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

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THE AESTHETICS OF ROMANTIC HELLENISM

(Monograph)

by

Derek Shank

Graduate Program in English

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

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

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Abstract

This study examines the aesthetics of Romantic Hellenism in theory and practice. I trace various forms of Hellenism's ambivalence, which manifests in certain paradoxes. Such paradoxes include the aesthetic of desire, which longs for a union with ancient Greek culture even as it is aware of the impossibility of such fulfillment, and the Romantic notion of mythology, which exhibits a tension between order and system. Such tensions work to energize Hellenism with aesthetic potentiality by preserving the mysteriousness of ancient Greek culture, and thus frequently turn upon the interdependence of the reading of Greece with the writing of literature or philosophy. In my first chapter, I show how Hellenism became the ground of German Romantic aesthetic theory beginning in the latter half of the eighteenth century. In the works of Winckelmann, Schiller, Friedrich Schlegel, Hegel, and Nietzsche, the study of Greek art and literature forms a space in which certain irresolvable aesthetic issues, in the form of the relationship between the real and the ideal, play out. The second chapter takes up the topic of fragmentation in British Romanticism, analyzing texts by Richard Polwhele, Felicia Hemans, Byron, Keats, and Blake. I show how fragmentation in representations of the modern Greek landscape and of ancient Greek art serves to energize them with aesthetic potentiality for the reading and writing processes. The third chapter examines the sexualization of the aesthetic of desire in Hellenizing erotic poems. I read Keats's *Endymion* and *Lamia* and Percy Shelley's *Epipsychidion* in the context provided by Shelley's preface to his translation of Plato's *Symposium*. Such poems work to stage the failure of cultural translation, the passionate yet futile attempt to "know" ancient Greek culture intellectually, aesthetically, and sexually. The fourth chapter addresses mythology

as embodying a tension between system and fragment. With reference to Romantic theories of mythology such as those of Schelling and Friedrich Schlegel, I argue that Keats's Hyperion poems and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* work like mythology in staging their own failures at arranging Hellenic fragments into coherent systems, leaving the writing of Greece yet to be completed.

Keywords

English literature; Romanticism; Hellenism; Greece; Aesthetics; Literary theory; British Romanticism; German Romanticism; Classical reception; Percy Shelley; Mary Shelley; John Keats; George Gordon, Lord Byron; Richard Polwhele; Felicia Hemans; William Blake; Fragmentation; Ruin; Rape; Seduction; Desecration; Mythology; Hermeneutics; Translation; Ekphrasis; Greek Love; Anal sex; Desire; Sexuality; Eros; Eroticism; Georges Bataille; Failure; Perversity; Johann Joachim Winckelmann; Friedrich Schiller; Friedrich Schlegel; Friedrich Schelling; G. W. F. Hegel; Friedrich Nietzsche; Ovid; Plato; *The Symposium*; *Prometheus Unbound*; *Hyperion*; *The Fall of Hyperion*; "Ode on a Grecian Urn"; *The Last Man*; *Modern Greece*; *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*; *Grecian Prospects*; *Laocoön*; "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles"; *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*; *History of the Art of Antiquity*; *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry*; *On the Study of Greek Poetry*; *Athenaeum Fragments*; *Lectures on Aesthetics*; *The Birth of Tragedy*; *Endymion*; *Lamia*; *Epipsychidion*; "A Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love"

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Introduction

In the third chapter of the second volume of Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Emily experiences a reverie which is emblematic of many of the salient tropes found within Romantic representations of Greece:

as her eyes glanced over the Adriatic, towards the opposite shores, which were, however, far beyond the reach of sight, she thought of Greece, and, a thousand classical remembrances stealing to her mind, she experienced that pensive luxury which is felt on viewing the scenes of ancient story, and on comparing their present state of silence and solitude with that of their former grandeur and animation. The scenes of the Illiad [sic] illapsed in glowing colours to her fancy—scenes, once the haunt of heroes—now lonely, and in ruins; but which still shone, in the poet's strain, in all their youthful splendour.

As her imagination painted with melancholy touches, the deserted plains of Troy, such as they appeared in this after-day, she reanimated the landscape with the following little story. (206)

The first thing to note is that Greece is absent, for Emily is travelling on a barge from Venice to the river Brenta. Not only is Greece out of sight, but it is not even directly on the other side of the Adriatic. To get to Greece from Venice one would have to sail the entire length of the Adriatic in addition to crossing to the other side, in a journey of nearly a thousand kilometers by sea. Much like how Radcliffe's own setting in France and Italy provides a geographical displacement allowing for the fantastical machinery of the Gothic plot, so too does the distance of Greece imbue it with potentiality for Emily's wayward and sentimental imagination. Rather than contrasting Emily's memories of the glory of classical Greece with her present deplorable state in which her uncle Montoni is trying to force her to marry Count Morano, this passage focuses on the contrast of the (imagined) heroic deeds of classical Greece with the (equally imagined) present desolation of the Greek landscape, which are both referred to in the word "scenes." Radcliffe's insistent visual metaphors for the operation of the imagination evident in the

words “glowing,” “shone,” and “painted” work to establish the vividness of Emily’s psychological experience of Greece even as they point to its fundamental absence. Despite the geographical distance of Greece and the extreme vagueness of Emily’s unspecified “classical remembrances,” the imagined present state of the Greek landscape is evoked as a physical reality which both substantiates the fantastic ideal of the mythical past as having actually taken place, and emphasizes its irrecoverable distance in an antiquity which can never again be realized.¹ The aesthetic power of Emily’s recollections, their delight for her melancholy imagination, stems from these scenes being simultaneously “now . . . in ruins” and “in all their youthful splendour” “in the poet’s strain.” Emily’s imagination works to overlay her conception of the present-day geography with her recollection of the ancient text, and this inspires Emily to produce her own poetic composition which “reanimate[s] the landscape.” This passage demonstrates, therefore, that one of the ways Romantic Hellenism operates is by setting up a dialectical relationship between the real and the ideal, which endows Hellenic material with aesthetic vitality for the production of a new poetic work that constitutes a “reanimat[ion]” by virtue of its being rooted in both the poet’s own imagination and the enduring legacy of ancient Greek culture.

But what connection, if any, does Emily’s poem, which recounts the story of a merchant crossing the plane of Ilium being rescued from a murderous brigand by a shepherd to return home to his family, really have to the glories of ancient Greece embodied in the martial heroism of Homer’s *Iliad*, aside from their being set in the same

¹ It is also worth noting that “classical” in this passage is used to refer exclusively to Greek subject matter, rather than referring collectively to both Greek and Roman civilizations as is often the case. Radcliffe’s Italy does not seem to bear the trace of its illustrious ancient inhabitants.

geographical location? Just as there is a gap between the idealized conception of ancient Greece and the harsh reality of Greece's present state, so too is there a disconnect between the theoretical description of the composition of such Hellenizing poetry and the actual result. Radcliffe shows that the creation of a poetic treatment which would successfully do justice to the artistic accomplishments of ancient Greece is a problem. Yet part of what the failure of the poem points toward is precisely the failure of modern Greece itself to reflect the ideals of ancient heroic myth. The prevalence of banditry and the danger of being killed and robbed are in fact perfectly reflective of modern Greece, according to the experience of eighteenth-century travellers. For example, in his account of Richard Chandler's expedition to Greece, which took place from June 1764 to November 1766, David Constantine concludes that "[w]here [the travellers] ventured and how long they lingered on sites in Asia Minor was in large measure determined less by the intrinsic interest of the place than by how safe or unsafe they felt themselves to be from local bandits" (192). Furthermore, Emily's poem does recount a heroic activity of sorts—the noble shepherd shoots and slays the murderous bandit with a bow and arrow in order to save the merchant's life, suggesting that heroism now takes place on a much more modest scale. It seems as if the present-day poet is only capable of representing the concrete details of modern Greece, and gesturing toward the greatness of ancient Greece in vague and passing allusions. The failure of Emily's poem to realize the potentiality of the ancient Greek past is just one example of a more widespread tendency toward failure in Romantic Hellenizing poetry.

This concern with poetic representations of Greece in Radcliffe's Gothic novel points toward the surge of interest in Greece beginning in Europe in the latter half of the

eighteenth century, which also manifested in the realms of archaeology, art history, and material culture. Herculaneum was discovered in 1738 and Pompeii in 1748. These were (and remain) particularly important archaeological sites because the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE covered the cities with volcanic ash, resulting in some remarkably well-preserved remains rarely to be found at other sites.² In 1751 the London-based Society of Dilettanti sponsored James Stuart and Nicholas Revett to travel to Greece in a four-year expedition with the purpose of collecting information on Greek architecture in order to improve the taste of their English countrymen. Many of these drawings were published as engravings in the series *Antiquities of Athens* (1st vol. 1762, 2nd vol. 1789), which were lavish subscribed editions. Such engravings along with detailed measurements of Greek temples were advanced as models for the construction of English architecture, in what is now known as the Greek Revival. The Society also sponsored an expedition to Ionia from 1764-66, which included Richard Chandler as well as Revett. The findings of this expedition were published in the series *Ionian Antiquities* (1st vol. 1769, 2nd vol. 1797). Over time, scholars began to realize that the class of vases originally thought to be Etruscan was actually Greek, and Sir William Hamilton published two sets of books with engravings and drawings of items from his collection (1st set 1766-67, 2nd set 1791-96). Such research and publications show that Greece was not considered merely as a heap of cut-and-dried remains, but rather as an area of inquiry which had yet to be fully explored. The ongoing study and investigation of ancient Greek

² E.g. wall paintings, as paint is very fragile and rarely survives from antiquity in anything more than small flecks. Publications of findings at Herculaneum first appeared in the 1750s.

art rendered it a vital site of cultural production in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Though relatively few Hellenizing authors travelled to Greece themselves, this period did mark a general increase in travel to Greece (more for the French and English than for the Germans) and travel literature about Greece. First-hand experiences were often combined with the reading of ancient texts and scholarly works about antiquity: in the preface to *The Ruins of Palmyra* (1753), Robert Wood reports that the effects brought along with his expedition included “a library, consisting chiefly of all the Greek historians and poets, some books of antiquities, and the best voyage writers” (qtd. in Constantine 67). Perhaps the best-known example of British appropriation of ancient Greek material culture is the (dubiously legal) acquisition of the Parthenon marbles by Lord Elgin, and their display at the British Museum beginning in 1816. Less known is the fact that there was a heated public debate over the artistic value of the Elgin Marbles (Rothenberg 212-356), and the government was at first quite reluctant to purchase them at the price demanded by Lord Elgin, who had incurred great expenses and was deeply in debt (Rothenberg 312-20). The prominent antiquarian Richard Payne Knight disputed the value and authenticity of the collection (Rothenberg 212-17). It required the public advocacy and testimony of a number of antiquarians before a deal between Elgin and the British government was finally reached, six years after they had first begun negotiations (Rothenberg 364-432), and a full ten years after the sculptures’ arrival in England. The debate over the artistic and monetary value of the Elgin marbles and the propriety of the government purchasing them for public display demonstrates the heterogeneity of British views of ancient Greek art in the early nineteenth century, and one of the crucial

problems posed by Hellenism itself: if ancient Greek art is the ideal aesthetic standard upon which we ought to base our judgement, how do we judge ancient Greek art itself in order to distinguish which pieces are the best expressions of such Hellenic perfection? Rather than providing a fixed aesthetic standard to which judgement could be mechanically deferred, ancient Greek material culture actually opened up a space of possibility in which theoretical debate about the nature of art could take place.

On a basic level, the artistic process in which Emily engages in Radcliffe's novel is not unlike that of many Romantic authors who composed works inspired by or treating of Hellenic subject matter, few of whom ever actually set foot on Greece themselves.³ Although scholars have long recognized the increasing interest in Greece evident in the literature and culture of western Europe beginning in the latter half of the eighteenth century, the significance of this shift for our understanding of Romantic literature and aesthetics has not yet been fully explored. Despite the fact that literary scholars have identified Romantic Hellenism as an important phenomenon,⁴ the existing studies either deal with single authors or address a small number of texts. My title "The Aesthetics of Romantic Hellenism" indicates my interest in two interrelated issues: the place that Hellenism occupies in Romantic literary and aesthetic theory, and the aesthetics which is implicated in Romantic treatments of Hellenic subject matter. As I suggested above in my discussion of Radcliffe's use of the word "reanimate," the Romantic impulse to create original works based on the author's engagement with the notion of ancient Greece discloses an essentially vital conception of past literature, culture, and myth (rooted in the

³ Byron is of course a notable exception.

⁴ In a 1917 article, "The Hellenic Current in Nineteenth Century Poetry," F. E. Pierce writes, "[t]he Hellenic current was an outgrowth of the romantic movement" (113).

extant material and textual remains of ancient Greece), even as it raises the problem of how the modern work of literature is to do justice to the legacy of antiquity.

This question of the relationship between the modern poet and the cultural legacy of antiquity is the approach adopted by Martin Aske in his book *Keats and Hellenism*. According to Aske's reading of Hellenism, "Keats appeals to antiquity as a supreme fiction, that is, an ideal space of possibility whose imaginative rehabilitation might guarantee the authority of modern poetry" (1), but such an antiquity is unrealizable and is in fact marked by the "*absence* of a material text" (4),⁵ so Keats's poems "expose the idea of an adequate restoration of ancient modes as an illusion, an impossible nostalgia" (6). While I agree with the general tendency of Aske's reading—particularly his argument about the deployment of ancient Greek culture as "an ideal space of possibility"—I differ on several points. Firstly, often the material text referred to is no more absent than Adam is absent in *Paradise Lost*. In other words, it may be described as absent only in the sense that it is represented in a text rather than actually present. In the case of Emily's relation to the Greek landscape, the landscape is absent because it is distant and only imagined, but its potentiality is in part based on the fact that it actually does materially exist in another place. Romantic representations of ancient Greek culture often emphasize the materiality of the cultural remains, as evident in my discussions of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and Mary Shelley's introduction to *The Last Man* (see below). Such texts describe the encounter between the authorial persona and a(n admittedly fictional and often fragmented) material text. If such a text is not fully present

⁵ Italics in quotations reproduce those of the original, unless otherwise noted.

because it is incomprehensible or ungraspable, this lack results more from the failure of the reading function than from the absence of the material text.

Furthermore, while I agree with Aske that Romantic Hellenizing texts are generally “*necessary failure[s]*” (6), I do not think that the goal toward which such texts vainly strive is “an adequate restoration of ancient modes”; rather, their unrealizable object is the material actualization of the aesthetic potentiality of ancient Greek culture by means of the intertwined processes of reading and (re)writing, even as they figure this process as a violent desecration or rape of the pristine Hellenic art object. Therefore, the sentiment they express toward ancient Greek culture is not so much “an impossible nostalgia” as it is a paradoxical desire, a desire that is not only unrealizable but is aware that its attainment of its object would negate its motivation. Appropriately enough—and as I take up in chapter three—it seems that such a conception of desire is already theorized within ancient Greek thought, in the characterization of *eros* in Plato’s *Symposium* as necessarily being *of* what it lacks.⁶ Romantic Hellenism deploys an aesthetic of desire that insistently strives toward what is necessarily unrealizable and unattainable. But such an aesthetic is not simply the manifestation of a wilfully naive nostalgia for the irrecoverable lost ideal of ancient Greek culture. Rather, the very lack or absence which Romantic Hellenism strives toward is precisely what endows it with its

⁶ That is, *eros* always is always directed toward an object which is absent; that which is desired is always that which is lacking (199c-201b). In the Greek this relation is expressed by *eros* plus a noun in the genitive case. In interrogating Agathon, Socrates first gets him to agree that *eros* is like ‘father’, ‘mother’, or ‘brother’, in that it is always *of* something (199c-e). Next, he gets Agathon to agree that *eros* is necessarily *of* what it desires, and necessarily lacks what it desires (because one does not desire what one already possesses) (200a-e). See my discussion in ch. 3.

fascinating potentiality.⁷ There is thus a contradiction at the heart of Romantic Hellenism. On the one hand, it sincerely desires the material or actual realization of the Greek perfection toward which it strives, even as it is aware that such a realization of its desire is necessarily impossible and would result in an apocalyptic implosion of its aesthetic. On the other hand, it is also aware that such a realization is not really its goal and must in fact be avoided at all costs, and so purposely seeks this satisfaction through a mode of writing that is necessarily doomed to failure.

For an example of such a process, let us consider Keats's (1795-1821) "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (1820). As its title indicates, the poem presents itself as a meditation on an aesthetic object produced by ancient Greek culture, which comes by synecdoche to stand for ancient Greek culture itself. The speaker's impassioned meditation on the urn discloses his ardent desire to possess ancient Greek culture through aesthetic experience as a mode of knowledge; if the speaker can crack the urn's code, then ancient Greek culture would become aesthetically knowable through his experience of the urn as a material medium. Yet throughout the course of his attempt to know the urn, for example in the speculative questions of the first and fourth stanzas, the speaker persistently exposes his own ignorance and the urn's ineffability. The very process of reading the urn discloses the urn's status as something never fully knowable, simultaneously both animated and frozen, vital and dead—or in the words of the poem itself, a "Cold Pastoral" depicting a maiden "[f]or ever warm and still to be enjoy'd" (45; 26). The most straightforward meaning of "still" in this context is that of 'yet'; the maiden is frozen in

⁷ Cf. Ferris, "[o]nly by recourse to the aesthetic can an unattainable goal be given a realizable potentiality that does not undermine its conceptual origin" (95).

time and therefore her lover's enjoyment of her is forever deferred to an unapproachable future point in time, just as the speaker's achievement of understanding of the urn is an unrealizable goal toward which he continually strives. The second, less obvious meaning of "still," 'motionless,' invokes a notion close to that of necrophilia, by suggesting that the maiden in being frozen in time is always warm and motionless for her lover's continual enjoyment. "[S]till" as 'motionless' thus evokes the pure violence of the speaker's imposing a reading on the unresisting urn as a form of hermeneutic rape, thus recalling the same double meaning of "still" in the "still unravish'd" of the poem's first line. To rephrase the dynamic of aesthetic and knowledge in the sexual terms suggested by the poem itself—and evident more explicitly in the Hellenizing erotic narrative poems I examine in chapter three—the urn is like a virgin who inspires sexual desire by virtue of her purity (her status as 'unknown'), even as her being ravished by a man in the fulfillment of that desire (her being 'known') would destroy her value and therefore annihilate the very motive for his desire in the first place.

Nevertheless, despite the passivity implied by such gendered sexual imagery, the urn *does* resist reading throughout the poem. Rather than locating such resistance within the urn itself, however, I would suggest instead that the urn's apparent resistance to being read is a defense mechanism within the speaker's own psyche. The speaker's vain attempt to impose an interpretation in the form of the bland tautology with which the poem concludes ("Beauty is truth, truth beauty" [49]) is symptomatic of both his will to knowledge and mastery and his drive to poetic and hermeneutic failure. The urn's potentiality as an aesthetic object is dependent upon the mysteriousness and obscurity of its representations, even as the speaker must draw some conclusion from his reading of

the urn in order for his poetic production to affirm the meaning of his aesthetic experience. The only conclusion he is capable of drawing, therefore, is one that is either patently false or semantically vacuous, depending on how one reads the terms of the tautology. The urn is both the embodiment of ancient Greek culture and civilization, and the marker of such a culture's status as entirely unreal(izable), an absence or lack toward which the imagination vainly strives. The poem's representation of the speaker's reading of the urn thus gestures toward a de Manian reading of poetic representation, as "able to posit regardless of presence but, by the same token, unable to give a foundation to what it posits except as an intent of consciousness" (6).

