Like an auditory echo of the visual splendour that has preceded it, this experience produces sublime feelings: "transported as we had been by the loveliness of nature, fancying that we beheld the abode of spirits, now we might well imagine that we heard their melodious communings" (420). This possibility is dramatically undermined by the sight they behold of the weeping daughter hoping – since "she had not courage to disclose the truth" (421) – to fool her blind father into believing that nothing has changed. (We might recall also the blindness of De Lacey, who also serves initially as a figure for an obliviousness to materiality; however, in both cases, it is precisely this obliviousness that enables both men to endure materiality rather than descending into violence or horror.) This truth that she will not disclose is not only the social reality of their solitude, but also the reality of her impending demise. Notably, the remnant's approach contributes to this fate, as "[t]he very day that we arrived she had been attacked by symptomatic illness" (421). As Kant recognizes, the sublime contains within it the conditions for its own undoing as its capacity for excess and saturation leads to a revelation of what it can never include and thus can never overcome through cognition alone.

The Last Man's manner of raising the question of the sublime takes up the larger themes related to the status of sympathy in the Romantic period. Against the possibility predicated by conventional sympathy that the experience of the other might be imagined

successfully and form the basis for one's selfhood, the illusory quality that Shelley

associates with this aesthetic mode insists upon an irrecoverable remainder for alterity.

To desire the other in a way that attempts to account for this remainder without also

recovering it requires the kind of transcendent orientation Shelley raises in *Matilda*, in

which the desire for the other takes the form of a submission to the diverse effects of the

other. Yet, because of its narrow scope, *Matilda* can only sketch the barest outline of this

transcendent desire before its attendant psychological and social contingencies occlude it.

In *The Last Man*, by contrast, the implications of an event such as Mathilda's willing

submission to her father no longer play a role. Instead, in the novel's positioning of the

sublime within the context of a global, human death without supplement, without a

"blessed[ness]" or hope that might recuperate death for humanity, Shelley questions the

possibility of desire apart from any imaginary (which would include both the self and the

other) and thus apart from any mobilization of one's own will. In the wake of the plague,

there is now only "the thorny truth of things" (360). In this way, the transcendent desire

that Shelley posits implies a distinctly deconstructive understanding of the relationship

between the other and the self – a relationship in which the other reveals to the self the

very otherness that composes the self. This disclosure transforms the nature of hope –

that most transcendent of virtues – not only in terms of its spatial value (i.e., utopia), but

also in terms of its temporal value (i.e., the future).

For instance, in his self-comparison with Robinson Crusoe, Lionel posits a

difference that resembles the difference Coleridge offers for pantisocracy, between "joys

that were" and the "sublime of Hope." Yet, unlike the youthful Coleridge, Lionel shifts

this distinction out of the idealist register and into the materialist register, which Shelley

has spent much of her previous novels exploring. Although both he and Crusoe are solitaries, Lionel remarks: "Yet he was far happier than I: for he could hope, nor hope in vain—the destined vessel at last arrived, to bear him to countrymen and kindred, where the events of his solitude became a fire-side tale" (448). Lionel has also been at work producing a tale of his adventures, but, unlike Crusoe's, it is addressed to a friend yet to come. This is a messianic figure, as we see in the message he leaves behind him as he journeys towards Rome: "Friend, come! I wait for thee!" (456). This friend-to-come, the reader of his tale and falsifier of his claim to be "the Last Man," is also at the same time a member of "THE ILLUSTRIOUS DEAD" to whom Lionel dedicates his book (466).[24] As was the case with Mathilda, the Other with whom Lionel has come to sympathize is associated with death and therefore with a materiality that undermines every imaginary.

In *Matilda*, this subversion took place in part by means of the insufficiency of her literary allusions to account for the anti-social nature of her desire as well as her repudiation of the social possibilities for which Woodville lives. In *The Last Man*, the exercise of writing a novel appears futile given its lack of a reader (at least in the context of it serving as the memoirs of the last person on earth). Nevertheless, where *Matilda* attempts only to escape recapitulation into the social, as does its narrator, *The Last Man* is deeply invested in uncovering the possibility of community. Although this exercise of writing is performed in absolute solitude, it has emerged out of a sympathetic impulse. Lionel's earlier attempt to "discipline my sorrowing heart to sympathy in your joys," namely the joys of animals (459), is unsuccessful at inaugurating a new form of relation. When Lionel is therefore forced to abandon yet another social imaginary, he begins writing. At the end of a year's work, he realizes that his waiting for the one to come was