But a key difference here is that de Man's argument refers to "[p]oetic language" (6), while the urn is a material object of plastic art. To argue, therefore, that the poem represents such a reading is to ignore the distinction within the poem between the urn itself and the process of reading. In other words, the poem employs the trope of ekphrasis in order to engage with the nature of aesthetic representation on two levels: on the inner level it dramatizes a scene of reading (the speaker's reading of the urn), even as on the outer level it is itself a scene of reading (the reader's reading of the poem).⁸ Thus, part of the effect of the poem is to stage the choice between these levels in the course of our

⁸ My interpretation of ekphrasis in the poem is another point on which I disagree with Aske. Aske defines ekphrasis as "the poetic description of a pictorial or sculptural work of art," and associates 'description' with readings that emphasize the poem's successful 'depiction' or 'representation' of the urn as a concrete art object, arguing that "the poem . . . is anything but a simple 'description,' or 'verbal transposition of the sensuous appearance of a Greek urn,'" and therefore "the urn . . . refuses to be aligned with any such tradition" (103). Rather than asserting a simple translation from the visual to the verbal medium, however, ekphrasis often works to expose the difference between verbal (temporal) representations and visual (spatial) representations, for example by describing images using narrative. As Krieger observes,

What is being described in *ekphrasis* is both a miracle and a mirage: a miracle because a sequence of actions filled with before and afters such as language alone can trace seems frozen into an instant's vision, but a mirage because only the illusion of such an impossible picture can be suggested by the poem's words. (xvi-xvii)

reading of it. Of course it is possible, if we regard the poem from the outer level, to read the urn as a linguistic construct which the reader encounters in the process of the decoding of the poem's language. Such a reading would emphasize the failure of the poem to represent the urn as a concrete object of plastic art. But if we read the poem from the inner level and examine the poem's own reflection on representation, the urn's materiality renders its potentiality more than purely imaginary in relation to the speaker. In the world of the poem, the very presence of the urn shows that the Greeks did exist in the past, made the urn, and the urn continues to exist in the present as an undeniable trace of their former being. The material reality of ancient Greek remains and the historical reality of ancient Greek culture pose an insistent problem because they clearly exist while they cannot be fully assimilated as knowable. So to return once again to the two levels of the poem: from the outer level we would say that the poet fails to represent the urn (the poem stages the failure of poetic language to portray ancient Greek culture); from the inner level we would say that the speaker fails to read the urn (the poem dramatizes the failure of the speaker's interpretation of ancient Greek art).⁹ If we combine the two levels into a single reading, Romantic Hellenism thus manifests itself as an aesthetic of desire through both the failure of the imagination to construct knowledge of the material object of plastic art within the speaker's psyche (a failure of reading), and the failure to realize the Hellenic object's actuality within the poem (a failure of writing). This double failure

⁹ Cf. Aske, "the poet . . . wants to write a Grecian urn, or else we might say that he endeavours to *read* the urn out of silence" (113).

works to preserve Greek culture's aesthetic potentiality as always in the process of being read and being written.¹⁰

II

Although my primary concern throughout this study is Hellenism as it is manifested in British Romanticism, throughout my first chapter and at various other points I also discuss the works of German authors. This approach may require justification, given that recently some critics have questioned whether treating British Romanticism alongside German Romanticism is methodologically sound. For example, in a review of *Silent Urns*, Jennifer Wallace writes, “[t]he difficulty with Ferris’s book is its emphasis on Winckelmann and other German writers—Friedrich Schelling, Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel—for a reading of British Romantic Hellenism” (631-32). Although there are certainly some notable differences between the Hellenism of British Romantics and that of the German Romantics—the British, for example, far more commonly travelled to Greece, while the Germans almost always shied away from a direct confrontation with Greece itself—that does not mean that it is inappropriate to read the two in relation to one another. Wallace oversimplifies when she characterizes German Hellenism as abstract and lacking in historical specificity in opposition to British Hellenism as being “caught in a tension between the abstract and the concrete” (632). Indeed, for Hegel, the classical form of art is defined precisely by the content’s “being in

¹⁰ My reading of the manifestation of Hellenism in the poem thus exhibits affinities with McFarland’s reading of the Romantic engagement with fragmentation and ruin, qualities he describes with the adjective diasparactive (coined from Greek διασπαράσσω ‘I rend in pieces’): “We see the same Romantic concern with infinity, and the attendant paradox whereby the perception of parts and fragments implies the hypothetical wholeness of infinity, but the impossibility of grasping that entity simultaneously witnesses the actual dominance of diasparactive forms” (28-29).

itself the concrete idea” in which “the spirit is at once determined as particular and human” (1: 78; 1: 79). Hellenism’s articulation of the relationship between the abstract and the concrete, the real and ideal, is in fact a common element to British and German aesthetic theory.¹¹

The commonality of the cultural preoccupation with Greece in Britain and Germany is also evident in the parallel emergence of work on archaeology and art history. As John Buxton writes, “we should inquire why the Society of Dilettanti sent out Stuart and Revett to Greece in the early 1750s at the very time when Winckelmann in Dresden was independently formulating his ideas on Grecian taste. The coincidence is too remarkable to be accepted as mere coincidence” (7).¹² More evidence for the mutual sympathy between British and German Hellenism is provided by Constantine, who in his book, *Early Greek Travellers and the Hellenic Ideal*, traces the development of the Western European conception of Greece in travel literature from the 1670s to the late eighteenth century. Constantine examines the interrelationship of ideas about modern Greece and ancient Greece in the latter half of the eighteenth century, as evident in the combination of classical scholarship and travel literature in works such as Robert Wood’s *Essay on the Original Genius and Writings of Homer with a Comparative View of the Ancient and Present State of the Troade* (1769), of which a German translation was published in 1773 and positively received by writers such as Goethe and Herder. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, the Homeric epics in particular became an important

¹¹ Cf. Güthenke, who writes of German Hellenism’s “fascination with Greece’s materiality, not as it opposes but as it is inseparable from its ideality” (3).

¹² The background information on eighteenth century study of Greek material culture throughout the rest of this paragraph is drawn from Buxton 4-13.

site in the broader theoretical debate about the nature of literature in general, and the reevaluation of Homer was intertwined with the development of Romantic aesthetic values such as truth to nature and poetic genius. Constantine writes of Wood, “[t]ime and again we hear him saying things of central importance in German *Sturm und Drang* (and in the European Romanticism of which that movement was a part)” (77). By demonstrating how Wood and others studied Homer in relation to their experiences of the modern Greek landscape, Constantine shows how late eighteenth-century culture persistently engaged with modern Greece alongside the ideals embodied by conceptions of ancient Greece and ancient Greek texts, providing an excellent context in which to consider the Hellenism of locodescriptive poems such as Felicia Hemans’s *Modern Greece* and Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, which I discuss in chapter two.

In her book *Placing Modern Greece: The Dynamics of Romantic Hellenism*, Constanze Güthenke undertakes a study of German and Greek representations of the Greek landscape during the Romantic period. Güthenke argues that Romantic representations of the Greek landscape establish a link between modern humanity’s estrangement from nature and separation from the past. Like David Ferris (see below), Güthenke reads Hellenism’s representation of the past as crucial to its conception of modernity, claiming that “both kinds of estrangement are understood to be conditions of modernity and of its possibilities to express itself” (5). Güthenke links representations of Greece to Romantic aesthetics by arguing that nature scenes establish a reciprocal

relationship between the subject and the external world.¹³ This interrelationship between ideality and materiality, the universal and the particular, makes the Greek landscape emblematic of the (Coleridgean or Schellingian) Romantic notion of the symbol. While I share Güthenke's concern with Hellenism as means of articulating the relationship between the real and the ideal (see chapter one), my treatment of the aesthetics of Hellenism differs because of my concern with British Romanticism as well as "the phenomenon of hellenizing or classicizing literature . . . as defined by the literary staging of classical artistic forms or motives or ancient settings," which Güthenke excludes from her study (11).

While I agree with Buxton's argument that the British and German turns toward Greek culture in the latter half of the eighteenth century were part of the same aesthetic movement, I disagree with his claim that we ought to read the literary Hellenism of Blake, Peacock, and Percy Shelley as a further development or extension of Neoclassicism. While Wood's reading of the Homeric poems was influential in Germany, Winckelmann's essay *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* (1755) 'Thoughts concerning the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture', was translated into English by Henri Fuseli in an edition titled *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks with Instructions for the Connoisseur, and an Essay on Grace in Works of Art* (1765), as well as appearing in an anonymous English translation, *Reflections concerning the Imitation of the Grecian Artists in Painting and Sculpture. In a Series of Letters* (Glasgow, 1766). As Buxton

¹³ The literary history of the development of a poetic form by Wordsworth and Coleridge articulating the reciprocal relationship between the poet and the natural scene is sketched out in Abrams, "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric."

points out, Winckelmann in the *Gedanken* emphasized “precision of contour” as a defining characteristic of ancient Greek plastic art, and Fuseli’s contemporary artists in Britain including “Flaxman, Romney, Blake and George Cumberland were all ready to respond to this Grecian emphasis on outline, both in practice and in theory” (13). Thus, there is some evidence that the direct imitation and adaptation of classical models in British art and architecture evident in the Greek Revival can be seen as a further development of Neoclassicism,¹⁴ and it is possible to read Winckelmann’s influence as contributing to this tendency, as suggested by Timothy Webb (162). The focus on Hellenic subject matter in Romantic literary works cannot be so easily accommodated to such an aesthetic of direct imitation of ancient Greek models, however. Buxton presents Shelley’s stylistic preference for verbs over epithets as a defining feature of a classical use of language (153-57), but he ignores, to take only a single example, the flagrant refusal of a work such as the lyrical drama of *Prometheus Unbound* to conform to the strict stylistic and formal requirements of the Neoclassical division of genres. The value of originality and genius, of creative innovation, which is evident in Romantic literary works, prevents any assimilation of Romantic Hellenism into the tradition of Neoclassicism.

Accordingly, I am more inclined to support David Ferris’s reading of the significance of Winckelmann for Romantic Hellenism, as expounded in his book *Silent*

¹⁴ In his treatise *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1790), Archibald Alison provides an example of the assimilation of the ‘Grecian Taste’ and Neoclassicism with regard to contemporary material culture:

The Taste which now reigns is that of the ANTIQUE. Every thing we now use, is made in imitation of those models which have been lately discovered in Italy; and they serve in the same manner to occupy our imagination, by leading to those recollections of Grecian or Roman Taste, which have so much the possession of our minds, from the studies and amusements of our youth. (393)

Here and in other quotations I have modernized long s and ligatures.

Urns: Romanticism, Hellenism, Modernity. Ferris presents Romantic Hellenism as an aesthetic model of culture for articulating the relationship between history and modernity in terms of freedom. According to Ferris, this manner of Hellenism originates in the work of Winckelmann, and its legacy extends through Ferris's readings of works by Keats, Schelling, Shelley, and Hölderlin, who build upon Winckelmann's conception of Hellenism even as they revise and question it. Ferris also launches a critique of what he calls "Ideological" criticism embodied by New Historicist critics such as Jerome McGann, arguing that their denigration of the aesthetic and their attempt to unmask it in favour of underlying (material) historical and political forces constitutes a disingenuous sleight-of-hand.¹⁵ The aesthetic cannot be exiled from critical discourse because "it is always the expression of a difference between what is represented and the means of representation" (59). Any reading of Romantic Hellenism must therefore take into account its aesthetic dimensions in relation to Romantic literature's self-reflexivity. Like Ferris, I see Hellenism as the space in which Romanticism confronts certain irresolvable aesthetic issues. Since for Ferris the main issue is the characterization of modernity in terms of freedom in relation to history, Greece is of primary importance as a theoretical space in which the idea of the interrelation between history, politics, culture, and the aesthetic is articulated. My first chapter dovetails with Ferris's argument, for I examine Winckelmann and subsequent thinkers as setting up Greece as a space for the articulation of Romantic aesthetic theory. In my readings of literary works throughout the rest of this

¹⁵ Ferris writes, "since the meaning the world of history and politics desires is affirmed by the negation of the aesthetic, neither history nor politics can become meaningful without such an aesthetic" (57). Thus, "at the moment he dismisses Hegel as pure theory, McGann has merely enacted what Hegel maps out as the historical passage of the aesthetic," for "Hegel's account of the history of the aesthetic is the means by which McGann rejects Hegel in the name of history: the aesthetic (in the guise of history and politics) is criticizing the aesthetic in order to hide from itself" (59).

study, I am less concerned with modernity as the articulation of freedom and a break from the past, than I am with Romantic texts' representations of the place of the modern poet or artist in relation to Greece's extant artistic, literary, and cultural remains. I accordingly focus on the ways in which Romantic texts address the dynamics of the aesthetic potentiality of ancient Greek art and culture in relation to the processes of interpretation and composition.

As Wallace points out, because classical education was associated with the (male) aristocracy, "the study of the Romantic interest in classical Greece can erroneously be seen as an attempt to focus back regressively upon the canon, to discipline new writers and writing" (*Shelley and Greece* 16). Such a view quickly becomes untenable when one realizes that Hellenizing works in English include not just poems by Keats, Byron, and Percy Shelley, but also by Felicia Hemans, Richard Polwhele, Joseph Dacre Carlyle, William Haygarth, Mary Tighe, and Mary Robinson, among others. When one also includes works of criticism and non-fiction prose, the quantity of Hellenic material becomes quite vast.¹⁶ While no study could hope to do justice to all the relevant works, this project attempts to present at least a hint of the diversity of authors and texts that fall within the scope of Romantic Hellenism, although I have necessarily had to be selective.¹⁷ Furthermore, because Romantic Hellenism is an area in which both traditionally canonical and lesser-known works intersect, the study of Hellenism has the

¹⁶ The same concern with Greece does not seem to extend to fiction, although there are some examples, such as Sydney Owenson's *Woman; or, Ida of Athens* (1809), and Thomas Hope's *Anastasius; or, Memoirs of a Greek, Written at the Close of the Eighteenth Century* (1820).

¹⁷ For example, travel literature about Greece is certainly an important aspect of the period's Hellenism, but has already been treated extensively by Constantine. I also do not address in depth the many translations of ancient Greek works which were published during the period.

potential to read such works in dialogue with one another, as evident in the range of texts I discuss in chapter two. In his book *Romantic Hellenism and Women Writers*, Noah Comet argues that the study of women writers reveals alternative forms of Hellenism than those found in their male counterparts. In contrast to “grand narratives of Hellenism and Romanticism,” Comet claims, women writers “envisioned a Greece that was tenuous,” and articulated an “*idea* of Greece [which] had at best a tertiary relationship to Greece itself” (3; 3; 12). Yet as Comet admits (126 n. 11; 138 n. 2), the distinction between masculine and feminine Hellenisms is not as clear-cut as such generalizations suggest. Comet’s claims actually point toward how men and women writers engaged with similar issues. As I demonstrate throughout this study, male writers also exhibit concern with the fragility of Greece, and the disconnect between the idea of Greece and the (supposed) actuality of Greece. Comet’s distinction between “masculine” and “feminine” Hellenisms reflects an ambivalence which exists already within Hellenism itself—though we need not characterize this ambivalence in such gendered terms.

In her book *Shelley and Greece: Rethinking Romantic Hellenism*, Wallace documents the often ambiguous and contradictory representations of different facets of Hellenism throughout the period, and offers readings of Percy Shelley’s poems in relation to these debates. Her main argument is that the simplistic view of Greece as an entirely idealized, perfect civilization was not developed and institutionalized until the Victorian period, and that Romantic Hellenism engages with Greece in a much more complex way because a single authoritative view of Greece was yet to be established. Wallace thus presents Shelley simultaneously as an author who ‘thought through’ Hellenism and as a figure through which modern criticism ought to ‘rethink’ Hellenism’s complexity.

Unfortunately, Wallace exhibits a tendency to oversimplify and dismiss the Hellenism of other Romantic poets. For example, she claims that “Keatsian hellenism is predominantly aesthetic,” “a sensual and illogical escape from mundane cares into the beautiful world of the imagination, evoked by beautiful art and landscapes” (3), while Byron exhibits an “emotional hellenism” by employing Greece as “an easily appropriated metaphor, almost a cliché, for the gloomy sense of self which he portrayed, and later interrogated, in his work” (4). Wallace thus sets up simplified versions of Byronic and Keatsian Hellenism as foils in order to emphasize the complexity of a Shelleyan Hellenism of intellectual engagement with the classical tradition. In denigrating Keats’s “aesthetic” Hellenism and Byron’s “emotional” Hellenism in favour of Shelley’s intellectual Hellenism, Wallace downplays not only Shelley’s own emotional and aesthetic engagement with Greece, but also the important role that emotion and aesthetics play in Romantic conceptions of knowledge and literature.¹⁸ Furthermore, her reading of Keats’s Hellenism ignores Keats’s often ambivalent and self-reflexive interrogation of the process of idealization in art, demonstrated by Tilottama Rajan (*Dark Interpreter* 98-101). The darker elements in poems such as *Lamia* and *The Fall of Hyperion* demonstrate that Keats’s Hellenism cannot be reduced to a simple aesthetic escapism. Although Wallace later acknowledges that Byron’s prose notes about modern Greece provide a more measured scholarly counterpoint to the emotional philhellenic rhetoric within his poetry (194-96), such an

¹⁸ In the 1802 additions to the preface of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth claims that the link between beauty and pleasure makes poetry a privileged medium for the expression and experience of knowledge about the world. According to Wordsworth, the “necessity of producing immediate pleasure” is not “a degradation of the Poet’s art,” but rather “an acknowledgement of the beauty of the universe” (422), and “[w]e have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure We have no knowledge, that is, no general principles drawn from the contemplation of particular facts, but what has been built up by pleasure, and exists in us by pleasure alone” (422).

antithesis ignores Byron's frequent tongue-in-cheek deployment of literary topoi. In this study I present a more diverse portrait of Romantic Hellenism by bringing into dialogue authors who have frequently only been studied in depth separately. Although a full treatment of every author or text is neither possible nor desirable, by proceeding thematically and theoretically I engage with a wider scope of material and identify some of Romantic Hellenism's more pressing questions and the variety of ways in which authors engaged with them.

III

Conceptions of Romantic Hellenism in the earlier twentieth century were for the most part limited by a notion of "influence" which seems dated to current critical sensibilities. Wallace remarks that because of this "unsophisticated view of influence," earlier scholars "have tended to concentrate on the laborious process of source-hunting and cataloguing areas of obvious similarity like latter-day Casaubons retreating behind the defences of their massive libraries" (1; 2). As indicated by its derivation from the Latin *influer*, 'to flow in', "influence" implies a unidirectional transference of literary and cultural material from the ancient Greek past to Romantic writers. Even if the writers are said to "reshape" past "material" to serve their own literary purposes, by assuming the continuity of a transferred "material" such a model ignores the active role that Romantic authors took in theorizing the nature of ancient Greek literature and culture. If we return once again to the passage from *The Mysteries of Udolpho* with which I began, we can see that Emily's experience of Hellenic material and her composition of her poem are not separate stages in a mechanical process. She does not simply experience Hellenic

‘material’ and then work with it or reshape it into an ‘ideal’ from which she constructs her poem. Rather, the ideal elements form a crucial role in her conceptualization of imagined Hellenic subject matter in the first place. Wallace is certainly correct to argue that attention to later twentieth-century developments in criticism ought to produce “[a]n awareness of how we respond to otherness, the degree of imaginative construction involved rather than simply passive inheritance,” which “should inform the study of hellenism” (7). When we pay closer attention to Romantic texts, however, we can see that twentieth-century criticism’s cultivation of such an awareness is not an entirely new development, but rather a reconsideration of certain complexities which are already theorized within Romantic texts.

Indeed, a number of Romantic works complicate the idea of a straightforward deployment of “material” by combining elements of life writing with Hellenizing fictions. For example, Friedrich Hölderlin’s (1770-1843) epistolary novel *Hyperion* (1797-99) deals with the eponymous protagonist’s political ideals for Greece during an armed revolt, as well as with his love affair with a character named “Diotima,” whom Hölderlin based upon his own love interest, Susette Gontard. In such cases, it is not merely that the process of composition involves a mechanical transfer of elements of the author’s life experience into the world of the text. Rather, such texts are examples of what Rajan calls “autonarration,” which she describes as “a form of self-writing in which the author writes her life as a fictional narrative and thus consciously raises the question of the relationship between experience and its narrativization” (*Romantic Narrative* 96). Since experience, like history, is itself a construct rather than something simply given, “[a]utonarration . . . involves a double textualization of both the narrative and the life on

which it is based,” even as “its genesis in experience complicates this textualization by inscribing the Real as what Jameson calls the ‘absent cause’ of the narrative process” (97). When elements of autonarration are combined with Hellenizing fictions, this double process of textualization is intertwined with a reading of Greek source material and a (re)writing of the idea of Greece itself.