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[24] Barbara Johnson emphasizes the novel's explicit alignment of the reader with the dead (265).

a "delusion." Moreover, it is a delusion that he has only exchanged "for another as delusive, as false" (467), namely, the work of writing. Nevertheless, these intentional delusions all serve to open a space in which he may approximate more closely a desire for the other that we come to associate in the novel with the end of humankind. Lionel describes the background of this seemingly self-destructive desire:

> Could I have seen in this empty earth, in the seasons and their change, the hand of a blind power only, most willingly would I have placed my head on the sod, and closed my eyes on its loveliness for ever. But fate had administered life to me, when the plague had already seized on its prey— she had dragged me by the hair from out the strangling waves—By such miracles she had bought me for her own; I admitted her authority, and bowed to her decrees. (464)

Lionel's submission to necessity, which he confusingly distinguishes from "a blind power only" by personifying it as "fate" and ascribing to "her" an "authority," gives him a strange, materialist kind of hope. Indeed, any hope for the other that might derive from it – including his desire for future readers – does not retain a social-humanist conception of the other. In this way, it offers the basis for an alternative transcendence grounded in materiality, rather than the imaginary. The disturbing manner by which "fate" comes to "b[uy] me for her own" in the novel illustrates the space in which transcendence and materiality overlap.

The representative of the plague ensuring Lionel's conversion to a hope understood as necessity is a fevered black man, whom Shelley describes as a "negro half clad" (336) and whose "breath, death-laden," infects Lionel with the disease that nevertheless fails to end his life. Although Shelley has Lionel personify the plague and its accompanying devastations throughout the novel, its singular appearance here, though literally embodied in a human form, seems, ironically and problematically, the least

human. In order to establish the event as an encounter with alterity, Shelley layers

descriptions in this scene, which notably appears framed by the activity surrounding the

death of Lionel's son. Not only does she distinguish this victim of plague racially, she

describes him as a man that does not speak; as partly naked; "writhing under the agony of

disease"; having "a convulsive grasp" (336) – in other words, he is not only a figure that

refuses assimilation into the social, but also an abject figure that escapes attempts to

elevate it into an object of transcendent desire, conventionally understood. The Creature

in *Frankenstein* provoked a materiality, yet was also deployed as a way of deconstructing

the desiring subject. The man here appears as an object of materiality, which Shelley

characterizes in terms of uncontrolled nervous energy, a-signifying communication, and a

body marked by its surfaces and disfiguration; however, his actions do not reflect desire.

The events that lead up to this encounter, which I want to suggest exemplifies Shelley's

idea of transcendent desire for the other, chart the trajectory out of sociality and towards a

material transcendence. Lionel enters the room of the dying man accidentally, thinking

that the "groan" he hears is that of his son, so that the domestic desire for the known-

other (i.e., Alfred) inadvertently leads him into the region of the truly other. As in

Godwin, the social continues to play a role in housing its others. Similarly, the event of

dark sympathy in the De Lacey episode in *Frankenstein* is only possible within the

context of the De Lacey home, hence it is perhaps unsurprising that the home ceases to be

viable after the eruption of transcendent desire in the scene. Yet, if the surplus desire in

the social leads him actively into the darkness of the dying man's room, Lionel's

encounter with the alterity that awaits him occurs first through his senses ("a pernicious

scent assailed my senses" [336]) and then literally through the violence of "the sufferer"

(336). In both cases, Lionel is a passive recipient.

This passivity is especially strange given the frame of the dying child; for, in

the seemingly simultaneous moment that his senses are "assailed," his "leg clasped," and

he hears "a groan repeated" (336), Lionel's only response is to experience "sickening

qualms, which made their way to my very heart" (336). These "qualms" originate in his

anxiety for his son, certainly, but also in the way the threat of his son's illness (for, at this

point, Lionel can only continue to assume that the groan comes from his son – he has not

yet seen the true sufferer) cuts through his desire to see his son, revealing a desire for his

own self-preservation. Nevertheless, his social desire remains. Thus, when the man

finally grasps him, Lionel describes himself as attempting to escape "[w]ith mixed horror

and impatience" (336), that is, with mixed reactions to the obstruction of multiple forms

of desire. What Lionel does not realize in this moment is that this encounter means his

salvation: as Alan Bewell notes of the embrace, it "functions as inoculation rather than

contagion" (313).[25] Nevertheless, the racist overtones of the social imaginary with which

Lionel identifies himself conceal from him what might become possible for community –

a future community that does not (and cannot) appear in the novel. Lionel's literal *in-*

spiration by the other ensures that the other's materiality offers a space beyond the social

relation Lionel has with his dying son for articulating a manifold desire for him in his

otherness. Lionel desires to see his son, on a social level, to affirm his love for him or to

express concern for him; at another level, he desires to be with his son for multiple,

ineffable reasons that not only blur the boundaries of their respective identities, but also

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[25] Bewell further suggests persuasively that the scene might "serve as an allegory of the fearful embrace of colonial encounters" (313), which he shows to be a pervasive theme in the novel.

effect a separation (and therefore a reinscription of his identity) originating in his fear of death.