Some Romantic poems combine an autonarrative component with their engagement with Greece, thus figuring the meaning of Greece as embedded within the author’s life, including his or her social relationships. A good example, which I examine in more depth in chapter three, is Percy Shelley’s poem *Epipsychidion*, which he addressed to “Emilia V——,” that is, to the nineteen-year-old Teresa Viviani, who was confined in a convent by her father until her arranged marriage. In the poem, Shelley presents Emilia with an argument for free love and suggests that she elope with him to a Greek island. In a letter to John Gisborne of 18 June 1822, Shelley identifies the poem as containing a significant autonarrative component, writing, “[i]t is an idealized history of my life and feelings” (*Letters* 2: 434). The meaning of the Greek island in *Epipsychidion* turns on how Shelley imagines it as an ideal space free from the corrupting influence of present-day European patriarchal culture, a place to which they can retreat and in which free love can be expressed without fear of social reprisal. Such a conception of Greece is not unique to Shelley; as Gilbert Highet notes, Greece during the Romantic period was associated with “freedom from perverse and artificial and tyrannical rules” as well as “sexual liberty” (361). Nevertheless, the allegorical rendering of Shelley’s life and the impassioned address to “Emilia” give such a vision of Greece a more personal and emotionally inflected significance. In other words, the poem as an autonarrative account

of Shelley's life figures the meaning of Greece as being read and (re)written through his own experience, hopes, desires, and philosophy.

The social element in the way Romantic texts engage with Greece also extends to real and fictional addressees, and thus the creative engagement with source material in the composition of the literary work dovetails with the increased importance assigned to the role of the reader as a crucial component in the construction of a text's meaning in Romantic literary theory. Such frames work to figure textual meaning as embedded in social relationships; without the reading function performed by the addressed characters, such texts would be incomplete. Along such lines, though in the particular context of epic, Rajan describes what she calls the "transactional" structure as a common model within Romantic textuality, as "a certain kind of text, which inscribes the activity of reading within itself so as to open itself to interpretive and historical difference," thus supporting "the idea that literature is a transaction between the text and its readers" and that "the text's meaning is to some extent developed in its appropriation by the reader" ("The Other Reading" 20). This focus on the reader as a constitutive element of a text's meaning manifests itself in Romantic Hellenism to figure the process of writing as intertwined with the author's reading of ancient Greek texts, art, and culture, when authorial figures occupy the place of the reading function in relation to works of ancient Greek art. Reading and writing thus become inseparable aspects of the same process of authorship, as evident in my discussion of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

We can also observe a more explicit description of such a dynamic in Mary Shelley's "Introduction" to her novel *The Last Man*. The authorial persona recounts a trip to Naples in 1818, in which she and a companion visit several sites of classical antiquity.

The two explore the labyrinthine passages of a cave and eventually come to the cavern of the Cumaean Sibyl, in which they discover “leaves, bark, and other substances . . . traced with written characters” in an array of ancient and modern languages (5),¹⁹ and they make numerous visits to gather selections of leaves written in languages which either of them can understand. Shelley writes, “I have been employed in deciphering these sacred remains” (6). The authorial persona thus presents the main narrative of *The Last Man* itself as the author’s editing and translation of these Sibylline leaves:

I present the public with my latest discoveries in the slight Sibylline pages. Scattered and unconnected as they were, I have been obliged to add links, and model the work into a consistent form. But the main substance rests on the truths contained in these poetic rhapsodies, and the divine intuition which the Cumaean damsel obtained from heaven. (6)

An account of authorship as the editing and translation of discovered material recalls *invention*’s derivation from the Latin verb *invenire*, literally ‘to come upon’ or ‘to find’. Given literary history’s ubiquity of epistolary novels claiming to be collections of actual letters assembled by an ‘editor’, it is of course unlikely that many of Shelley’s readers would be so naïve as to accept such a fantastic claim at face value. Nevertheless, it is important to consider how this passage represents composition as the author’s deciphering of the fragmented text(s) of the ancient Greek past. On the one hand, the

¹⁹ Throughout this discussion, I interpret the Cumaean Sibyl as a Greek prophetess. Although Cumae is located in Italy, in antiquity it was a Greek colony and it is sometimes considered as part of Magna Graecia. Therefore, when Shelley writes of the Cumaean Sibyl as “the Latin poet” (6), I believe she is using the adjective to describe the Sibyl as an inhabitant of Latium (OED adj. def. 1, “Of or pertaining to Latium”; cf. OED noun def. 2, “An inhabitant or native of Latium”), or referring to the Latin sources which mention the Cumaean Sibyl, e.g. Vergil’s *Aeneid* 6.33ff. (Williams ed.), Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 14.101ff., and Petronius’ *Satyricon* ch. 48. In the *Satyricon* an exchange with the Cumaean Sibyl (the passage famously used by T. S. Eliot as an epigraph to *The Waste Land*) takes place in Greek.

It is also possible to interpret the Cumaean Sibyl in light of the tendency to approach Greece through archaeological remains present in Italy, as I mentioned above. Webb point out that Percy Shelley, for example, erroneously believed “that Pompeii had been a Greek settlement” (155).

authorial persona acknowledges the heavy degree of editorial intervention required by such source material, the necessity of composing connecting passages oneself in order to present the text in an intelligible form. Despite the degree of idealization that must take place in such a process of fictionalization, this imaginative invention is described as a material process, “giving form and substance” (7). On the other hand, the authorial persona claims to “have faithfully transcribed from [her] materials” (7), and emphasizes the authenticity of the text as being rooted in the original “poetic rhapsodies” and “divine intuition” of the Sibyl herself, suggesting a successful mediation or at least a lingering trace of her poetic and religious genius, and a link to the authority of ancient Greek culture. The persona is accordingly somewhat uneasy about her interventions, acknowledging the inevitability of the resulting “distortion” (7) of the Sibyl’s productions, and writes, “[m]y only excuse for thus transforming them, is that *they were unintelligible in their pristine condition*” (7, my emphasis). The Sibylline leaves “in their pristine condition” are not merely incidentally unintelligible; that is, it is not simply the case that they have been rendered unintelligible fragments as a result of historical contingency. Rather, the leaves’ being unintelligible is a necessary condition for their being pristine. The phrase I have emphasized thus points to the same paradox articulated in Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn.” The paradox is that, on the one hand, the fragments and ruins of antiquity cannot be grasped without the intervention of an intertwined reading/writing process in which the author plays a crucial role in constructing the experience of the text with material from his or her own imagination; but on the other hand, to fix these fragments into an intelligible form through such authorial intervention is to desecrate their “pristine condition,” to distort them through a violent hermeneutic

rape that destroys their mysteriousness and therefore their aesthetic potentiality. I examine further this tension as it plays out in representations of fragmentation and ruin in chapter two, and the conflicting drives toward violently “knowing” a sexualized Hellenic other in chapter three.

IV

Hellenism evokes a number of related issues which I have chosen to exclude from this study. That which comes to mind most readily is perhaps the issue of politics. As I alluded to briefly in my discussion of the passage from *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Hellenism was further complicated in the Romantic period by the political turmoil within modern Greece. Events such as the Orlov Revolt of 1770 and the War of Independence were not only fodder for the expanding periodical print culture, but also formed the subjects of literary works. Greece’s position in Europe was particularly important for international relations in the wake of the Napoleonic wars. Furthermore, in many works representations of modern Greece and ancient Greece are interconnected, contrasted, or arranged dialectically, as the two are thought together or one is thought through the other. Greece thus becomes a means of thinking about cultural continuity in relation to material and geographical history, as is evident in Hellenizing political works such as Percy Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound* and *Hellas*. I have excluded an analysis of the politics of Hellenism from my study not just because a truly sensitive analysis would require its own dedicated study, but rather because I want to show how a cultural-historical phenomenon such as Hellenism engages with theoretical issues in a manner that, contrary to the tendencies of much current (cultural materialist) scholarship, is *not* reducible to politics.

Politics are indeed part of Hellenism but they are not its *raison-d'être*, and a too-swift critical decoding of Hellenism into political terms risks obfuscating its significance in the realms of literary and aesthetic theory, which warrant investigation in their own right.

One manifestation of the politics of Hellenism in the period is philhellenism. Philhellenic sentiment was directed toward the liberation of modern Greece from Ottoman rule and its political and cultural renovation. Important to philhellenism was the idea of the historical connection between the ancient and the modern Greeks considered in relation to the intellectual and cultural legacy of classical Greece in modern Western Europe. Hence the notion that a nation such as Britain owes Greece a debt of gratitude which might be repaid in the form of political and/or military action in support of the freedom of the modern Greeks. The sentiments of philhellenism play a prominent role in a poem such as Percy Shelley's *Hellas* and in the biographico-mythological legacy of Byron. But the status of the modern Greeks and their relation to the ancient Greeks was itself a matter of dispute. T. J. B. Spencer points out that the French explorer Pierre Augustin Guys viewed the modern Greeks as a living monument of ancient Greek culture, and studied them to discern the surviving characteristics of their ancestors as documented in ancient sources, presenting his findings in the book *Voyage littéraire de la Grèce* in 1771 (215). According to this view, the modern Greeks are something like the 'ruins' of their illustrious ancestors—defaced by time yet still rooted in the greatness of the past, and thus in possession of an idealized cultural potentiality. On the other hand, Spencer points out that others saw the modern Greeks as hopelessly degraded, only interesting in as much as their degradation contrasted with the greatness of their ancestors to produce melancholy and nostalgia (294). As with politics, philhellenism was an

important aspect of engagement with Greece in the period, but is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, the debate about the status of the modern Greeks evoked by philhellenism is yet another point at which a straightforward view of the continuity of Greece becomes complicated by a theoretical consideration of the defining characteristics of Greek culture and of the Greek people.

Given the modern discipline of classical studies and the tendency to speak of the cultural tradition of the Greco-Roman world, it is perhaps worth justifying my decision to focus almost entirely on Greece to the exclusion of Rome. In his book *Romantic Antiquity: Rome in the British Imagination, 1789-1832*, Jonathan Sachs examines the continued importance of representations of Rome throughout the Romantic period. Sachs demonstrates that the Romantic conception of Rome exhibited a shift from an exemplary model of classical antiquity that focused on classical civilization as the apex of human cultural achievement, to a historical model that emphasized the individual specificity of past civilizations. Sachs thus provides an important corrective to the traditional tendency to view Romantic Hellenism as rooted in a shift of interest away from Rome toward Greece.²⁰ I have decided to focus on Romantic representations of Greece and not on those of Rome not because I think that Romantic conceptions of Rome were unimportant, but because I am concerned with aesthetics, while Sachs is concerned primarily with politics and historiography. Of course, there was certainly some conflation between Greece and Rome with regard to the study of classical art. Constantine points out that Winckelmann emphasizes the importance of living in Rome in order to study classical art properly first-

²⁰ For example, Webb writes with reference to the latter half of the eighteenth century, “[t]he cultural supremacy of Rome had been challenged by Greece” (162).

hand, and that such a view was quite common and sensible at the time, since “[t]here was *in fact* more to be seen in Rome—that is, there was more to be seen of what, conventionally, was felt to be typical and best in classical art; and more easily to be seen, since sites in Greece were for the most part chaotic and private collections almost non-existent” (109).²¹ Furthermore, collectors were often incapable of distinguishing authentic Greek statues from Roman copies, so the analysis of classical sculpture tended to focus on the more numerous and usually better-preserved Roman works. Nevertheless, authors such as Winckelmann often presented their work as the study of *Greek art*; Rome was important for them not so much as a cultural object in itself as for the historical role it had happened to play in the mediation of ancient Greek culture and a present-day site of the best collections of ‘classical’ art.²² In aesthetic theory and particularly in Romantic poetry, it is evident that Rome did not possess the same potentiality as an ideal space of possibility as Greece did. In other words, despite the continued importance of Rome throughout the Romantic period, Romantic authors self-consciously engaged with ancient Greek literature and culture in a way that they did not with that of Rome, as evident in poems such as *Prometheus Unbound*, and the “Ode on a Grecian Urn.” My focus on Romantic Hellenism thus reflects the prominent place Greece occupied in Romantic theory and literature, and engages with the ensuing aesthetic issues that become evident in Romantic texts.

²¹ See also Bowron and Rishel, *Art in Rome in the Eighteenth Century*.

²² In his *History of the Art of Antiquity*, Winckelmann includes only a short chapter on Roman art, in which he argues that the Romans “developed no style of their own” for their art was entirely imitative, first of that of the Etruscans, later of that of the Greeks (284). He concludes that “the concept of a Roman style in art . . . is a delusion” (285). In quotations of translations I occasionally silently omit editorial matter, such as references to the pagination of the original.

Part of what makes Hellenism worth investigating is precisely the ambiguous place Greece occupies in relation to the Romantics' conceptions of their own literary and cultural history. On the one hand, ancient Greece is a cultural other—distant historically, geographically, and linguistically. For example, in his preface to his translation of Plato's *Symposium*, which I take up in chapter three, Percy Shelley emphasizes the barriers of cultural difference, particularly homosexuality, to the English reader's appreciation of the ancient text.²³ Sometimes the otherness of Greece was emphasized by associating it with Oriental culture, an identification made easier by modern Greece's status as part of the Ottoman empire until the War of Independence. On the other hand, ancient Greece is often claimed as the literary and intellectual origin of modern Western civilization, possessing a privileged status as a past Golden Age from which cultural authority is derived. This view is evident in accounts of British gentlemen who considered themselves the heirs to ancient Greek civilization by virtue of their classical education.²⁴ These views, although they exhibit a logical tension in relation to one another, are by no means mutually exclusive or invariably opposed. Often in a single author there is a tension between a desire to appropriate ancient Greece as cultural authority and an awareness of its unbridgeable distance and inassimilable otherness.

²³ Shelley's preface will be discussed in more detail as an attempt at "cultural translation" in chapter three. Note that neither the translation nor the preface were published in Shelley's lifetime. Mary Shelley published a version of the text in 1840 which she had reluctantly expurgated.

²⁴ According to Woodhouse a common view in England was that "[t]he [modern] Greeks, if Greeks they could be called, were unworthy of their ancestors, whose true descendants were to be found in the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge" (27). This view is of course somewhat curious given the relatively low importance of Greek (as compared to Latin) in the British university curricula during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

Further ambiguity and authorial license are rooted in the historical, political, and literary diversity of Greece itself. The notion of Greek antiquity, for example, could encompass anything from the Bronze Age in which the Homeric poems are (more or less) set, to the early centuries of the Christian Era when Greece itself was under Roman rule. Even when referring to the period of Greek history traditionally known as “classical” (the 5th century BCE), one had the choice of invoking the political culture of Athens or that of Sparta, and different authors would valorize one or the other according to their purposes and persuasions.²⁵ As Wallace points out, Athens itself could be represented positively as the achievement of an ideal democracy, as it often was by radicals and reformers, or negatively as an example of the dangers of democratic rule which illustrated the superiority of monarchy, as it was by conservatives and royalists (56-58). Beginning in the later eighteenth century, increasing knowledge of the diversity of Greek antiquity made possible a wider range of conceptualizations of the significance of Greece itself.

By now it ought to be clear that it is not my intention to delineate a single, monolithic conception of Romantic Hellenism. As Webb points out, “[l]ike Romanticism, [Romantic Hellenism] never achieved articulation as a coherent philosophy” (148). Like many of the period’s concerns, Hellenism is interesting because it was itself a site of contestation. The special status accorded to ancient Greek art, literature, and culture within aesthetic theory and artistic practice makes it particularly well-suited as a lens through which to focus the study of Romantic texts, which Rajan describes as constituting “a literature involved in the restless process of self-examination, and in

²⁵ For attitudes toward Sparta in Romantic period Germany and England, see Rawson 306-25 and 351-57, respectively.

search of a model of discourse which accommodates rather than simplifies its ambivalence toward the inherited equation of art with idealization” (*Dark Interpreter* 25). Hellenism, I suggest, was particularly attractive to Romantic authors because of how it allowed for a self-reflexive engagement with the nature of the aesthetic representation.²⁶

My first chapter examines Hellenism’s significance in German aesthetic theory, including works of Winckelmann, Schiller, Friedrich Schlegel, Hegel, and Nietzsche. I argue that the privileged status accorded to ancient Greece in these theories of art lay in its felicity for conceptualizing the relationship between the real and the ideal, though the particular manner in which Greece serves to articulate such a relationship differs among various authors. Each thinker characterizes the relationship between the real and the ideal as involving both opposition and entanglement. The opposition and the entanglement emerge in the form of a pair of terms which it is art’s role to reconcile through a third term, which serves as the nexus for the attempt to work through the issues, though it ends up complicating rather than resolving them. This third term in fact serves to defer and to displace the issues onto the processes of the reading and the writing of ancient Greek art and culture, and thus endows Greece with aesthetic potentiality for Romantic thinkers and artists. Such Hellenizing thinkers and artists projected ideals onto Greek literature and culture, only to have their encounter with the foreignness of Greece force them to reconsider the nature of those ideals, generating a Romantic aesthetic theory characterized by the struggle to reconcile its internal tensions. By showing how Hellenism became the ground of aesthetic theory in the latter half of the eighteenth

²⁶ Cf. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy: “romanticism is neither mere ‘literature’ . . . nor simply a ‘theory of literature’ (ancient and modern). Rather, it is *theory itself as literature* or, in other words, literature producing itself as it produces its own theory” (12).

century, the first chapter opens a space for the consideration of representations of ancient Greek subject matter as self-reflexive engagements with the nature of artistic representation, which informs the readings of the manifestations of Hellenism in British Romantic works in the chapters that follow.

In the second chapter I extend the focus on the relationship between the real and the ideal to the dynamics established in the Romantic period reception and reading of Greece. In readings of works by Richard Polwhele, Felicia Hemans, Byron, Keats, and Blake, I demonstrate that the ruined and fragmentary state of modern Greece and of objects of ancient Greek art imbues them with a heightened potentiality that is aesthetically productive. The representation of the modern Greek landscape as fragmented allows for the intersection of aesthetics with history and politics. Polwhele and Hemans attempt to mobilize the fragmentation of Greece in the writing of imagined future histories for British imperialism, whereas Byron valorizes fragmentation's resistance to history. Byron aestheticizes ruin's irrecuperability, and thus shifts its productivity to its evocation of the viewer's affect. Keats's sonnet on the Elgin marbles focuses on the hermeneutics of fragmentation in relation to the viewer's/reader's phenomenology, while Blake's *Laocoön* evokes fragmentation through its non-linear formal structure. By thematizing fragmentation's entanglement with hermeneutics, Keats and Blake engage with the intersection between fragmentation and Hellenism with a greater degree of self-reflexivity, which is also evident in the thematization of unresolved hermeneutics in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn." This increased self-reflexivity in the works of Keats and Blake allows for a more sustained linking of fragmentation to the work of

the negative, which involves a perverse satisfaction with the lack of contentment and is thus bound up with the reading and writing processes.

I examine the deferral and denial of fulfillment through a different lens in the third chapter, which traces the link between the aesthetic potentiality of Hellenism and its sensual and sexual possibilities as deployed in the works of British Romantic writers. By reading Percy Shelley's preface to his translation of Plato's *Symposium* alongside Keats's *Endymion* and *Lamia*, and Shelley's *Epipsychidion*, I argue that Hellenizing representations of sexuality deploy a notion of Greece as a cultural other. Hellenizing erotic poems frequently align the desired beloved with ancient Greek culture itself, and thus deploy *eros*, '(sexual) desire', as both the object and the medium of cultural translation, the attempt to 'know' ancient Greek culture aesthetically, intellectually, and sexually. Even as Romantic works undertake this sincere and impassioned attempt to attain knowledge of the cultural other, they exemplify the paradox I sketched in my discussion of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" above, and which I explore in chapter three with reference to Bataille's *Eroticism*: there is an element of coercion and violation involved in this attempt to know the other, such that truly attaining such knowledge would entail a desecration of the desired object. Each Hellenizing poem employs its own approach to address this issue. *Endymion* adopts the mode of romance in order to defer consummation indefinitely, whereas *Lamia* more explicitly thematizes the violence involved in seduction such that Lycius's vain desire for complete possession results in his death. *Epipsychidion*'s hyperbolic rhetoric highlights its own status as fantasy, and the poem ultimately eroticizes the failure to attain possession of the beloved and Greece. In

staging the failures of their attempts at cultural translation, these poems preserve the mysteriousness of ancient Greek culture as never fully knowable.

Both the mysteriousness of ancient Greek culture and the staging of failure inform the argument of my fourth chapter, which examines the deployment of Greek mythology within Keats's Hyperion poems and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. By reading such poems in relation to Romantic period scholarship on mythology, I show how they evoke mythology's tension between fragment and system. Whereas the works I examined in chapter two figure fragmentation in terms of the modern Greek landscape and the extant material remains of ancient Greek art, and ultimately extend fragmentation to the processes of reading and of composition, the fragmentation in mythology involves the theorization of the relationship between various elements of ancient Greek religious consciousness. Mythologists who wrote during the Romantic period theorized an essential connection between Greek mythology and the ancient Greek cultural worldview, so their attempts to develop systematic theories of myth were bound up with their conception of the nature of ancient Greek culture. At the same time, these mythologists often demonstrated their awareness of the intractability of the mass of mythological material to their syncretizing projects, emphasizing the mysteriousness of Greek mythology. Hellenizing mythological poems such as Keats's Hyperion poems and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* evoke the tension between system and fragment evident in the work of the mythologists. In these poems, the heterogeneity of Greek mythology serves as a method of fragmenting Hellenic ideality into pieces, so as to allow the texts to stage their unsuccessful attempts at arranging these pieces into coherent systems to produce modern works of art which are at the same time readings and rewritings of

ancient Greek culture. Thus, in the manner in which Romantic works represent Greek mythology they aspire to operate in the same method as the fragmented works of ancient Greek antiquity, that is, to inspire the reader to imagine an unattainable, unrepresentable aesthetic ideal.

Throughout this thesis I show that Hellenism takes a central place in Romantic aesthetics by serving as both the medium and the means through which authors address fundamental problems relating to the nature of art and literature. This study not only connects the aesthetic theory of Hellenism with the artistic practice of Hellenizing works, but also (re)reads Romanticism through Hellenism itself, and thus establishes the theoretical basis of Hellenism within Romanticism. Hellenism is not merely an incidental or particularly convenient literary mode which Romantic texts strategically deploy as the occasion demands. It cannot be reduced to a (mere) literary trope or to a theoretical or political battleground. Rather, Romantic authors' conceptions of ancient Greece were bound up with their conceptions of art and literature, so Hellenizing works necessarily reflect upon and redefine the nature of the aesthetic discourse in which they engage. Hellenism thus becomes for Romanticism both an object which is theorized and the medium in which such theorization takes place, resulting in a hermeneutic dilemma akin to that involved in an attempt to analyze language or consciousness. The insolubility of the hermeneutic problem with which Romanticism itself struggles points to the Romantic tendency to favour process over closure, even as it entails that any critical examination of its Hellenism will necessarily be provisional. It may seem perverse that Romanticism's engagement with a past culture, with texts in a dead language, forms a central component of a poetics which is always in process and never completed. That the nature of Romantic

Hellenism exhibits such an incongruity may perhaps serve as a reminder of how we are still struggling today with the legacy of a Romanticism that refuses to die.

Chapter 1

1 The Real and the Ideal in the Reading and Writing of Greece

The noblest contour combines or encompasses in Greek figures all parts of sublime nature [*schönsten Natur*] and of ideal beauty [*idealischen Schönheiten*], or, one might say, it represents the highest concept of both.

(Winckelmann, *Reflections* 25)²⁷

In my introduction I claimed that Hellenism's attractiveness to many authors lay in its felicity for self-reflexivity, on account of the entanglement of conceptions of ancient Greek art with the articulation of aesthetic theory in the Romantic period. This entanglement provides the basis for the meta-poetic engagement of Hellenizing poems such as Keats's *Endymion* and Percy Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. In this chapter I explore the theoretical baggage involved in this entanglement through my examination of a number of works of German aesthetic theory: Johann Joachim Winckelmann's *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture* (1755) and *History of the Art of Antiquity* (1764), Friedrich Schiller's *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry* (1795), Friedrich Schlegel's *On the Study of Greek Poetry* (1797) and *Athenaeum Fragments* (1798), G. W. F. Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1835), and Friedrich Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* (1872). My purpose in the readings I undertake here is not to establish a 'theory' to be applied to the texts throughout my subsequent chapters, but rather to show how the study of ancient Greek art and literature became a site for the

²⁷ In English translations of Winckelmann's *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in Malerei und Bildhauerkunst*, 'Reflections' has been the preferred translation of *Gedanken*, which might be more literally translated simply as 'Thoughts'.

consideration of pressing and unresolved aesthetic issues, which resurface in the British Romantic texts with which the remainder of this thesis is concerned.

Each thinker I examine undertakes a general aesthetic theory which is at the same time a reading of ancient Greek art. Each theory of art and each reading of ancient Greek art operates primarily through its attempt to characterize the relationship between the real and the ideal, though the various thinkers do so in different ways. At the same time, they show that the relationship between the real and the ideal plays out in the processes of the reading and rewriting of ancient Greek art, which evoke a certain sense of loss but are ultimately productive and future-oriented rather than being trapped in the mode of nostalgia. Hellenism becomes the ground of Romantic aesthetic theory and is thus the space in which these aesthetic issues play out.

In the work of each thinker there emerges both an opposition and entanglement of the real and the ideal, in the form of a pair of terms which reflect particular concepts which art attempts to reconcile. Each thinker's argument presents or suggests a third term, a concept which serves as a dynamic nexus whereby the relationship between the pair of elements is conceptualized. This concept is the means with which the issue is worked through, but rather than resolving the tensions, it defers resolution by moving the issue to the realm of the process of artistic production—of reading and rewriting. This focus on process and the resultant deferral of resolution evokes the connection between Hellenism and fragmentation which I analyze in my second chapter, as well as erotic narrative poems' portrayal of the attempt to actualize ancient Greek culture as an unfulfilled aesthetic of desire, which I explore in my third chapter.

In the case of Winckelmann (1717–1768), the opposition and entanglement of the real and the ideal emerge in the pairing of nature and culture. Winckelmann presents the concept of imitation as the process by which the relationship between nature and culture is to be worked through in the reading and rewriting of ancient Greek art. Shifting the focus from statuary to literature, Schiller (1759–1805) continues in the tradition of Winckelmann by characterizing ancient Greek art as the expression of a culture in harmony with nature. The relationship between the real and the ideal, in the form of the naive and the sentimental, reflects what, philosophically speaking, we might refer to as being and consciousness. Moral reflection emerges in Schiller as the process which distinguishes between naive and sentimental, being and consciousness, even as it attempts to reconcile the two. Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829), like Schiller, identifies an irreconcilability between real and ideal, ancient and modern, which is aligned with the tension between objectivity and creativity (or invention) in literature. Schlegel's thought also exhibits a tension between maintaining this irreconcilable distinction and striving toward a unification or reconciliation. In *On the Study of Greek Poetry* the mediating process is *Studium*, 'study', 'zeal', 'aim', or 'striving', as the critical process which attempts to negotiate between the two. In the *Athenaeum Fragments* Schlegel aligns the process of *Studium* with the ongoing progressive faculty of romantic poetry, which is always in the state of becoming and never completed. Hegel (1770–1831) shares Winckelmann's concern with the historical development of art and its cultural specificity, but re-establishes the dynamic of the real and the ideal to that between the concrete and the spiritual, the embodiment and the Idea. In Hegel's case the relationship between the real and the ideal is worked through by means of the *historiography* of art, so the

aesthetic potentiality of the Classical is mobilized in the critical process of the *Aesthetics*' reading of art and its writing of art history. For Nietzsche (1844–1900) the dynamic between the real and the ideal becomes entangled with a hermeneutic dimension: the interplay between the Apollonian and the Dionysian reflects a violent, negative dialectic that serves to highlight the tensions which in the other thinkers are more implicit. Nietzsche presents this negative dialectic as both the underlying aesthetic principle of Western art, and the energizing force which drives the reading and writing processes.

For all these thinkers the goal of modern art is to embody and to respond to the issues crystallized in their study of the art of ancient Greece. The tensions implicit in the aesthetic explorations of each thinker's theorization of Greek art make Hellenism into a space of possibility for the consideration of these issues, and thus allow for the intertwined operations of reading and writing, whereby the analysis of ancient Greek art is entangled with the articulation of aesthetic theory or the creation of a new, modern work.

1.1 Nature and Culture Related through Imitation in Winckelmann's *Reflections* and *History*

As scholars have noted, one of Winckelmann's key contributions to aesthetics was his development of a historical theory of ancient Greek art.²⁸ According to Winckelmann, ancient Greek art constitutes an exemplary ideal worthy of imitation, even as it is to be understood according to a developmental model in which each of the various

²⁸ E.g. Heyer and Norton write that Winckelmann's work "was to become vital to the development of aesthetics, since it helped shift taste and beauty to a time-related historical perspective" which "involved acceptance of change and development" (xiii). As I show later on in this chapter, Winckelmann's integration of a theoretical framework with his account of the temporal development of art in *History of the Art of Antiquity* can be seen as paving the way for Hegel's treatment of art in his *Aesthetics* lectures.

styles is the product of a particular material historical moment. While Winckelmann is less self-reflexive than the other thinkers I examine in this chapter, his thought, like theirs, poses difficulties for critical exegesis, because he opens up a space for the consideration of aesthetic issues without tidily resolving them. Here I want to establish two main points about the importance of Winckelmann's work in relation to Romantic Hellenism: 1) at the level of the content of his aesthetic theory in both *Reflections* and *History*, Winckelmann's thought exhibits a tension between a causal-material conception of art (according to which art is rooted in nature), and a somewhat Platonic conception of art (as the reflection of an ideal beauty, to which we do not have direct access, which exists above and beyond nature); 2) at the level of the form or structure of his discussion in *The History of the Art of Antiquity*, Winckelmann establishes the entanglement of the material remains of ancient Greek art with his ideal theoretical framework. Both tensions support a preference for fragmentary art objects, for these allow for the positing of a past material realization of aesthetic ideals while providing a convenient explanation for our inability to experience these ideals in the present, thus preserving the mysteriousness and aesthetic potentiality of ancient Greek art. The manner in which Winckelmann's work engages with the relationship between the real and the ideal thus reflects two important aspects of Romantic Hellenism: the entanglement of reading and writing in the experience of the extant remains of ancient Greek culture, and the deployment of an aesthetic of desire whose inspiration and frustration both stem from the fragmentation and unattainability of its object.

A binary dynamic in Winckelmann which can be aligned with that between the real and the ideal is the relationship between nature and culture, evident in

Winckelmann's theory of the importance of climate in the development of ancient Greek art:

The influence of climate must invigorate the seed from which art is to germinate, and Greece was the preferred soil for this seed . . . Much that we might imagine as ideal was natural for them. Nature, after having passed step by step through cold and heat, established herself in Greece, where the weather is balanced between winter and summer, at the midpoint between them. (*History* 186)²⁹

Climate influences art by shaping both the physical and the psychological characteristics of the inhabitants of a given region. Winckelmann argues that Greece's temperate climate produced beautiful human bodies as sculptural models, and imparted to the Greeks a judicious and economical facility for the creation of images.³⁰ By identifying climate as the source of the excellence of ancient Greek art, Winckelmann suggests a causal, material basis for artistic production. In other words, he sets up a real or material foundation for aesthetic principles, nature as the cause of culture. At the same time, however, Winckelmann emphasizes the importance of ancient Greek culture in perfecting these bodies and their artistic representations. For example, he argues that the naturally beautiful Greek bodies were further developed by their practice of exercise (*Reflections* 7), that ancient dress—unlike modern clothing—was free flowing rather than constricting of the natural shape of the body (9), and that the frequent public nudity in their culture allowed Greek artists greater acquaintance with the human form (13). Furthermore, the

²⁹ The argument for the importance of climate is also advanced in the first section of *Reflections*; see esp. 3, 7, 9, 11, 21.

³⁰ Winckelmann does not explain directly how their climate caused the Greeks to possess “concepts and images as painterly as their language” (*History* 121). Rather, he argues that “Eastern and southern peoples” possess “figurative expressions . . . as warm and fiery as the climate in which they live, and the flight of their thoughts often takes them well beyond the bounds of possibility” so “their artists strive more for the extraordinary than for beauty” (120, 120-21, 121). By implication, it would seem that Greece's temperate climate is balanced between the fantastical excess of heat and the impoverished sparsity of cold, resulting in a well-proportioned, mimetic realism particularly suited for emulating the beauty of the natural world.

beauty of their bodies was enhanced by their unconstrained pursuit of “joy and pleasure [*Lust und Freude*]” because “there was no such social decorum [*bürgerlicher Wohlstand*] as ours to restrict the freedom of their customs [*Freiheit der Sitten*]” (11).³¹ This seemingly counterintuitive formulation of customs as defined not by rules but by freedom from social constraints points to the paradox contained in Winckelmann’s conception of the relationship between nature and culture, which exhibits similarities with Derrida’s notion of the supplement, developed in his reading of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*:

there is *lack* in Nature and . . . *because of that very fact something is added* to it. . . the supplement comes *naturally* to put itself in Nature’s place. The supplement is the image and the representation of Nature. (149)

Like Rousseau according to Derrida’s reading,³² Winckelmann begins by asserting the fullness and self-sufficiency of nature, only to supplement nature with culture as the nurturing force that naturally allows for the free expression of nature in the artistic representations of nature produced by culture. Built within Winckelmann’s theory, therefore, is the awareness that a purely material nature—nature as such—is incapable of fully accounting for the idealizing process of the aesthetic representation of nature in mimetic plastic art. Hence he writes, “[i]n the masterpieces of Greek art, connoisseurs . . . find not only nature at its most beautiful but also something beyond nature, namely certain ideal forms of its beauty” (*Reflections* 7), even as his emphasis on climate suggests instead a purely natural, material basis to ideal Greek forms. For Winckelmann,

³¹ For citations of the *History* where German words are included, the first page number cited is that of the English translation, the second page number that of the German text. I do not give page numbers for the German citations of the *Reflections*, for the German text is on facing pages in the same edition.

³² N. that in his reading of the supplement in Rousseau Derrida is primarily concerned with writing. In extrapolating this argument to my discussion of Winckelmann, I extend it to include non-linguistic forms of representation in the plastic arts of sculpture and painting.

ancient Greek art exhibits this supplementary entanglement of the real and the ideal *par excellence*.

This ambivalence about whether aesthetic representation is rooted in the material “real” of nature or the Platonic “ideal” beyond it is also evident in Winckelmann’s argument for the imitation of ancient Greek art. As I mentioned in my introduction, an important aspect of Romantic Hellenism is the creative engagement with ancient Greek subject matter in the production of a new modern work. This focus on ancient Greek art and culture as a source of inspiration is anticipated by Winckelmann’s concern with the practical application of knowledge of ancient Greek art, evident in the title of his first work, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerey und Bildhauer-kunst*, ‘Thoughts Concerning the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture’, in which Winckelmann offers detailed and specific advice on the techniques which modern artists ought to employ.³³ Although I distinguished above between Romanticism’s creative engagement with Hellenic subject matter versus Neoclassicism’s more mechanical imitation of ancient models, on closer examination Winckelmann’s concept of ‘imitation’ (*Nachahmung*) will be found to embody elements both of mimetic reproduction and of idealizing creativity.

First, it ought to be noted that Winckelmann conceives of art primarily as a mimetic activity, which seems natural given his focus on painting and sculpture in a time before the advent of abstract art. Artistic representations are imitative in that they reflect

³³ See, for example, the section entitled *Arbeitsmethoden* ‘Working Methods’, which discusses the procedure for chiseling a marble statue based on a model statue of clay (43-55). In the *History*, too, Winckelmann claims that the study of Greek art ought to convey “not only knowledge for its own sake but also tenets for practice” (186).

the artist's study of models, but they are also creative because the conceptualization and execution of the artist represents such models in a new form. One of Winckelmann's primary concerns in the *Reflections* is his argument that it is more effective for modern artists to take ancient works as their models rather than nature itself. He argues that the imitation of nature "either directs itself toward a single object or it gathers observations of various individual objects and makes of them a whole [*bringet sie in eins*]" (21). The first form of imitation produces "a similar copy, a portrait" (21), while the second form "is the way to general beauty [*allgemeinen Schönen*] and to ideal images [*idealischen Bildern*] of it" (21). Because Greek artists lived in a culture that provided them with frequent opportunities to study the beautiful naked bodies produced by their spectacular climate, they were able to accomplish the second, idealizing form of imitation with more facility than modern artists can. Studying the works of ancient Greek art therefore provides the modern artist with a short cut, because "it shows us on the one hand the essence [*Inbegriff*] of what is otherwise dispersed through all of nature, and, on the other, the extent to which the most perfect nature [*schönste Natur*] can boldly, yet wisely, rise above itself" (21). Ancient Greek art thus becomes an exemplary model for the modern artist to follow, for in the imitation of it "he finds established . . . the highest limits (*höchsten Grenzen*) of that which is both humanly and divinely beautiful" (21). But if the modern artist discovers in ancient art "the highest limits" of human and divine beauty, how is it possible for him to produce original work? The word *Grenzen* 'limits', 'boundaries', suggests that imitation confines aesthetic activity to that which has already been established by ancient Greek art, stifling the creativity of the modern artist by

preventing him from progressing into new territory.³⁴ Winckelmann's text thus raises one of the crucial questions of Romantic Hellenism with which later authors will struggle: if ancient Greek art is the material realization of aesthetic ideals, how can art itself exist as a vital thing rather than a static artifact? Oddly enough given his focus on the material basis of nature and climate in the development of art, Winckelmann's answer to this question seems to lie in a somewhat Platonic conception of beauty.³⁵ Art remains vital because even though ancient Greek art is the closest approximation or best existing model of beauty, it operates not as the ultimate rule of beauty but as a medium through which the modern artist can encounter a deeper understanding of beauty itself. Thus, Winckelmann paradoxically argues that it is in fact through the imitation of ancient Greek art that the modern artist can attain the necessary craft to "become a rule unto himself" and practice "a greater freedom" (23). Ancient Greek artistic models thus become the very source of the modern artist's originality and creativity.

Nevertheless, this chain of reasoning is not entirely capable of resolving the tensions within Winckelmann's thought. Winckelmann himself argues that the decline of art is characterized by imitation,³⁶ and that Roman art is not worthy of study in itself because its imitation of Etruscan and Greek models leaves it with no style of its own (*History* 284-85). Furthermore, Winckelmann notes that the *Geschmack* 'taste' found in ancient Greek art "has seldom been taken far from its source [*Griechenland*] without

³⁴ I write "him" because Winckelmann refers to the artist using the masculine pronoun *er* (e.g. 21).

³⁵ Winckelmann makes several references to Plato and to the theory of Ideas, though his valorization of nature is not entirely consistent with Platonic metaphysics.

³⁶ "Sometime after these artists [Lysippos and Apelles] and their schools, art began to decline into imitation of their work, and we can define a third style, that of the imitators, which lasted until art gradually declined to its fall" (*History* 227).

loss” (*Reflections* 3),³⁷ while his theory of historical development suggests that the greatness of ancient Greek art is rooted in the particular cultural moment which gave it birth. If his cultural and historical theorization of art were pushed to its logical conclusion, the argument would suggest that the studious efforts of artists alone are not enough, that the rejuvenation of modern art would demand a complete overhaul of contemporary society. Of particular importance for Romantic Hellenism, therefore, is how Winckelmann’s work—like that of Schiller and Schlegel—both infuses ancient Greek art with a vital aesthetic potentiality for the modern artist to tap, while also exposing the impossibility of fully realizing such potentiality. Such a conception of ancient Greek art leads to Winckelmann’s preference for fragmentation, which I shall discuss after I elaborate the connection between ideality and materiality vis-à-vis the relationship between reading and writing in the *History*.