Notably, this fear disappears after Lionel recovers from his bout of plague. When he embraces the other, Lionel is initially afraid not only of the literal plague, but also of the other's unknowability. This fear keeps him trapped within a primarily social form of desire, despite the other threads of desire at work. Lionel's survival of the plague is, therefore, according to Jan Plug, "important not because he is the last representative of the human race so much as because he interrupts the totalizing movement of the plague" (160). This totalizing aim of the plague mirrors the totalizing aim of society before its fall: as Lionel declares in the novel's opening paragraph, "So true it is, that man's mind alone was the creator of all that was good or great to man, and that Nature herself was only his first minister" (9).[26] What Shelley proposes – not only in this novel, but in *Frankenstein* and *Matilda* as well – is an ongoing relation, which will serve to perpetually undermine totalities in order better to maintain a vision of the other. Thus the "interrupt[ion]" that Plug refers to is not an obstruction of the plague's movement, but a kind of temporization that opens up a parallel time in which Lionel comes to sympathize with the absolute unknown:

> Peril will now be mine; and I hail her as a friend—death will perpetually cross my path, and I will meet him as a benefactor; hardship, inclement weather, and dangerous tempests will be my sworn mates. Ye spirits of storm, receive me! ye powers of destruction, open wide your arms, and clasp me for ever! if a kinder power have not decreed another end, so that after long endurance I may reap my reward, and again feel my heart beat near the heart of another like to me. (468-69)

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[26] Johnson aligns this opening description of England with "the image of a certain conception of *man* which will be progressively demystified throughout the novel that follows" (265).

Lee Sterrenburg suggests that the novel "deals with politics, but ultimately it is an antipolitical novel. The characters in the novel discuss and try to enact various reforming and revolutionary solutions, but all such endeavors prove to be a failure in Mary Shelley's pessimistic and apocalyptic world of the future" (328). While I question whether it may be going too far to call the novel "antipolitical," I also wonder whether "politics" remains a suitable term for the kind of relationship envisioned by the end of *The Last Man*: better, perhaps, is "community." Not only does this distinction underscore the limits that Shelley sets for social desire, to which Sterrenburg's essay draws our attention ("No political remedies will avail against it [the plague], nor will society survive its ravages" [331]), but it also emphasizes the novel's attempt to think an alternative being-together that might account for an alterity that lies not only outside the *polis*, but also outside what is typically considered "other."[27]

Taking up the project she leaves in suspense at the close of *Frankenstein*, Shelley thus turns more fully towards the alterity that the Creature presented in that novel. As De Lacey discovers, the materiality that he cannot perceive forms a bond with his desire to know "who are you"; however, that novel circumvents further inquiry into the ramifications of this bond by having Walton return to the social fold. By positing Mathilda's body as the site of her father's illicit desire, Shelley resists sublimating alterity within a more manageable imaginary, such as she also attempted initially in *The Fields of*

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[27] Another way of considering this is from the perspective of time – where the absolute other to be taken account of resides in or is aligned with the future. Both Walton and Victor are notable for their anxieties about the judgements of future generations. In *The Last Man*, however, to look to the future at all implies an indeterminate orientation towards the other. After all, the novel's preface is set in 1818, the year in which the narrator discovers the ancient prophecies of the Cumaean Sibyl. These prophecies, it seems, contain a precise forecast that traces the end of the world to the year 2100. In light of the rest of the novel, the chief lesson of this strange temporality is that the other demands above all openness – whether that is figured as an open door or an open wound is less clear.

Fancy. If materiality and the dark sympathy characters like De Lacey experience for it lie at the core of what it means to desire the other, then *Matilda* is above all a work about the place of such desire at the far limit of the social. To move beyond that limit, as Mathilda does, appears to be possible only through death. In *The Last Man*, Shelley presses even this understanding of desire further, as Lionel, ultimately, exhibits a transcendent desire finally free of the social. Recalling Coleridge's attenuated desire in his late poetry, we can read in Shelley's novel an impossible setting within which to trace a more complete unfolding of dark sympathy. Lionel's response in the closing paragraph of the novel explicates one possible outcome:

> I form no expectation of alteration for the better; but the monotonous present is intolerable to me. Neither hope nor joy are my pilots—restless despair and fierce desire of change lead me on. I long to grapple with danger, to be excited by fear, to have some task, however slight or voluntary, for each day's fulfilment. I shall witness all the variety of appearance, that the elements can assume—I shall read fair augury in the rainbow—menace in the cloud—some lesson or record dear to my heart in everything. (470)

Somewhat differently from Godwin's traumatized encounter with materiality or Coleridge's reluctant submission to it, Shelley explores the shape of a community turned to face materiality. The sympathy that Lionel discovers with his future reader is, like all sympathy, predicated upon a kind of falsehood – that he might be able to imagine adequately the other's experience. Nevertheless, the impossibility of that future reader also draws attention to the materiality of the novel's deployment of hope. While this materiality demands an end to imaginaries that substitute feasible or programmatic social desire for troubling, though potent, transcendent desires, it also compels the imagination to attempt again and again the sympathetic act of reading. Thus, while Lionel's practice of reading at the end of the novel, which he does in order "to conceal me from myself,

and immerse myself in the subject traced on the pages before me" (465), represents an important return to the aesthetic, it is a return that also recognizes the gap that separates it from the Real. The stability of social desire is an irresistible draw, as he notes upon reaching Rome: "At length, then, I had found a consolation. I had not vainly sought the storied precincts of Rome—I had discovered a medicine for my many and vital wounds" (462). Yet it is also inadequate. In the remains of sympathy's ongoing and necessary failure to satisfy, Mary Shelley depicts a community with the other emerging not out of desire, but from the wide uncertainty that lies beyond hope even as it also makes it possible.

Encountered repeatedly by the figures in this study, this dark materiality of hope is fundamentally an acceptance of finitude. In the aftermath of this collapse of desire, however, the community that remains is not simply drive, as Coleridge teaches us in his later poetry. Instead, there remains some residual impulse—a dark sympathy for the other that maintains the connection with the other even when all other desires have failed. As Percy Shelley's Ianthe, or Godwin's misanthropes, or Coleridge's mariner, or Mary Shelley's Mathilda all recognize in a variety of ways, desire persists paradoxically even after the forms of desire—social or transcendent—cease. Where Hume responds to the "immense depths of philosophy" (169) by repressing transcendent desire within a desire for the social, Shelley and the other Romantics studied here find that their transcendent desire for the other grows under the influence of a materiality that they cannot ultimately resist. Neither a site of "Sublime Hope" nor necessarily a threat, the communities beyond desire to which they have been led by dark sympathy are ultimately points of access to the "thorny truth of things" that has attracted them all along.

CODA
The Cost of Dark Sympathy

"How many tears & spasms of anguish this solitude has
cost me lies buried in my memory — formed to feel
pleasure in society —in intercourse with persons of wit &
genius & the busy scene of life — how against the hair has
fortune ever stroked me! — Well — it is well nigh over."
     — Mary Shelley, journal entry for 21 October 1838

Although I have closed my study with a discussion of *The Last Man*, this novel

marks neither the end of Mary Shelley's writing nor of Romanticism. Likewise, the gaps

that have appeared in my chapters on Godwin and Coleridge – omitting, for example,

Godwin's voluminous historical writings or Coleridge's prose works – signal a tension

that I have tried to gesture towards, but have not made the central focus. This tension is

well phrased in the opening line of Emmanuel Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*, in which

he quotes from Rimbaud: "'The true life is absent.' But we are in the world" (33). If

Romantic writing is perhaps most regularly conceptualized in terms of its transcendent

tendency, then its standard history is also typically understood as a gradual retreat into

the social idealism of the Victorians. The modern myth of this apparently inevitable and

conservative turn to the social after a brief libidinal struggle certainly gains many

examples during this period. Accusations could be and were levied against all three of the

writers I have taken up, with Godwin assuming a government post in his last years,

Coleridge identifying increasingly with orthodoxy in church and state, and Shelley

"bowdlerizing" the radicalism of her late husband.[1] Furthermore, the irresistibility of

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[1] William St. Clair notes that in 1833 the Whig Government appointed Godwin "to the post of Office Keeper and Yeoman Usher of the Receipt of the Exchequer" (485). On the subject of Shelley, accusations of "bowdlerization" continue even today, with a (very one-sided) debate appearing on the online listserv for the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism (NASSR-L) as recently as September 2013 (https://listserv.wvu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A0=NASSR-L).

social desire is a regular theme in many of the texts I have taken up. Dark sympathy cannot, it seems, be extended into an ongoing mode of being with others; it remains an event only. One of the costs of dark sympathy is the gap on the other side of the event, in which social desire returns, but with a reinforced sense of its inadequacies.