A crucial aspect of Winckelmann’s work, and one of particular significance for his relevance to Romantic Hellenism, is the entanglement of the reading of (material) ancient Greek art with the writing of a(n ideal) theoretical framework with which to conceptualize it. Winckelmann’s emphasis on the importance of a proper reading or experience of art is embodied in his insistence, contrary to the common practice in his day (especially among authors in Germany), on the necessity of discussing only those works which he has been able to examine himself in person, rather than relying on drawings, engravings, or second-hand accounts of the artifacts: “All that I have cited as evidence—paintings, statues, gems, and coins—I have myself seen and examined

³⁷ Cf. *History*, “Greek art would not take root in Egypt, in a climate foreign to it, and it lost amid the splendor of the courts of the Seleucids and the Ptolemies much of its grandeur and its true conception” (319).

repeatedly” (*History* 76). As Alex Potts points out (33-34), this statement of Winckelmann’s methodology, along with his impassioned descriptions of works such as the Apollo Belvedere (*History* 333-34), suggests a hermeneutics which stresses the importance of the individual’s immediate, sensuous experience of ancient works of art—for this sensuous experience is the most direct form of human access to the materiality of the plastic work of art. Nevertheless, this immediate sensuous experience of reading must be combined with a theoretical framework in order for art’s beauty to be made intelligible. Indeed, Winckelmann makes clear his purposeful combination of the empirical and the theoretical in the very first sentence of the *History*: “The history of the art of antiquity that I have endeavored to write is no mere narrative of the chronology and alterations of art, for I take the word *history* [*Geschichte*] in the wider sense that it has in the Greek language and my intention is to provide a system” (71; 9). The primary meaning of the Greek ἱστορία is “*inquiry*,” while the verb ἱστορέω means to “*inquire into or about*” something, to “*examine*,” as well as to “*give an account of what one has learnt*” (Liddell and Scott). The Greek sense of the word *history* to which Winckelmann refers thus brings together the process of inquiry (reading) with the published systematization of the conclusions of that inquiry (writing), denoting an analysis which is both exploratory and declamatory. This kind of history takes as its object of study an entire subject as a whole rather than an assemblage of heterogeneous facts yoked together under an arbitrary category. Winckelmann’s reference to the Greek sense of *history* also points to the work’s engagement both with the material or the empirical (the real), along with the theoretical (the ideal). It is important to note that Winckelmann does not develop his theory of ancient Greek art from the ground up. That is to say, he does not proceed in

a purely empirical or inductive fashion, for example, by dating a bunch of statues on the basis of archaeological evidence, grouping together those statues of certain ranges of dates, and then comparing the groups to one another to determine the stylistic characteristics of each time period. Potts points out that in Winckelmann's time there was not enough available evidence for anyone to pursue such an approach, so Winckelmann undertook "the invention of a schema, one derived largely from a speculative projection of the phases through which Greek art would likely have evolved" (22). In other words, the lack of surviving evidence about ancient Greek art, its mysterious and fragmentary character, is precisely the condition which allows Winckelmann to develop his systematic theoretical account in the manner he does.³⁸

At the very end of his *History*, Winckelmann makes explicit the link between the fragmentation of ancient Greek art and Hellenism's aesthetic of desire, and how this aesthetic of desire is rooted in the entanglement of ideality and materiality. This lyrical passage is worth quoting at length:

Just as a beloved [*Liebste*] stands on the seashore and follows with tearful eyes her departing sweetheart [*Liebhaber*], with no hope of seeing him again, and believes she can glimpse even in the distant sail the image of her lover [*Geliebten*]³⁸—so we, like the lover, have as it were only a shadowy outline of the subject of our desires remaining [*einen Schattenriß von dem Vorwurfe unserer Wünsche übrig*]. But this arouses so much the greater longing for what is lost, and we examine the copies we have with greater attention than we would if we were in full possession of the originals [*wir betrachten die Kopien der Urbilder mit größerer Aufmerksamkeit, als wie wir in dem völligen Besitze von diesen nicht würden getan haben*]. In this, we often are like individuals who wish to converse with spirits [*Gespenster*] and believe they can see something where nothing exists. The word *antiquity* [*der Name des Altertums*] has become a prejudgment [*Vorurteil*], but even this bias [*Vorurteil*] is not without its uses. One always

³⁸ Cf. Ferris, who writes, "Winckelmann's . . . writings provide an unparalleled example for studying the formation of a culture in the absence of direct experience of that culture's own artistic productions" (5).

imagines that there is much to find, so one searches much to catch sight of something. (351; 393)

Like Keats in the “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and the authors of the Hellenizing erotic poems I examine in chapter three, Winckelmann figures the longing for the knowledge and experience of ancient Greek art in sexual terms, as an unfulfillable desire existing between separated lover and beloved. Winckelmann further complicates this dynamic, however, by blurring the distinction between lover and beloved, between subject and object. The first sentence of the passage that I have quoted follows Winckelmann’s confession, “I could not keep myself from gazing after the fate of works of art as far as my eye could see” (351). Thus, he begins the embarking ship simile by identifying the modern observer with the beloved (*Liebste*) standing on the seashore who believes she can see in the sail of the ship the image of her retreating lover (*Geliebten*), who is accordingly identified with ancient Greek art. Half-way through the sentence, however, Winckelmann reverses the terms of the simile by comparing the modern observers to the *lover*, by implication suggesting that the “shadowy outline” (*Schattenriß*) now refers to the outline of the *beloved* standing on the shore. The break in syntax and the reversal of the terms of the simile make it impossible to pin down the direction of the relationship between the modern observer and ancient art. The resultant blurring of the distinction between subject and object demonstrates the entanglement of materiality and ideality, the impossibility of what Kant would later characterize as critical philosophy’s transcendental policing of the subject-object divide.³⁹ The distance and disfigurement of

³⁹ Discussing Kant’s famous association of dogmatism with sleep, Bundock writes, “transcendental philosophy vigilantly, sleeplessly polices the subject-object distinction, forestalling the simple reduction of the one to the other” (“Prophecy” 1).

ancient Greek art inspire a greater desire and fascination for the remaining fragments to which we have access.

Furthermore, the comparison of modern students of ancient art with those who converse with non-existent spirits demonstrates that such stretching after the inaccessible and the unknowable approaches the realm of delusion, but this is justified as a useful bias (*Vorurteil*) on account of the speculative readings it produces in the pursuit of knowledge which does in fact exist. The paradox in Winckelmann's reasoning runs thus: it is necessary to believe, despite the lack of evidence, in the greatness of ancient art, so one can achieve a correct idea of such greatness in spite of the lack of evidence.

Winckelmann concludes his treatise by justifying such speculation: "One must not hesitate to seek [*scheuen . . . suchen*] the truth, even to the detriment of one's reputation; a few must err, so that many may find the right way [*richtig gehen*]" (351; 394).

Speculation in the pursuit of knowledge is productive because it contributes to the discovery of truth by stimulating continual inquiry into objects of knowledge. The seeking of truth and the committing of errors in the process of doing so leads to the discovery of genuine knowledge and the benefit of all. In other words, Winckelmann ends by characterizing the value of his treatise as consisting in its participation in an ongoing process of inquiry and discovery, reading and writing. The knowledge of ancient Greek art after which such inquiry strives is indeed important, but it is by definition not fully graspable due to the fragmentary state in which the art remains. Ancient Greek art is such a fascinating subject for inquiry because by virtue of its fragmentary state of existence it is incapable of ever being fully known. Winckelmann thus characterizes himself in a similar manner to the way in which Diotima describes Eros in Plato's

Symposium, as a philosopher in the sense of one who *loves* or *desires* the knowledge one lacks and pursues, and thus necessarily operates in between knowledge and ignorance (204b). Winckelmann's portrayal of the modern scholar as a lover who pines for the retreating 'beloved' of ancient Greek art anticipates the argument of my third chapter, where I analyze Hellenizing erotic poems as evoking an aesthetic of desire in their failed attempts at cultural translation.

In her path-breaking study *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany*, E. M. Butler writes—ostensibly with some degree of consternation—that “Winckelmann in discovering Greece had delivered his countrymen bound hand and foot to an idea” (240). Clearly, Winckelmann's influence on subsequent thinkers is indisputable. In contrast to Butler, however, I argue that by emphasizing the discovery of knowledge as a continual process of revision among numerous scholars, Winckelmann in fact opened the floodgates for the historical and theoretical examination of the very nature of the Greek ideal, and its implications for the modern appreciation and production of works of art. Thus, rather than delivering his contemporaries bound helpless to an idea, Winckelmann inaugurated the unraveling and retying of the knot of the ideal, inviting subsequent thinkers to continue along this line of inquiry. By articulating the nature of art vis-à-vis the relationship of the entanglement of the real and the ideal in ancient Greek art and culture, Winckelmann began the process in which the study of the legacy of ancient Greece and the articulation of a more general aesthetic theory (with relevance for modern art) were intertwined. The resultant combination of, on the one hand, the empirical, the historical, and the material, with, on the other hand, the theoretical and the abstract—the combination of the process of the reading of ancient Greek art and culture with the

writing of aesthetics—is precisely what endowed Romantic Hellenism with such a radical potential for reconceiving the nature of art in diverse and dynamic ways.

1.2 Being and Consciousness Related through Moral Reflection in Schiller's *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry*

Like Winckelmann, Schiller attempts to characterize art through theorizing the nature of the relationship between the real and the ideal, which are aligned with nature and culture. In Winckelmann this emerged as a reciprocal and entangled relationship, with imitation (*Nachahmung*) presented as the mediating process involved in reading and writing. In Schiller, on the other hand, the entanglement of the naive and the sentimental, being and consciousness, is approached through the reading and writing processes involved in the moral reflection of the modern observer. A tension is evident in Schiller's thought. He seems to affirm that, on the one hand, the naive and the sentimental both possess validity as aesthetic principles operative in art and reflective of the human condition at different stages. On the other hand, Schiller's definition of the naive as something which is perceived by sentimental readers moves to subsume the naive itself as merely an idealized projection of the sentimental consciousness, in a confusion of the relationship between observer and observed reminiscent of the abrupt switching of perspectives in the lover/beloved simile at the end of Winckelmann's *History*. Schiller's argument, which first distinguishes ancient and modern literature on the basis of opposed aesthetic principles, and then pushes toward a reconciliation whose possibility it nevertheless calls into question, thus anticipates Friedrich Schlegel's thought process in *On the Study of Greek Poetry* and the *Athenaeum Fragments*.

Unlike works such as Winckelmann's *Reflections* and *History*, and Friedrich Schlegel's *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, Schiller's aesthetic treatise, *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*, 'On Naive and Sentimental Poetry', does not explicitly announce its concern with ancient Greek culture in its title or even in the discussion of its introductory paragraphs.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Schiller's notion of the naive is bound up with his understanding of ancient Greek art and culture,⁴¹ such that the essay's approach to aesthetics consists in its addressing of the interrelated issues of the nature of ancient Greek art and the nature of modern art vis-à-vis its relationship to the art of the ancients. Indeed, Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly notes that Schiller wrote to "Wilhelm von Humboldt on 26 Oct. 1795 that the whole essay *On the Naive and Sentimental in Literature* is an attempt to answer the question: 'Given my distance from the spirit of Greek literature, to what extent can I still be a poet and indeed a better poet than the extent of that distance seems to allow?'" (12). Schiller's formulation of this question as a frame for his argument seems to suggest that the entire treatise springs from a defensive theoretical gesture whereby he, as a modern poet, attempts to address his feelings of inadequacy in relation to his ancient predecessors. When viewed in the wider context of Romantic Hellenism, Schiller's notion of the relationship between the naive and the sentimental can be read as a general theory of the relationship between ancient Greek and modern

⁴⁰ The English word *poetry* is the most literal translation of the German *Dichtung*, but this translation may be somewhat misleading at times, for it is evident in the discussion of Schiller and others that the term does not carry the sense of the modern opposition of *poetry* to *prose*. *Dichtung* is closer in meaning to the English *poetry* as the term is used by Percy Shelley in *Defence of Poetry* to include all creative linguistic works, not just those written in verse. Thus Watanabe-O'Kelly translates *Dichtung* as "Literature" in the title of her translation, and I frequently refer to "literature" in my discussion here and in the following section on Schlegel's *On the Study of Greek Poetry* and the *Athenaeum Fragments*.

⁴¹ Indeed, although Schiller's title announces his concern with *Dichtung*, 'poetry', his aesthetic theory is founded in a theory of culture and he himself generalizes his discussion in referring to "the ancient artist (for what has been said here of the poet can, with obvious modifications, be extended to any artist)" (41).

literature—a theory which attempts to sketch a model of the process by which the modern poet might creatively realize the aesthetic potentiality of ancient Greek literary works. Whereas for Winckelmann ancient Greek art contains within itself at once both the tension and the reconciliation of the entanglement of the real and the ideal, for Schiller the real and the ideal can be aligned with the naive and the sentimental, the ancient and the modern. By establishing a theoretical term (the naive) which embodies the aesthetic properties of ancient Greek literature, Schiller is able to integrate the historical phenomenon of ancient Greek literature into his development of a more general theory of poetry. In the course of his argument, Schiller exposes the interdependency of the naive and the sentimental, the real and the ideal, even as they remain inherently incommensurable.⁴² For Schiller, the aesthetic potentiality of ancient Greek literature would best be realized by the harmonious integration of its artistic principles into modern literature: that is, the union of the naive and the sentimental, the real and the ideal, the empirical and the *a priori*. Schiller exposes both the vital necessity and the tragic impossibility of realizing such a project, resulting in an aesthetic of desire according to which the modern poet strives asymptotically toward an unattainable Hellenic ideal.

Schiller defines his two types of poetry according to the manner in which the poet relates to nature: poets “will either *be* nature or they will *look for* lost nature” ‘werden entweder Natur *seyn*, oder sie werden die verlorene *suchen*’ (35; 432). Like Winckelmann, Schiller conceives of ancient Greek art (the naive) as mimetic in so far as it is an expression of nature in its perfect state. In short, the naive can be aligned with the

⁴² Tilottama Rajan notes, “[c]oncepts such as irony, sentimentality, Schopenhauer’s will and Nietzsche’s Dionysos are all in some sense designed to explore the discontinuity between the ideal and the real” (*Dark Interpreter* 29).

real because it is the artistic manifestation of “nature” as “nothing other than voluntary existence [*freiwillige Daseyn*], the continuation [*Bestehen*] of things through themselves, existence according to its own unchangeable laws” (21; 413). Naive cultures such as that of ancient Greece existed in unity with nature rather than being estranged from it (32-34), so their literature can be understood not just as the conscious *representation* of nature by poets, but in fact the direct *operation* of nature’s pure materiality without the mediating process of reflection inherent in subjectivity.⁴³ The naive expresses the fantasy of a united art and culture as the unmediated embodiment of being.

In contrast to the naive poet, the sentimental poet consciously undertakes the representation of a nature which is lost to him.⁴⁴ Because the sentimental poet is self-aware and separate from nature, his representation of nature is entangled with his own character and subjectivity—with his own sentimental longing for the irrecuperable ideal he attempts to portray. Sentimental texts thus always inscribe a difference between the current fallen state within culture (the real of the present), and the pure uncorrupted harmony of nature (an ideal which is conceptualized as having *really existed* in the past, to which the modern poet aspires to return). Thus the sentimental consists in the representation of nature from outside nature. Because nature is lacking for him, the sentimental poet constructs an imaginary ideal of nature. In sentimental art, nature becomes a fantastic projection of the alienated modern consciousness which attempts to recapture the supposed purity of being.

⁴³ This is of course quite a radical claim, and Watanabe-O’Kelly notes that “[f]or the modern reader . . . ancient poets regarded by Schiller as naive would be sentimental” (18), while Rajan observes, “as Derrida points out, signification, which reveals the separation between signs and things, is always already a feature of language. Naive cultures are always already sentimental” (*Dark Interpreter* 33).

⁴⁴ My use of the male pronoun for the poet reflects Schiller’s use of the pronoun *er* (e.g. 433).

Thus, although the naive and the sentimental reflect the opposition between nature and culture, being and consciousness, they are at the same time interdependent with one another. Indeed, Schiller makes explicit the association of the naive with the real and the sentimental with the ideal in the following passage:

If one now applies the concept of poetry, which means nothing else than *to give humanity its most complete expression possible*, to both of these states, then in the state of natural simplicity, where man still functions together with all his powers [*Kräften*] as a harmonious unit, where the whole of his nature expresses itself completely in reality, the result is that the most complete possible *imitation of the real* [*Nachahmung des Wirklichen*] must constitute the poet—that, on the other hand, here in the state of culture where the harmonious cooperation [*Zusammenwirken*] of his whole nature is merely an idea, it is the elevation of reality to the ideal [*die Erhebung der Wirklichkeit zum Ideal*], or, what comes to the same thing [*auf eins hinausläuft*], the *representation* [*Darstellung*] of the ideal which must make the poet. (39; 437)⁴⁵

Like Winckelmann, Schiller attributes the beauty of ancient Greek art to its source in a culture which realized most perfectly the natural potential of the human being. Schiller's notion of naive art is predicated on the idea that human beings in the past achieved such perfect harmony in their way of life that artistic representation could merely reproduce the mode of their existence in order to form a beautiful expression of humanity. The modern poet, Schiller argues, must attempt to reclaim the perfection of the 'real' (*Wirklichen*) expressed in the literature of ancient Greece through the production of an 'ideal' (*Ideal*) that aspires toward reclaiming this lost harmony. Even as it distinguishes between the real of the naive and the ideal of the sentimental, however, this passage also

⁴⁵ Cf. also Goethe's comments in *Einwirkung der neueren Philosophie* in 1820: "Because I . . . not only emphasised the excellence of the Greek type of literature and of a literature based on it and originating in it, but also exclusively allowed this type to be valid, so he [i.e., Schiller] was forced to think things out more precisely and it is to this conflict that we owe the essays *On the Naive and Sentimental in Literature*. Both sorts of literature, though opposed to each other, were to acquiesce in mutually according each other equal rank. He hereby first laid the basis for the whole of the new aesthetics, since Hellenic or Romantic and whatever other synonyms may be invented can all be traced back to that work where the preponderance of real or ideal treatment was first discussed" (qtd. in Watanabe-O'Kelly 13).

points toward the fact that these two terms are intimately interconnected, such that neither could exist without the other. This is because for Schiller ‘the naive’ is a concept invoked by us as sentimental readers. Namely, the naive is what we call something that is “*natural*” “or at least . . . held by us to be so,” when this nature “stand[s] in contrast to art and put[s] it to shame” (21). In this context “art” (*Kunst*) is associated with the sophistication and decadence of modern culture, with the fall from a prior state in which human beings lived in harmony with nature. The naive is rooted in the contrast between art and nature. The feeling we have for the naive is not produced by the way a naive object *appears* to us, but is rather a function of the *idea* we feel that such an object represents; thus Schiller describes the pleasure we take in the naive as “not an aesthetic but a moral one” (21). Because nature must stand in contrast to art, the experience of the naive poetic work requires the observer to experience an elision of the representational function of language, to feel as if the work of art proceeds directly from man-as-nature without the intervening mediation of human subjectivity and signification. The naive, in fact, cannot exist without the sentimental because it is founded upon this contrast between nature and art, reality and representation, being and consciousness. Schiller shows that our very conception of nature is rooted in the idea that we are separate from nature, that nature is something we have lost on account of the progress of civilization. Thus Schiller writes of the naive, “[t]he feeling of which we are speaking here is, therefore, not that which the ancients had; it is rather one with that which we have *for the ancients*. They felt in a natural way, we feel the Natural” (34). Our experience of nature as ‘nature’ is predicated on our viewing it as something which is external to us by virtue of our position inside of culture; “naive” poets and poetry are only classifiable as “naive”

by sentimental readers, and would not impart us this moral pleasure if we did not think that we lack the qualities we believe these works embody. It is the moral reflection within the modern observer's thought process which distinguishes between the naive and the sentimental, the real and the ideal, even as it attempts to reconcile them.