Jean-Luc Nancy observes that discussions about community often emphasize or narrate the ways in which it has been "lost, or broken" (*Inoperative* 9) by society. He disputes this claim, however: "*Society* was not built on the ruins of a *community*. It emerged from the disappearance or the conservation of something – tribes or empires – perhaps just as unrelated to what we call 'community' as to what we call 'society'" (11). The radical alterity that materialism introduces in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries suggests an insufficiency in sociality itself, to the extent that its reliance upon narrative, image, and system cannot accommodate a materiality understood as that which resists representation. A major aim of this study has been to unpack more fully the scope of this alterity and the kinds of desires it produces in the period. As I note in the Preface and elsewhere, social desire has justly been one of the key approaches to studies of sympathy. I have tried to account at least superficially for this influence in the organization of the chapters on each author. Although partly chronological in nature, the order of the chapters has also been intended to express something of the ebb and flow of the social's influence through the period. Godwin's suspicions about the social are not entirely taken up by Coleridge, for instance, nor does Shelley embrace either Coleridge's idealism or Godwin's optimistic opinions about a perfectibility that would undergird an improved society. Likewise, the development of each author's thought on the social rarely overlaps. Godwin's adjusting view on the role of partiality in political justice

distinguishes him from Coleridge, whose pantisocratic pretensions were both more

sectarian than political justice and less threatening than Mary Shelley's exploits as a

youth. Rather than organizing my discussions in terms of an ideological movement (for

example, from Coleridge as social idealist to Godwin to Shelley), I position Coleridge

between Godwin and Shelley (these latter two of whom are perhaps the most

ideologically similar) in order to highlight the different attitudes each of the three authors

has towards the social. This hopefully can help to draw out the way these attitudes shift

over the course of each one's career.

Yet, if we return to Nancy's observation, these modulating attitudes towards "the

social" may in fact beg a question about the very possibility of retreat or conservation. If

dark sympathy is an event, then how accurate are these terms in describing a social desire

that subsequently ensues after its "failure"? I have used this vocabulary in several places,

partly to mark its inoperative (*désœuvré*) dimension; however, from another perspective,

the language of "failure" participates in precisely that nostalgic view of community that

Nancy critiques. Likewise, the standard idea of a Romantic retreat from the transcendent

to the social both overlooks the evental nature of the desire itself and silently authorizes

the Victorian interpretation of the Romantic period as a lost community out of which a

perhaps less ideal, yet ultimately more stable and successful society could emerge.

Matthew Arnold's famous pronouncement on "the English poetry of the first quarter of

this century" as having "about it, in fact, something premature; and that from this cause

its productions are doomed, most of them, *in spite of the sanguine hopes* which

accompanied and do still accompany them, to prove hardly more lasting than the

productions of far less splendid epochs" (8, emphasis mine) reiterates this view almost

explicitly. My focus on the way transcendent desire presses against the social has been part of a larger effort to dispute this reading.[2] By focusing on dark sympathy as a vehicle of desire for the other capable of temporarily circumventing the social to some extent, I hope that this project will invite further inquiry into similar forms of this contingent event of relation, which might also upset or interrogate the truth of things as they are.

Thus, even in the midst of this attempt to appropriate Romanticism, dark sympathy may persist. After Mary Shelley died, her son and daughter-in-law discovered Percy's heart in her travelling desk, wrapped in silk between the pages of *Adonais*.[3] From one perspective, the anecdote offers a possible allegory that has continued to affect (and effect) the way Mary tends to be read into the Victorian period. The travelling desk, a relic itself from her time writing *Frankenstein*,[4] follows her out of the poverty and social rejection of her youth, into Field Place, the ancestral home of the Shelleys, where she moved with her son, the baronet, Sir Percy Florence Shelley, in 1849. Hence, as the story goes, the failed community of the Romantics finds its social redemption in the sentimental idealism of the Victorians. There, in the seat of what Godwin had called, describing aristocracy, "a scheme for rendering more permanent and visible by the interference of political institution the inequality of mankind" (PJ1 2:478), the desk lay

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[2] Joel Faflak and Julia M. Wright's collection, *Nervous Reactions: Victorian Recollections of Romanticism*, speaks strongly to this subject. In the introduction, they note: "the Victorian privileging of an idealistic and largely apolitical Romanticism elided its diversity, political and otherwise. Moreover, this elision is a suggestive one for scholars interested in the transition from one period to the other, not as a change in the Jaussian 'horizon of expectations' but as a transition that was constructed to secure that horizon and with it the fiction of sociocultural stability. For a feeling, politicized Romanticism thus becomes, for Victorian writers, 'sentimentalism' (frequently the pejorative term of *sensibility* for nineteenth-century writers), Byronic egotism, radicalism, and sensationalism—a Romanticism with addictive properties and thus a pathology within the body politic that demands either curing or excision" (8) – or, we might add, discursive translation via periodization, biography, and abstraction.

[3] See Julie A. Carlson, 195.

[4] Carlson notes that the desk in which Percy Florence Shelley and his wife discovered the relics was "the very desk that was returned to her on 7 October 1822, having been left in Marlow in 1818" (195). She finished writing the last volume of *Frankenstein* in April, shortly after she and Percy moved to Albion House in Marlow, Buckinghamshire (see Sunstein 130).

unopened until the first anniversary of Mary's death. After the heart's discovery, Lady

Shelley had it buried with Mary as well as the disinterred and displaced bodies of

Godwin and Wollstonecraft. Especially near the end of the century, the story was spread

widely:[5] it appears to perfectly accommodate the approach the Victorians had taken to

socializing the Romantics (and, foremost, P. B. Shelley).[6] The heart, they might say, is a

sign of the Romantic longing that Mary continued to harbor even after she began

producing more domestic or "safe" novels such as *Lodore* and *Falkner*.[7] Functioning like

Walter Pater's "gem-like flame," the heart takes the best of what the Romantics thought

and said – offering, perhaps, an "intimation of immortality" or "the world in a grain of

sand" – and transmits it into a more socially capable era.

Yet an interesting aporia emerges in late-nineteenth-century discussions of

Shelley's heart that points back to the manner in which dark sympathy persists in spite of

the apparent slow retreat of Romanticism. For example, William Michael Rossetti's

poem, "Shelley's Heart," describes in transcendent terms how the heart "shall dart /

Pangs of keen love to human souls" (5-6). As Rossetti noted in his diary, however, the

poem was rejected from *The Fortnightly Review*: "Morley wouldn't stand my Shelley

sonnet. Professes to think it 'very perfect' in execution but 'terribly physical' in idea"

(qtd. in Hawley 82). Put into poetry, the materiality of this symbol grows unmanageable.

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[5] The story seems to have been originally popularized in Edward Dowden's 1887 biography of P. B. Shelley (2:534). Edward Trelawny mentions taking the heart from Shelley's pyre in his 1856 *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron* (137-38).

[6] See Eric O. Clarke's chapter on "Shelley's Heart" for an excellent overview of the Victorian reception and sanitization of Shelley and with specific commentary on the discussion of Shelley's heart – both literal and figurative – in the period.

[7] Mary Poovey writes: "After composing the novels that show most clearly the influence of her mother's self-confidence and Percy Shelley's aesthetics—*Frankenstein* (1818), *Mathilda* (1819), *Valperga* (1823), and *The Last Man* (1826)—Mary Shelley began to use her literary career both to defend her behaviour and, more significantly, to so characterize it that it would need no defense; in other words, she sought to make her behaviour conform to conventional expectations of what a woman should be. Her last three novels— *Perkin Warbeck* (1830), *Lodore* (1835), and *Falkner* (1837)—demonstrate the refinement of this strategy" (116).

The nature of Mary's desire for Percy – or the desire for the other more generally – harnesses the opacity paradoxically communicated by the physicality of the heart to articulate a form of relation that cannot be understood or comprehended without some reserve. While the attempt on the part of Victorian writers to integrate this opacity into their social idealism reveals in part their need to mitigate it, it also recalls the complexity of sympathetic desire. For, although the event of dark sympathy interrupts or disputes social sympathy because of its implicit effort to undo the stabilities of the social, it may nevertheless serve as the basis for a new work of sympathy, located in the reader's recognition of the unbearable draw of the other and a momentary sharing of the difficult work of being in the world.

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