On the other hand, the naive and the sentimental are merely different modes of operation according the same aesthetic principle, namely "*to give humanity its most complete expression possible*" (39), so Schiller admits rather belatedly that "[f]or this reason we should have compared ancient and modern—naive and sentimental—poets either not at all or under a common but higher category [*Begriff*]" (41; 439). Schiller goes on to draw the conclusion that since both naive and sentimental are legitimate poetic modes of expressing the nature of humanity, both are necessary for the complete articulation of beauty as a union of the real and the ideal: "Since the truly beautiful must be in harmony [*übereinstimmend*] on the one side with nature and on the other with the ideal, the one can lay claim [*Anspruch machen*] as little as the other to the title of a beautiful work" (58; 461), "[f]or we must finally admit [*gestehen*] that neither the naive nor the sentimental character, regarded alone, can quite exhaust the ideal of noble humanity which can only emerge [*hervorgehen*] from the close combination [*innigen Verbindung*] of both" (80; 491). Yet despite the fact that neither the naive nor the sentimental alone is sufficient for the production of true beauty, the very qualities according to which the naive and the sentimental operate also make them incommensurable with one another. Thus Schiller advises the modern poet to select either the naive or the sentimental and to pursue his choice exclusively, for "one must choose once and for all between the individual and the ideal; for to want to satisfy both demands

[*beyden Foderungen . . . Genüge leisten*] at the same time is the surest way, as long as one has not reached the goal of perfection [*Ziel der Vollkommenheit*], to miss [*verfehlen*] both together” (65; 471). The real and the ideal are intimately interconnected such that one cannot exist without the other, yet to attempt to integrate and combine them in a work of art is to pursue the impossible, since perfection is an unattainable goal.

Schiller complicates his work toward the end by extending this bifurcation of the aesthetic to the domains of the epistemological and the ethical, in shifting his focus from *naive* and *sentimental* as types of poets and literature, to the terms *realist* and *idealist* as types of people with different epistemological and moral engagements with the world. Although he does not state so explicitly, it seems that the realist is associated with naive art and the idealist is associated with sentimental art. Schiller associates the realist with empiricism, and the idealist with *a priori* modes of understanding and knowledge. Whereas the realist bases his understanding and actions on his own experience of the particulars of nature, the idealist bases his understanding and actions on reason alone, striving after absolute truths and knowledge of the whole. Schiller devotes the final discussion of his treatise to establishing the positive and negative aspects of both realism and idealism, demonstrating that while each contributes its own benefits to human understanding and action, each has its own necessary shortcomings. Schiller thus argues that both realism and idealism play positive roles, but claims that the two are inherently irreconcilable because any mixture or fusion of the two would cause them to contaminate one another irreparably (88-89). Schiller suggests, therefore, that the necessity and the impossibility of unifying the real and the ideal in art is reflective of the necessity and

impossibility of unifying the empirical and the *a priori* in the human epistemological and ethical relationships to the world.⁴⁶

Schiller abruptly ends his treatise with a discussion of the downfalls of the flawed articulations of realism and idealism. In discussing “the effects of false idealism” (90), he writes the following as the final sentence of his work:

But just because this deluded visionary quality [*Phantasterey*] is no aberration [*Ausschweifung*] of nature but of freedom and therefore springs from a disposition [*Anlage*] worthy of respect in itself which is infinitely perfectible, so it leads also to a never-ending fall into a bottomless pit [*Tiefe*] and can only end in complete destruction. (90; 503)

The treatise’s ending thus seems incomplete and unsatisfactory. Rather than appearing as the logical end or conclusion of Schiller’s argument, it reads simply as if the text breaks off unfinished, like Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Schiller’s text resists imposing any form of closure on its discussion, and thereby highlights its failure to settle the issues it has raised. In what is perhaps a deliberate irony, the word with which Schiller ends his text is the verb *endigen* ‘to end’, which by virtue of its final position only serves to draw greater attention to the fact that the argument remains unfinished. Whereas Winckelmann’s *History* traces ancient art as far as possible chronologically (even beyond the self-imposed bounds of the study itself, as Winckelmann admits), and then ends by situating itself as part of a provisional examination of fragments across the distance of time and thus contributing to the continual process of inquiry that produces knowledge (thus providing a sense of closure through the very admission of its own provisionality), Schiller’s treatise gives the appearance of simply breaking off, thereby through its own form refusing to impose closure on its argument and implicitly leaving it

⁴⁶ Schiller thus anticipates Hegel. See below.

open to continuation by its author or reader. Schiller implies, therefore, that the development of poetry consists in the continual, futile process of attempting to reconcile naive and sentimental, ancient and modern, realism and idealism, being and consciousness, which are always already entangled with one another inasmuch as they reflect contradictory tendencies that lie at the heart of human nature and the way that human beings interact with the world. The imperfection and fragmentation of poetry reflect the imperfection and fragmentation of the human experience of reality, even as the sentimental striving of art to unite disparate elements in the infinite ideal reflects the entanglement of these faculties within man himself. The paradox is thus that art succeeds mimetically when it reflects the fragmentary division of imperfect human nature, even as art fails inasmuch as it strives to realize the perfection and unity of which man is (theoretically) or ought to be capable. Ancient Greek poetry is the representation of humanity's true nature in a form which explains why we can never experience nature as such but only through the lens of culture and sophistication, and shows that "nature" is a concept rooted in our very separation from nature through our imprisonment in a culture whose aesthetics strives vainly toward the ideal of reclaiming lost nature. The inability to achieve fully such a realization ensures the aesthetic vitality of ancient Greek naive art as the inspiring subject matter for modern sentimental Hellenizing poetry. Schiller thus shows how ancient Greek poetry is in itself perfect and complete and yet not sufficient, why it must be reread and rewritten in the process of the moral reflection of the modern sentimental poet, who continues to strive asymptotically toward the Hellenic ideal.

1.3 Objectivity and Creativity Related through *Studium* and Romantic Poetry in Friedrich Schlegel's *On the Study of Greek Poetry* and *Athenaeum Fragments*

A similar tension in the relationship between the real and the ideal in relation to ancient Greek literature also manifests in the work of the early Friedrich Schlegel, when one reads between his treatise *On the Study of Greek Poetry* and his aesthetic theory as sketched in the *Athenaeum Fragments*. Whereas Winckelmann had shown the entanglement of reading and writing by presenting imitation as the process of attempting to negotiate the relationship between nature and culture, ancient art and modern art, Schlegel presents *Studium*—‘study’, ‘zeal’, ‘desire’, or ‘aim’—as the process which negotiates between ancient and modern literature, distinguishing the one from the other even as it attempts to reconcile them. In *On the Study of Greek Poetry* Schlegel sees an irreconcilable divide between the aesthetic principles of ancient and modern literature, even as the two remain interdependent. Ancient Greek literature, embodying the beautiful aesthetic principles of objectivity and harmony, necessarily informs the conceptualization of the modern literature of creativity even as it remains irrecoverable. The tension between ancient and modern, objective and creative, is mediated and energized by the reading and writing involved in the process of *Studium*. In the *Athenaeum Fragments*, Schlegel at some points moves to maintain this division between the ancient and the modern but at others works to complicate it and to break it down. The *Athenaeum Fragments* presents a positive and progressive view of romantic poetry, which is mostly modern, even as it attempts to subsume ancient poetry under its own aesthetic rubric.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ In this section, “romantic poetry” (uncapitalized) translates Schlegel’s term *romantische Poesie*.

Thus in the *Athenaeum Fragments* romantic poetry itself contains the tension between the aesthetics of ancient and modern, emerging as part of the process of *Studium* which is evoked in *On the Study of Greek Poetry*. The *Athenaeum Fragments* attempt to assimilate Greek poetry as part of romantic poetry, so romantic poetry's project entails the ongoing process of the reading and rewriting of Greek poetry in the effort to unite the real and the ideal, the objective and the creative.

It has become a commonplace among scholars that Schlegel re-evaluated his view of modern literature around the time of the composition of the *Athenaeum Fragments* in 1798. The resultant conclusion has been to characterize *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, composed in 1795, as expressive of earlier views from which the Schlegel of the *Athenaeum Fragments* distanced himself. My reading, in contrast, traces a continuity in the development of Schlegel's thought between the two texts, for I show how the *Athenaeum Fragments* continue to engage with the same issues raised in *On the Study of Greek Poetry*.⁴⁸ Whereas Schiller's *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* presents itself as a general aesthetic theory while being in large part about the nature of ancient Greek literature, Friedrich Schlegel's *Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie* 'On the Study of Greek Poetry' presents itself (at least in its title) as a study of ancient Greek poetry in particular, but is at the same time a general aesthetic treatise including a historical and theoretical account of literature encompassing the relationship between ancient and modern poetry.⁴⁹ Indeed, Schlegel's study provides a striking example of the

⁴⁸ Barnett propounds a similar view: "the writings of the 'classicist' Schlegel pose the question to which the writings of the Romantic Schlegel attempt to provide the answer" (1).

⁴⁹ Despite announcing the study of Greek poetry as its primary subject, Schlegel's treatise begins with an extended discussion of modern poetry, and does not even mention Greek poetry at all in the first third of its

centrality of Hellenism to Romantic aesthetic theory in Germany, not only in the fact that a general aesthetic treatise presents itself under such a title, but also in the work's argument, which, like Schiller's, develops a theoretical articulation of the nature of ancient Greek literature in order to deploy the historical phenomenon as part of its comprehensive aesthetics. Unlike Schiller, however, Schlegel follows in the tradition of Winckelmann by incorporating a strong sense of historical development into his theory of ancient Greek literature: "Philosophy poeticizes and poetry philosophizes: history is treated as poetry and poetry is treated as history" (18), Schlegel writes.⁵⁰ In this integration of the empirical with the theoretical, Schlegel anticipates Hegel's methodology in the *Aesthetics*, as Behler has argued.⁵¹ By means of his theoretical characterization of ancient Greek poetry as an objectively beautiful realization of perfected human nature—as the union of the real and the ideal—Schlegel argues that it is necessary for modern poets to attain understanding of ancient literature in order to produce beautiful poetry of their own. At the same time, however, Schlegel also identifies competing aesthetic principles which make ancient and modern poetry irreconcilable. The complete understanding of ancient Greek poetry and the fulfillment of its aesthetic potentiality by the modern poet both remain unattainable goals, so the reading and (re)writing of ancient Greek poetry participates in an aesthetic of desire. This aesthetic of

total text. Schlegel accordingly confesses in the preface he wrote after completing the main work, "[p]erhaps the first treatise discusses modernity more than the title of this collection would lead one to expect" (96).

⁵⁰ In his edition of *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, Barnett observes, "[t]he essay is part of a larger attempt in German culture to articulate a post-Kantian philosophy by means of cultural history" (107 n.38).

⁵¹ Behler writes, "Schlegel was the first among the idealistic philosophers to develop an historical consciousness out of speculative idealism and to affirm the complementary relationship between history and theory which was later to become the essence of Hegel's philosophy" ("Origins" 59).

desire, rooted in the process of *Studium*, strives to unify the ancient and the modern, the real and the ideal, the objective and creative, and becomes the defining characteristic of the notion of romantic poetry which Schlegel goes on to develop in the *Athenaeum Fragments*.

In *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, Schlegel distinguishes ancient and modern poetry by characterizing each as proceeding from its own '*Bildung*,' a word which Schlegel uses to refer to the underlying principle of aesthetic development, and which Barnett often translates as 'culturation', 'development', or 'culture'. Like Schiller, Schlegel makes a distinction between nature and artifice, for he argues that the *Bildung* of ancient poetry was natural and incorporated both freedom and necessity, while the *Bildung* of modern poetry is artificial and is governed by concepts and the understanding. While Schlegel's distinction between the natural *Bildung* of ancient poetry and the artificial *Bildung* of modern poetry clearly parallels Schiller's distinction between the naive and the sentimental, there are important differences. In my reading of Schiller, I aligned the naive with the real and the sentimental with the ideal, since the sentimental is idealizing by virtue of the process in which it strives to represent the absent natural perfection which naive works (seem to) embody effortlessly. In the case of Schlegel, on the other hand, modern artificial poetry does not attempt to recapture lost nature; rather, it strives to represent the individual, the particular, and the interesting, while operating according to the understanding and governing concepts. Ancient poetry, in contrast, is objective and focuses on a harmonious, beautiful whole.

The beauty and harmony of ancient Greek poetry consist in its unification of the real and the ideal. Schlegel prepares for the introduction of Greek poetry into his

discussion by asking rhetorical questions to which he will proceed to provide the example of Greek poetry as an answer:

Does the divine appear in earthly form? Can the limited ever be whole, the finite complete, the particular universal? . . . Are there mortal works in which the law of eternity is visible? (48)

These various antitheses reflect the inherent opposition of the real and the ideal which it is the task of “art as such [*die Kunst schlechthin*]” to reconcile (48; 275), much like the manner in which Hegel characterizes the beauty of art according to the concrete embodiment of spirit in the Classical art form. Schlegel continues, “[o]nly in the case of one people did fine art correspond to the great dignity [*hohen Würde*] of its destiny [*Bestimmung*]” (48; 275), and goes on to cite the Greeks as this particular people. In a claim similar to that which Winckelmann made of ancient Greek sculpture, Schlegel argues that Greek poetry contains both the real and the ideal within itself because in accordance with the natural *Bildung* it “encompasses the whole of human nature in uniform completion [*gleichmäßiger Vollständigkeit*]” (48; 276). This comprehensive embodiment of human nature includes the reconciliation of the diverse forces within human nature itself, as evident in Schlegel’s characterization of Sophoclean tragedy, which, as his translator Barnett observes (122 n. 97), clearly anticipates Nietzsche: “[e]qually blended together [*verschmolzen*] in the mind of Sophocles was the divine intoxication of Dionysus, the profound inventiveness of Athena, and the quiet level-headedness of Apollo” (61; 298).

Schlegel often stresses the importance of modern poets studying ancient Greek poetry in order to produce better work. He makes it clear, however, that the relationship of modern poetry to ancient poetry ought not to be “the conspicuous *imitation of the*

ancients” embodied in the Neoclassical tradition (29). Whereas Winckelmann, in his analysis of statuary, argued that imitating the form of ancient plastic art could allow for the modern poet to assimilate key aesthetic principles, Schlegel, in shifting the focus to literature, argues that a more mechanical sense of copying or reproduction (e.g., of particular incidents) actually confounds access to the most important principles of literary works. The imitative approach fails by confusing the local with the objective, with the lamentable result that “[t]he childish understanding elevates the individual example to a general rule, ennobles tradition [*Herkommen*], and sanctions prejudice [*Vorurteil*]” (29; 238).⁵² The problem is that the artificiality of the modern *Bildung* causes the understanding to form general rules on the basis of purely incidental aspects of ancient works. Schlegel thus emphasizes the importance of a different kind of study of ancient Greek literature than that which Winckelmann propounds for ancient Greek statuary, though Schlegel does believe that modern poets can produce better work by improving their taste through the study of ancient Greek poetry. In the case of Schlegel, the value of studying Greek poetry does not consist in the modern poet’s abstraction of more perfect natural forms from the Greek works than from nature itself (as Winckelmann argues of Greek sculpture), but rather in the assimilation of the aesthetic principles of objectivity, completeness, and harmony, which are rooted in Greek poetry’s union of the real and the ideal.

⁵² Schlegel’s disparagement of *Vorurteil* in relation to ancient works might seem to contrast with Winckelmann’s justification of the usefulness of *Vorurteil* at the end of the *History*. They are using the word *Vorurteil* in different senses, however. Winckelmann uses *Vorurteil* to refer to the high regard in which ancient art is generally held. Schlegel uses the word *Vorurteil* with reference to those who have misunderstood ancient poetry and thus formed false principles on the basis of their flawed understanding, resulting in “aesthetic dogmatism” (29).

At the same time as he advances this optimistic argument for the regeneration of modern poetry through the study of ancient Greek poetry, Schlegel demonstrates the irreconcilability of ancient and modern aesthetic principles:⁵³

Only where all elements of art and taste evolve, form, and complete themselves in equal proportion is the greatest beauty possible—that is, in *natural* culturation [*Bildung*]. In artificial culturation [*Bildung*] this *symmetry* [*Gleichmäßigkeit*] is irrecoverably lost by the arbitrary division and mixture undertaken by the regulative understanding. (58; 293)

The full realization of the beauty and objectivity toward which modern poetry strives already exists in the past body of ancient Greek literature. Ancient Greek literature is thus both the past attainment of aesthetic perfection and the practical model from which proper aesthetic principles are to be derived. Schlegel characterizes ancient Greek literature as a body of work whose reading allows for the writing of the realization of the height of artistic achievement into history. Yet both the full understanding of the perfect organic whole of ancient Greek literature, and the adequate realization of the aesthetic principles embodied in it through the creation of modern literary works, are unattainable goals. This striving for the unattainable goal of the realization of the aesthetic potentiality of ancient Greek literature is evident in the project of a poem like Keats's *Endymion*, which frames itself as aiming for an idealized union of the real and the ideal (in the form of the mortal and the divine) only to have its bathetic anticlimax defer that union indefinitely.

Schlegel uses Greek poetry as the epitome of the fullest representation of the most perfect human nature, thus defining its artistic representations as the expression of an

⁵³ Barnett notes, “[f]or the most part . . . *On the Study of Greek Poetry* does not successfully outline how a synthesis between antiquity and modernity might be achieved. It remains very much caught up in outlining the thesis and antithesis that antiquity and modernity present. Indeed, the antinomy between the two seems irreconcilable in the essay” (13).

underlying essential humanity which provides a universal, objective standard for art. Like the conception of ancient Greek sculpture in Winckelmann, Schlegel's characterization of Greek poetry encompasses the union of the real and the ideal, inasmuch as it constitutes the natural organic expression of an essential underlying humanity. Because nature is the ultimate inspiration or source of all aesthetic representations—even those modern ones directed by the understanding—an understanding of Greek poetry is essential for the proper theoretical comprehension of the aesthetic principles in which all literature is rooted. The real subject of Schlegel's treatise is the nature of poetry itself as understood *through* Greek poetry and the relationship between Greek poetry and modern poetry. Schlegel argues that it is necessary to attain complete comprehension of the organic whole of Greek poetry in order to develop an adequate understanding of the nature of literature. His treatise is essentially propaedeutic because it claims not to present this complete understanding of Greek poetry but rather to present an aesthetic theory which proves the necessity of pursuing such an understanding for modern authors and critics. Hence, as Barnett observes, the appropriateness of its being named "*On the Study [Studium] of Greek Poetry*" rather than merely '*On Greek Poetry*' (10, my emphasis). Greek literature is perfect but can never be understood in its perfection by virtue of the very quality which makes it perfect in the first place (and thus desirable for the understanding): its organic totality. By characterizing Greek literature as a perfected organic whole of beauty which is absolutely necessary to know but by its very nature as such is inherently impossible to grasp, Schlegel presents modern literature and the practice of criticism as the continual process of attempting to grasp the unity of the real and the ideal within ancient Greek literature through the intertwined processes of reading

and writing involved in *Studium*. Despite Schlegel's optimistic conclusion and confident pronouncements about the strides to be made by modern German literature, according to his own theory such advances are incapable of fully realizing the aesthetic potentiality of ancient Greek literature, and constitute only an asymptotic progression toward an unattainable ideal. Modern literature, by virtue of its relationship to the ancient Greek literary tradition, will, like Keats's *Endymion*, always evoke only longing and never fulfillment, interest and never the satisfaction of complete beauty.

The *Athenaeum Fragments* take up the issues which remain unresolved in *On the Study of Greek Poetry*. Schlegel articulates the notion of romantic poetry, based on an aesthetic of desire, in order to theorize the possibility of a different kind of aesthetic achievement in modern literature. On the one hand, Schlegel at a number of points suggests the continuation of his view of a chasm between the ancient and the modern, according to which certain aesthetic principles embodied in ancient literature have been lost.⁵⁴ According to this perspective, the great achievement of ancient Greek literature remains irrecoverable and modern literature suffers in comparison. On the other hand, Schlegel at other points in the *Athenaeum Fragments* suggests a dissolution of this sharp divide between ancient and modern literature. In fragment 153 he writes, “[t]he more popular an ancient author, the more romantic,” suggesting that romantic poetry does not stand in opposition to ancient poetry, but rather encompasses it through acts of criticism

⁵⁴ E.g., fragment 154: “To anyone coming fresh from Aristophanes, the Olympus of comedy, [(modern)] romantic persiflage seems like a long spun-out thread from the cloth of Athena, like a flake of heavenly fire of which the best part was lost on the way to earth” (181). This fragment represents modern romantic comedy as a degenerated portion of the greater aesthetic achievement of ancient Greek comedy.

which continually redefine the nature of the canon. A self-reflexive critical perspective works to incorporate ancient Greek poetry into modern aesthetics.

Whereas in *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, Greek poetry itself had achieved the union of the real and the ideal which modern poetry was incapable of realizing, in the *Athenaeum Fragments* romantic poetry is supposed to work to unify the real and the ideal *as well as* combining the aesthetic principles of the ancient and the modern. Hence in the famous fragment 116 on progressive universal poetry, Schlegel writes that romantic poetry “tries to and should mix and fuse poetry and prose, inspiration [*Genialität*] and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature” (175; 38), and these opposed terms reflect the opposition between the ideal and the real, the creative and the objective. The opposition between ancient and modern thus forms a stepping stone en route to a higher synthesis which is to be achieved through *Studium*, evident in fragment 149:

Winckelmann . . . provided the first basis for a material knowledge of the ancients [*Altertumslehre*] through his perception of the absolute difference between ancient and modern. Only when the perspective and the conditions of the absolute identity of ancient and modern in the past, present, and future [*die war, ist oder sein wird*] have been discovered will one be able to say that at least the contours of classical study [*Wissenschaft*] have been laid bare [*fertig sei*] and one can now proceed to methodical investigation. (181; 43-44)

In this reference to Winckelmann Schlegel argues that the division between ancient and modern, articulated by Winckelmann and indeed by Schlegel himself in *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, is a necessary first step for the understanding of the aesthetic principles at work in the development of Western culture evident in ancient Greek art and literature. The next step, which is still to come, is the syncretic reconciliation of these constitutive differences. Yet this realization of “the absolute identity of ancient and modern” is not itself the final goal but rather merely the necessary step to sketch the “contours” to

prepare for “methodical investigation” to take place. In other words, the *Athenaeum Fragments* are, like *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, essentially propaedeutic in that they work to sketch theoretically the project of a future-oriented aesthetic of reading and writing rather than coming to fixed conclusions.

Clearly linked to Schlegel’s notion of romantic poetry is his idea, developed in fragment 238, of “transcendental poetry” “whose essence [*Eins und Alles*] lies in the relation between ideal and real” (195; 53). In order to operate effectively it is necessary for transcendental poetry to combine the aesthetic principles of ancient and modern literature:

this sort of poetry should unite the transcendental raw materials and preliminaries [*Materialien und Vorübungen*] of a theory of poetic creativity [*Dichtungsvermögens*]—often met with in modern poets—with the artistic reflection and beautiful self-mirroring [*Selbstbespiegelung*] that is present in Pindar, in the lyric fragments of the Greeks, in the classical elegy, and, among the moderns, in Goethe. In all its descriptions, this poetry should describe itself, and always be simultaneously poetry and the poetry of poetry.⁵⁵ (195; 53)

Important to note here is the fact that the only modern author linked with the aesthetic principles of ancient Greek poetry is Goethe, whose apparent naturalness led Schiller to associate him with the naive. Nevertheless, the introduction of Goethe as an example of a modern who embodies the aesthetic principles of beauty and harmony found in the ancients works to dissolve further the notion of an irreconcilable distinction between ancient and modern literature. Schlegel’s argument in this fragment supports a key point in my reading of Romantic Hellenism, for he suggests that the unification of the real and the ideal, the ancient and the modern toward which the romantic literary work strives, is

⁵⁵ Schlegel’s syntax is difficult to reproduce in readable English; in the original there is no sentence break in the quoted passage.

bound up with the work's self-reflexive engagement with literary and aesthetic theory. Such meta-poetic tendencies, manifesting in how modern Hellenizing works attempt to define the relationship between the ancient and modern aesthetic principles which they themselves deploy, are evident in works such as Blake's *Laocoön*, which I discuss in chapter two.

In the *Athenaeum Fragments* Schlegel further wrestles with the issues of the relationship between the real and the ideal, the ancient and the modern. In response to the impasse modern poetry had arrived at in *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, he develops the notion of romantic poetry as the reconciliation of the real and the ideal, the ancient and the modern. Romantic poetry's double vision should allow for the unification of objectivity and creativity, harmonious beauty and sophisticated self-reflexivity. Yet for these reasons romantic poetry's "real essence [is] that it is always only becoming and can never be completed," for it has its being in the interminable operation of the reading and writing processes evoked by *Studium* (*Athenaeum Fragment* 116, p. 39, my trans). Through the very qualities which render it inexhaustible, romantic poetry operates in a similar manner to the Hellenizing fragments I discuss in chapter two and the erotic narratives I discuss in chapter three: it continually works to defer and deny its delivery of the promise it holds out to us.

1.4 The Concrete Embodiment and the Idea Related through Art Historiography in Hegel's *Aesthetics*

Although it is not usually considered in the context of Romantic Hellenism,⁵⁶ Hegel's *Aesthetics* can be productively read in the tradition of Winckelmann as continuing to address historically key issues such as the nature of ancient Greek art and its relationship to modern art. Although the *Aesthetics* presents itself as a general philosophical treatment of art rather than as a consideration of the art of ancient Greece in particular, Hegel's concept of the Classical—of ancient Greek art, literature, myth, and culture—plays a central role in how the *Aesthetics* engages with the same issues evoked by the Hellenism of Winckelmann and others.⁵⁷ I thus read Hegel's approach to art in the *Aesthetics* in a similar manner to how I read Schiller's approach to literature in *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry*: as a theory of art that takes as its starting point the elucidation of the nature of ancient Greek art, and then sets out to elaborate the manner in which non-classical art operates vis-à-vis its relation to the yardstick of the Classical Ideal. In other words, I read the *Aesthetics* as a work which tackles the problem of art *through* the Classical, and thus develops its notion of Romantic art in response to the Classical.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ A number of illuminating treatments have focused on the architectonic or conceptual structure of the *Aesthetics*, especially in terms of its relationship to the rest of Hegel's system of philosophy. See Aschenberg (79-99), Halper (187-202), and Pinkard (3-23).

⁵⁷ Throughout the *Aesthetics* it seems clear that the Classical refers almost exclusively to ancient Greek art, and not to Roman art. E.g. Hegel associates Roman society with modern structural rule of law as opposed to the individuality found in the heroic age of Greece (185-86; 193-94); Hegel (like Winckelmann) claims that Roman art is purely derivative of Greek art (285); Hegel associates Vergil with allegory in contrast to the concrete individuality of the Greek gods of Homer (399); Roman satire occupies the place of a sort of anti-art which marks the dissolution of the Classical art form (214-16); and Hegel confines his discussion of statuary almost entirely to Greek sculpture (721-90), only briefly mentioning Roman sculpture as marking the decline of the Classical Ideal (788).

⁵⁸ Throughout this section I often use "Romantic" in a different sense than I do throughout the rest of the thesis. Here, "Romantic" translates Hegel's term *romantische* when it is followed by "art" or "art form," and "the Romantic" is shorthand for "the Romantic art form." For Hegel "Romantic" is thus a designation

As I shall demonstrate, Hegel's theory of art is actually a theory of the Classical art form—only the Classical constitutes “true” art, through its union of the real and the ideal. Furthermore, in proceeding, like Winckelmann and Schlegel, according to a methodology which exhibits a union of the theoretical with the empirical, Hegel analyzes specific examples of ancient Greek art to show how its attainment of the Classical Ideal is rooted in particular historical and cultural circumstances.⁵⁹ Hegel thus suggests that ancient Greek art constitutes the standard according to which art is to be judged *qua* art, while also demonstrating the impossibility of any manner of imitating ancient Greek models. In the place of the Classical, the Romantic art form emerges, defined by the irreconcilable tension between its real and ideal aspects, its concrete form and its spiritual content. The *Aesthetics* thus banishes ancient Greek art as “a thing of the past [*ein Vergangenes*]” (11; 1: 25), while at the same time imbuing it with a vital aesthetic potentiality, though a different sort of aesthetic potentiality than that which is evident in the work of Winckelmann or Schiller. In Hegel's case, the aesthetic potentiality of ancient Greek art is not for the Hellenizing modern artist, but rather for the philosopher or the critic who articulates the notion of the Classical in his *theory* of art. Hegel thus defines the nature of the Romantic as a kind of post-art or anti-art which emerges as a result of the impossibility of realizing the Classical in the modern age. In deploying the aesthetic potentiality of the Classical through his very production of the *Aesthetics*

for modern, as opposed to ancient, art, although it ought to be kept in mind that this “modern,” “Romantic” era of art begins in the middle ages.

⁵⁹ Throughout this section the term “the Ideal” (capitalized) ought to be distinguished from “the ideal” (lower case). The latter term is used in the same vein as the discussion above, in antonymic tension with “the real,” while the former is a translation of Hegel's *Ideal* and is the defining characteristic of the Classical art form.

lectures, Hegel redefines the importance of ancient Greek art as a paradigm of reading in the critical arena which allows for the conceptualization of the productivity of the failure of the Romantic as art, thus shifting the significance of art toward an aesthetics of the reading and writing processes rather than the complete expression of harmonious beauty.

Although Hegel's approach is more theoretical than that of Winckelmann, like Winckelmann and Friedrich Schlegel he accepts the importance of a combination of theoretical with historical treatment in order to attain an accurate understanding of the nature of art. According to Hegel, this methodology is demanded by the very nature of the subject matter itself, for "[t]he philosophical Concept of the beautiful . . . unites metaphysical universality [*Allgemeinheit*] with the precision of real particularity [*Besonderheit*]" (22; 1: 39). Hegel accordingly admits the impossibility of demonstrating the necessity of the Concept of the beautiful *a priori* (22-25). It is necessary, Hegel argues, to "take up the Concept of art *lemmatically*" (24), for we have access not to the Concept itself but "only elements and aspects [*Seiten*] of it as they occur already in the different ideas of the beautiful and art held by ordinary people [*im gewöhnlichen Bewußtsein*]" (25; 1: 43). Hegel thus entangles his theoretical framework with his historical treatment of the development of art and his analysis of individual works of art.

As is well known, Hegel's primary theoretical framework in the *Aesthetics* is the division of art into three art forms, the Symbolic, the Classical, and the Romantic, each characterized by the nature of the relationship between the Idea and its embodiment in the work of art. In the Symbolic stage the Idea is "still in its indeterminacy and obscurity, or in bad and untrue determinacy" (76), resulting in grotesque forms which do not embody the Idea, but rather merely point to its existence *outside* the work of art itself. Classical

art is defined by the presence of the Ideal, which Hegel defines as the concrete embodiment of the Idea; in the case of the true Classical Ideal, the work of art does not merely represent the Idea, but is itself the concrete embodiment of spirit. Finally, in the Romantic stage, the Idea has developed to the point where it is defined by inward-looking subjectivity and spirituality and is thus incapable of being adequately embodied in sensuous form as demanded by art.

Although Hegel presents each art form as a necessary stage in the development of the Idea, and clearly demonstrates that each is worthy of study and understanding in its own right and according to its particular nature, a close examination of Hegel's arguments about the function of art and the nature of beauty demonstrates that only the Classical is truly "art."⁶⁰ Only the Classical art form, through its adequate embodiment of the Idea, is able to achieve the purpose of art by successfully reconciling the abstraction of the universal with the sensuousness of the particular.⁶¹ In his introduction, Hegel

⁶⁰ Tilottama Rajan points out some of the tensions inherent in Hegel's treatment of the art forms: Through the symbolic and romantic Hegel inscribes a space for an art that he is compelled to judge defective in terms of his own determination that "the highest" art unites "Idea and presentation" (A 79, 74). Yet by his own standards this art is not defective, since "defectiveness of *form* results from defectiveness of *content*" (74), so that symbolic forms are indeed expressions of their content. As Hegel himself concedes, such forms are deficient only in "beauty," but in terms of adequacy "the specific shape which every content of the Idea gives to itself in the particular forms of art is always adequate to that content" (300). ("Toward a Cultural Idealism" 66)

⁶¹ It might seem perverse to claim that the Symbolic and the Romantic art forms are not truly art, for Hegel does of course *call* them 'art' (*Kunst*) and discuss them in the course of the *Aesthetics*, but the Symbolic and the Romantic art forms would perhaps better be described as proto-art and post-art, respectively. They are necessary stages in the interaction between the development of the Idea and the mode in which it is grasped and represented sensuously, but neither does what Hegel says art is supposed to do. In the case of the Symbolic art form the sensuousness of the work of art does not present the Idea but merely points to the Idea which exists beyond and outside of it, as for example in the sublimity of the infinite. In the case of the Romantic art form the necessity of the portrayal of spirit as having withdrawn into itself and its own inner life makes the Idea incapable of being embodied in sensuous form. The Symbolic and the Romantic art forms are necessary and important to study because they reflect the development of the Idea and perform their proper roles accordingly. Hegel certainly appreciates Symbolic and Romantic art, but he appreciates them for qualities which according to his own criteria are *not artistic*.

Cf. Warminski, who refers to the Symbolic and the Romantic as "pre-art" and "post-art" (39),

contextualizes his discussion of the function of art by setting forth an interpretation of the Kantian categorical imperative, which his translator T. M. Knox claims “is based on a measure of misunderstanding” (53 n. 2). Hegel argues that the moral conflict in the individual between his own selfish sensuous desires and abstract universal duty reflects the “opposition between what is *absolute* and what is external reality and existence” (53). The inner moral conflict in Hegel’s reading of Kant mirrors the bifurcated human experience of the world. The task of philosophy is to grasp the truth by enacting through reflection the continual mediation and reconciliation between these two sides (55). Along similar lines (since philosophy, religion, and art are merely different modes of grasping the Absolute), Hegel argues that “art’s vocation is to unveil the *truth* in the form of sensuous artistic configuration [*der sinnlichen Kunstgestaltung*], to set forth the reconciled opposition just mentioned” (55; 1: 82). Through the beauty of the Ideal, Classical art performs precisely this function of a sensuous manifestation of the truth of the reconciliation between absolute spirit and external material. Hegel explains why only Classical art (i.e. ancient Greek art) is “true art” in the following passage:

The centre of art is a unification, self-enclosed so as to be a free totality [*macht die zu freier Totalität in sich abgeschlossene*], a unification [*Einigung*] of the content with its entirely adequate shape. This reality, coinciding with the Concept of the beautiful, towards which the symbolic form of art strove in vain, is first brought into appearance by classical art. We have therefore in our earlier treatment of the Idea of the beautiful [*Betrachtung der Idee des Schönen und der*

respectively. I prefer to refer to the Symbolic as “proto-art” rather than “pre-art,” for “proto” emphasizes the incipient nature of the Symbolic, its fermentation and struggle toward the Classical.

Hegel clearly seems to characterize the Symbolic as proto-art when he writes, “our interest in considering symbolism consists in recognizing the inner process of the origin of art, in so far as this can be derived from the Concept of the Ideal in its development up to true art, and so of recognizing the sequence of stages in the symbolic as stages on the way to genuine art” (314).

Kunst]⁶² already settled in advance the general nature of the classical; the Ideal provides the content and form of classical art which in this adequate mode of configuration [*Gestaltungsweise*] achieves what true art is in its essential nature [*ihrem Begriff nach ist*]. (427; 2: 13)⁶³

Hegel's argument thus continues in the tradition of Romantic Hellenism by reading ancient Greek art as the reconciliation between what I have called, in discussing other thinkers, the "real" and the "ideal," although these terms differ from Hegel's own due to his metaphysics. According to Hegel,

The spirit in its truth is absolute. Therefore it is not an essence lying in abstraction beyond the objective world. On the contrary, it is present within objectivity in the finite spirit's recollection or inwardization of the essence of all things—i.e. the finite apprehends itself in its own essence and so itself becomes essential and absolute. (101)⁶⁴

In other words, for Hegel, to distinguish between "the real" and "the ideal" as separate spheres is to make a false distinction. According to Hegel's philosophical idealism, the ideal is always real and the real is always ideal. Whereas hitherto, for example in my readings of Winckelmann and Schiller, I have associated *the real* with nature as such, that is, with the materiality of the external world, Hegel's conception of the real differs substantially. I have also hitherto associated *the ideal* with a concept of theoretical perfection existing apart from material and historical contingency. In the case of

⁶² It seems to me that Knox omits *und der Kunst* from his translation, or perhaps is translating from a text without it. With this phrase added the translation might read, "in our earlier treatment of art and of the Idea of the beautiful," and this phrasing suggests the connection between beauty and the nature of art.

⁶³ Cf. other passages in which Hegel reiterates the link between the Ideal and beauty for true art: "[w]e called the beautiful the Idea of the beautiful. This means that the beautiful itself must be grasped as Idea, in particular as Idea in a determinate form, i.e. as Ideal" (106); "The *first* part of the science we are studying [i.e. vol I] was devoted to the general conception and the reality of beauty in nature and art: true beauty and true art or, in other words, the Ideal" (613).

⁶⁴ The German as follows:

Der Geist als wahrer Geist ist an und für sich und dadurch kein der Gegenständlichkeit abstraktjenseitiges Wesen, sondern innerhalb derselben im endlichen Geiste die Erinnerung des Wesens aller Dinge: das Endliche in seiner Wesentlichkeit sich ergreifend und somit selber wesentlich und absolut. (1: 139)

Winckelmann this clearly bore a relation to Plato's theory of ideas, whereas in Schiller and Schlegel it had to do with a perfected vision of human nature. Despite these differences, Hegel's theory of art can be said to reflect this dynamic between the real and the ideal through the interplay he envisions between, on the one hand, the concrete, the sensuous, the historical, and the material, and, on the other hand, the abstract, the inner life, the subjective, and the spiritual. It merely needs to be kept in mind that in this case these opposed concepts which align with the dynamic between the real and the ideal are posited by Hegel not as metaphysical principles but as alternative modes of expression within the Absolute itself. What I earlier described as the union or entanglement of the real and the ideal in ideas of Greek art expounded by Winckelmann is thus manifested in Hegel's notion of the Classical art form as the adequate embodiment of the Idea in its deployment of the Classical Ideal—Classical art does not merely *represent* the Idea, but actually embodies it, because “in classical art the peculiarity of the content consists in its being itself the concrete Idea, and as such the concretely spiritual” (78). For Hegel the Classical art form unites spirit with the external sensuous medium. What is for others a union of the real and the ideal is for Hegel a union of the sensuous and the spiritual, internal subjectivity with concrete external material. This is the proper function of true art and this function is only fulfilled by the Classical art form.

Having established the theoretical basis of the mode of operation of the Classical art form, Hegel goes on to demonstrate how the capacity of ancient Greek art to manifest the Ideal was rooted in the particular historical and cultural circumstances in which it flourished. Following Winckelmann, Hegel emphasizes the importance of practices of material culture in shaping the beauty of Greek art, by arguing that ancient Greek dress

with its flowing drapery portrays the pose and movement of the human form in a more artistic manner, in contrast to modern trousers and shirts which are fixed and lifeless:

What constitutes the ideal in clothing is the determining principle displayed when the outer wholly and entirely subserves [*diene ganz nur*] the changeable expression of spirit appearing in the body, with the result that the particular form of the drapery [*Gewandes*], the fall of the folds [*Faltenwurf*], their hanging and lifting is entirely regulated from within, and is adapted to precisely this pose or movement momentarily only. (165; 1: 218)

Whereas Winckelmann had emphasized the freedom of Greek clothing as allowing for natural and unhindered movements of the body (*Reflections* 9), Hegel instead focuses on the *aesthetic expression* of free-flowing drapery. What is important for Hegel is not so much the wearer's feeling about the clothing, but the mode or manner in which clothing is modified to reflect the orientation of the human form which is concretized spirit. In the case of modern dress, Hegel writes, "our manner of dress, as outer covering, is insufficiently marked out by our inner life [*nicht genug von dem Inneren abgeschieden*] to appear conversely as shaped from within" (166; 1: 219). Thus Hegel continues to emphasize the importance of Greek culture for Greek art, but moves away from Winckelmann's mimetic ideas of imitation to ideas that focus more on the mode of representation. Despite his focus on the theoretical—rather than the mimetic—significance of Greek clothing, Hegel does not advocate for the adoption of ancient dress in modern sculptures, but rather insists on the cultural and historical particularity of such representations. Even though ancient Greek dress does the best job reflecting the Idea of the human form in sculptures, Hegel claims that to carve a statue portraying a modern general in ancient Greek clothing "would be the same mummery as putting a bearded man in a girl's clothes [*Mädchenkleider*]" (749; 2: 411). By comparing the dressing of a statue of a modern man in ancient clothes to dressing a bearded man in girl's clothes,

Hegel suggests not only the ridiculousness of such a representation, but also that transposing the material culture of ancient Greece to the representation of a modern European man is unnatural—literally a travesty. This is one of few passages in the *Aesthetics* where Hegel explicitly acknowledges the radical otherness of ancient Greece in relation to modern culture, and it is no coincidence that he does so through evoking an analogy to the transgression of gender codes (see chapter three below where I discuss the link between cultural otherness and sexuality), which expresses a certain degree of anxiety toward cross-cultural contamination. Yet this passage also suggests the futility and impossibility of cultural translation. Hegel would doubtless claim that the problem with dressing a bearded man in girl's clothes is that he remains a bearded man; it is the incongruity of his biology with his dress which produces the absurdity. A modern general is unsuited to being dressed as the Greek god Mars precisely because the qualities he possesses do not conform with those of the ancient Greek god. So although ancient dress is particularly suited for the expression of the Ideal, it can only operate effectively in this manner by being portrayed as part of the Classical art form, complete with the cultural and historical context of this stage of the development of the Idea. The representation of ancient dress on statues in modern times does not work because it is merely the transposing of the external shapes without the requisite content.

Thus, Hegel argues that the achievement of ancient Greek sculpture was rooted in the particular historical moment which provides the requisite content for the complete development of formal perfection. Here we may note a significant contrast with the Hellenism of Winckelmann. Winckelmann too had argued for an essential basis of ancient Greek art in ancient Greek culture, including both the cultural practices and the

worldview as a whole. But for Winckelmann beauty is a universal which exists apart from culture; ancient Greek culture was ideal inasmuch as it provided the conditions for its artists to approach beauty through the imitation and idealization of natural forms. Thus, according to Winckelmann, if a modern sculptor were to study ancient Greek art and assimilate its practices, he could learn to produce art that more closely approaches ideal beauty. In the case of Hegel, on the other hand, the Idea of beauty does not exist apart as a separate universal to which all ages aspire, but is rather developed in and through culture itself; it is bound up as part of history. The concept of the Classical allows Hegel to acknowledge the greatness of the achievement of ancient Greek art and culture, while also historicizing it in a particular stage in the progressive development of the Idea throughout history. Thus, the Classical embodies a universal ideal because it conforms to certain theoretical principles, but is also obsolete and superseded, incapable of being produced or of expressing the human condition in the modern world. According to Hegel's theory, imitating the forms of ancient Greek works would be futile because the modern artist does not exist in the cultural and historical moment with the proper content to produce Classical works of art—not to mention the fact that Classical works would not speak properly to modern observers. Hegel thus expresses a similar problem to that which troubled many authors of the Romantic period: the beauty of the aesthetic achievement of ancient Greek art cries out to authors for engagement, even as their greater understanding of the cultural specificity of its aesthetic achievement convinces them of the impossibility of recreating a similar form of beauty in modern works. This tension between the desire to revitalize ancient Greek art and the awareness of the modern author's distance from it

provides the dynamic energy of Romantic Hellenizing poems such as Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*.

Hegel thus addresses the problem that the Classical, the only true form of art, which has its being in the identity of the Idea and its embodiment, cannot be created in the modern world. The Romantic art form thus emerges as a kind of inversion of the Classical, for it is distinguished by the inability of the Idea to be adequately embodied in sensuous material. In Romantic art the Idea has developed to such an extent that it is defined by the inner life, so artistic representations only end up exposing the disconnect between spiritual content and external form. While the Classical consists in the union of the inner and the outer, the real and the ideal, the Romantic exposes their discontinuity and thus supersedes the Classical even as it ultimately fails as art. Hegel's conception of Romantic art has important implications for the readings I undertake throughout the chapters which follow, for it helps to suggest the importance of Romantic art as a kind of necessary failure, one which is productive and generative even in its insufficiency. Romantic art, as is evident in poems such as Keats's *Endymion*, strives to unify the real and the ideal, and appropriately figures this union as the performance of the function of ancient Greek art, even as it remains aware of its inability to achieve this unification and its necessity of remaining in the mode of the aesthetic of desire produced by the reading and writing processes.

Hegel provides a cultural and historical analysis that he integrates with his theoretical description of the Ideal as the union of sensuality with universality. It is clear from Hegel's analysis that while the beauty of Classical works of art endures, such beauty can never be reproduced or recaptured through imitation because the aesthetic

quality of the Classical consisted in its expression of the stage of the Idea's development in a particular historical and cultural moment of the past: "The beautiful days of Greek art, like the golden age of the later Middle Ages, are gone" (10). Unlike in Winckelmann, the aesthetic potentiality of the classical in Hegel does not consist in the supplementary relationship between the real and the ideal which modern art must imitate, but rather in the philosophical articulation of the historical relationship between the real and the ideal which emerges in the process of the writing of the *Aesthetics*. Nevertheless, according to Hegel, the Classical—ancient Greek art and culture—remains always the centre and the circumference of art *qua* art, of art as the mode of the relationship between the Idea and its embodiment, such that the articulation of aesthetic theory and the judgement and appreciation of art are forever intertwined with the processes of the reading and the writing of the art of ancient Greece.

1.5 The Dionysian and the Apollonian Related through Negative Dialectic in Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*

I have argued that Hegel's *Aesthetics* can be read as an aesthetic theory which takes as its basis or starting point ancient Greek art and thereby defines the true nature of art according to Hegel's conception of the Classical art form. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche much more explicitly sets out to write a theoretical account of the nature of art through his treatment of the culture of ancient Greece, which he considers best exemplified by the art of tragedy. In this respect, Nietzsche's title to the 1872 edition, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* 'The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music,' is somewhat misleading because it suggests that the work treats primarily the origin of tragedy. The title of the 1886 edition, *Die Geburt der Tragödie, Oder:*

Griechenthum und Pessimismus ‘*The Birth of Tragedy; Or, Hellenism and Pessimism*,’

better reflects the work’s concern with the continuation throughout Western history of the artistic forces found in ancient Greek culture.⁶⁵ Nietzsche’s work has more in common with the approach of Romantic Hellenism—that is, with reading into the aesthetic productivity of ancient Greek culture in terms of its relationship to modern art—than with the learned antiquarianism exemplified by many classical scholars of the later nineteenth century.⁶⁶ Nietzsche continues in the tradition of earlier thinkers by combining the historical and the theoretical in his approach, and his treatment of similar issues diverges with important implications for the understanding of Romantic Hellenism. Through his argument about the source of art in the two drives of the Dionysian and the Apollonian, Nietzsche develops his conceptualization of a violent and dynamic dialectical relationship between the real and the ideal within ancient Greek culture, and thus brings into the open the inherent tensions and contradictions in the views of earlier thinkers. In his concern for a modern revival of the Greek spirit through the re-energization of these aesthetic drives, Nietzsche suggests how modern art might strive to realize the aesthetic potentiality of ancient Greece, even as he exposes the impossibility of attaining this goal. The continual operation of this negative dialectic evokes the future-oriented aesthetic of the reading and writing processes.

⁶⁵ As Tilottama Rajan notes, “Nietzsche is not concerned with historical scholarship, so much as with the use of Greek myth to develop a theology of creative consciousness” (*Dark Interpreter* 45).

⁶⁶ Although Nietzsche lived and wrote much later than the other authors I analyze in this study, he can nevertheless be illuminating because he furthers the tradition of Romantic Hellenism such that we can productively read his work projected backwards onto his predecessors. Indeed, Nietzsche demonstrates his awareness of this affinity by explicitly situating his work in relation to authors of the later eighteenth- and early nineteenth centuries, frequently referring to Winckelmann, Goethe, and Schiller. In the preface to the 1886 edition, Nietzsche expresses regret at this mode of treatment: “I *debased* the grandiose *Greek problem* as it occurred to me by introducing the most modern things!” (10).

As Rajan notes (*Dark Interpreter* 35), Schopenhauer's metaphysical and aesthetic theory in *The World as Will and Representation* is crucial for the development of Nietzsche's views about art in *The Birth of Tragedy*. According to Schopenhauer, existence can be characterized according to two principles. These principles are the will (*Wille*), which is the underlying essence or core of each thing or individual, equivalent to Kant's notion of the noumenon, and representation (*Vorstellung*), the images formed by the will through which human beings experience the world, equivalent to Kant's notion of the phenomenon. Naturally, the will is the privileged term in this relationship, even though "the world as will . . . is essentially a blind world" without representations—though representations ultimately turn out to be merely projections of the will (Rajan 35). In his aesthetic theory, Schopenhauer privileges music because it is a non-representational art. Whereas arts such as painting, sculpture, and literature are limited by being copies of representations, music, being non-representational, is an expression of the will itself.⁶⁷ Hence from Schopenhauer Nietzsche derives the principles of the Dionysian (similar to the will and associated with music) and the Apollonian (similar to representation and associated with sculpture). In defining the principle drives of art in terms of divinities from Greek mythology, Nietzsche shifts the discussion onto the Hellenic ground, allowing him to develop further Schopenhauer's critique of Hegel, with important implications for theorizing the relationship between Greece and ideals in Romantic Hellenism.

⁶⁷ As Rajan notes, this schema is, ultimately, inconsistent according to the logic of Schopenhauer's argument: "Because the ideas are only 'the objectivity of the will' and therefore the disclosure of the real, the difference between the Apollonian arts of literature and sculpture and the Dionysiac art of music is no more real than the difference between representation and will" (39).

In arguing ultimately that all works of art are copies of representations, Schopenhauer critiques aesthetic theories such as that of Hegel, who argues that the work of art, when properly formed, is the adequate embodiment of the Idea, rather than being merely a representation or copy. In arguing that all works of art are ultimately only representations, Schopenhauer suggests that art produces illusions rather than directly embodying its own kind of truth as Hegel claims.⁶⁸ Hegel had historicized the relationship between the real and the ideal in his art historiography, in describing the changing relationships between the Idea and its embodiment in different stages of art and cultural history, and presented ancient Greek art, in the form of the Classical, as embodying the perfect identity of external form and internal content. Nietzsche, in contrast, internalizes the relationship between the real and the ideal, in the form of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, within ancient Greek art itself. Ancient Greek art becomes not a site of reconciliation rooted in a particular, irrecoverable historical moment, as it is in thinkers such as Winckelmann and Hegel, but rather the site of a dynamic and dialectical relationship which is open to continuation in the modern world. For Nietzsche the aesthetic potentiality of ancient Greek art consists not purely in imitation or in art historiography, but rather in fundamental aesthetic drives which are visible both in the art of tragedy itself, and in the ongoing historical development of art throughout Western culture.

⁶⁸ Rajan points out Schopenhauer's ambivalence in this regard: "Although he sets out to abolish the post-Kantian notion of the priority of mental forms over the brutality of life, he regards as legitimate a definition of art in terms of idealization. But equally, although he defines art in terms of illusion, he also insists that it be an embodiment of life" (38).

Nietzsche's more explicit staging of the tensions in the thought of Winckelmann and Hegel is evident in his revaluation of ancient Greek sculpture. According to Winckelmann ancient Greek sculpture attained the highest possible art form through its unification of the real and the ideal, its entanglement of nature and culture in its expression of "noble simplicity [*edle Einfalt*] and quiet grandeur [*stille Größe*]" (*Reflections* 33). Schiller's and Schlegel's views of ancient Greek literature reflect the kind of unification sculpture seems to embody. Similarly, for Hegel sculpture becomes the paradigmatic example of the Classical art form through its concretization of spirit, its identity of internal content with external form. Nietzsche, in contrast, denigrates sculpture by associating it with the tyrannical and distorting influence of the Apollonian: in sculpture "beauty triumphs over the suffering which is inherent to life, pain is in a certain sense effaced from the features of nature by a lie [*aus den Zügen der Natur hinweggelogen*]" (90; 104). The prioritization of appearance in sculpture renders it incapable of the expression of the dark truth toward which tragedy gestures. In prioritizing tragedy over sculpture in his reading of ancient Greek art, Nietzsche makes the argument which Hegel in the *Aesthetics* intimated but did not state: the proper function of art is not in fact confined to its concrete expression or appearance but rather extends to what is beyond that expression, to what is beyond form.⁶⁹ In Nietzsche, the

⁶⁹ Hegel himself acknowledges that tragedy involves a dissonance produced by collision, though he sees this dissonance as ultimately being reconciled through the process of the tragic plot in the service of the Ideal:

the beauty of the Ideal lies precisely in the Ideal's undisturbed unity, tranquillity, and perfection in itself. Collision disturbs this harmony, and sets the Ideal, inherently a unity, in dissonance and opposition. Therefore, by the representation of such transgression, the Ideal is itself transgressed, and the task of art can lie here only, on the one hand, in preventing free beauty from perishing in this difference, and, on the other hand, in just presenting this disunion and its conflict, whereby out of it, through resolution of the conflict, harmony appears as a result, and in this way alone becomes conspicuous in its complete essentiality. (205)

Apollonian and the Dionysian reflect the interplay between the real and the ideal, which are related by means of a negative dialectic in both the historical development and the operation of art—in both the reading and writing processes.

Ancient Greek culture had been traditionally associated with the origin of Western culture, and was thus seen as a logical and civilizing force—a conclusion which seems sensible given its association with figures such as Socrates and with democratic principles. Nietzsche turns this picture on its head by claiming that the force of ancient Greek art and culture consisted not in the triumph of this ordering, civilizing drive, which corresponds to his notion of the Apollonian, but rather that such civilizing tendencies themselves are bound up with Dionysian elements of madness and excess. According to Nietzsche, not only is ancient Greek culture distant both historically and conceptually, but it is also in certain ways fundamentally alien to the rationality of modern Western thought—and in this foreignness consists its power to reconfigure aesthetics by challenging the conventional model which associates soft beauty with rationality and the rugged sublime with overwhelming affect. This essential foreignness of ancient Greek culture, at turns both alluring and disturbing, informs the argument of my third chapter, which focuses on the sexualization of Greek otherness.

Like Hegel, Nietzsche interprets the historical development of art as a manifestation of the fundamental aesthetic principles in which art is rooted. Briefly, Nietzsche's argument about the evolution of art may be summarized as follows: 1) the Apollonian arts of epic and sculpture rose to perfection among the Greeks in reaction against the tragic knowledge of the Dionysian; 2) in ancient Greek tragedy the dialectical interplay and integration of the Dionysian and the Apollonian produced the highest art; 3)

Euripides and Socrates were the heralds of a cultural shift, which, by insisting that all things be knowable and intelligible, banished the Dionysian from cultural forms; 4) in Nietzsche's own time the Socratic impulse of totalizing rational knowledge eventually encounters its limits and turns upon itself, leading back to the necessity for a cultural regeneration by means of true Dionysian art.

In the case of Nietzsche, the dynamic between the real and the ideal can be aligned with that between the Dionysian and the Apollonian, the two basic aesthetic drives within nature which are the source of all true art, and which in their historical development are the source of ancient Greek art and culture, even as ancient Greek myth provides the very symbols with which these two drives are identified. The Dionysian can be aligned with the real. In addition to denoting simply a raw, ungraspable materiality as such, however, Nietzsche's concept of the Dionysian carries much more radical metaphysical implications, in a manner suggestive of the Lacanian Real. The Dionysian is the dark underside of existence, a sheer irreducible materiality which entails the dissolution of individual subjectivity in an experience of oneness with all things in the moment of being. The Dionysian, through instigating the apprehension of the original Unity of existence, necessarily dissolves all boundaries, distinctions, or categorizations; in short, all the taxonomic or conceptual procedures which make ordinary human experience possible. Because the Dionysian is incompatible with individual subjectivity, it is also antithetical to knowledge in the traditional (Western metaphysical) sense. Furthermore, the Dionysian cannot be represented—language or signification cannot grasp it. It is beyond the realm of logic and rationality, and thus completely opposed to

the Socratic impulse which in its blind optimism insists that everything be knowable.⁷⁰

Through the Dionysian, which is inherently ungraspable and unknowable, Nietzsche situates negativity at the heart of his metaphysical aesthetics. We can only (mis)encounter the Dionysian in brief glimpses of intuition, giving it a fragmentary character while also imbuing it with limitless aesthetic potentiality, because it can never be fully grasped or represented and therefore never exhausted—thus making it the perfect object of an aesthetic of unattainable desire which nevertheless continually strives for the impossibility of realizing it fully.

In contrast, the Apollonian can be aligned with the ideal because it is an idealizing process insofar as it involves the shaping of beautiful images as in the plastic art of sculpture and in epic. Nietzsche associates the Apollonian drive with the world of dream. The Apollonian is about the experience of representations created through the idealizing process of *appearance* involved in the production of a “surface reality” (20); thus it is a transfiguring process based on order and form, an illusion. It ought to be kept in mind, however, that for Nietzsche the idealizing force of the Apollonian is aligned with the finite and with concreteness. The Apollonian can be aligned with culture as a reaction against nature as such (the Dionysian real); the idealizing tendencies of appearance and illusion work as a sort of psychic and aesthetic defense mechanism against the dark truth of the Dionysian abyss, toward which the wisdom of Silenus gestures.⁷¹ The Apollonian

⁷⁰ Nietzsche denigrates “*aesthetic Socratism*, whose highest law runs approximately as follows: ‘In order to be beautiful, everything must be intelligible’” (70).

⁷¹ Nietzsche explains the myth as follows: “According to an ancient legend, King Midas had long hunted the forest for the wise *Silenus*, the companion of Dionysus, without catching him. When Silenus finally fell into his hands, the king asked him what is the very best and most preferable of all things for man. The stiff and motionless daemon refused to speak; until, forced by the king, he finally burst into shrill laughter and uttered the following words: ‘Miserable ephemeral race, children of chance and toil, why do you force me

is at once a protective barrier against the Dionysian and also the very conduit which allows fleeting and limited (mis)apprehension of it. Without the process of idealization through the appearance and illusion of Apollonian images, human beings would have no access to the Dionysian whatsoever.

Ancient Greek tragedy attained the highest mode of art possible, through combining the aesthetic forces of the Dionysian and the Apollonian. Nietzsche describes this process in the following passage, in which music is an expression of the Dionysian and myth an expression of the Apollonian:

Tragedy inserts between the universal validity of its music and the listener who is receptive to the Dionysian [*den dionysisch empfänglichen Zuhörer*] a sublime allegory [*Gleichniss*], myth, and gives the spectator the impression that music is merely the highest means of representing and bringing to life [*ein höchstes Darstellungsmittel zur Belebung*] the plastic world of myth. Trusting to this noble illusion [*Täuschung*], tragedy may now move its limbs to the dithyrambic dance and surrender [*hingeben*] itself without a thought to an orgiastic feeling of freedom, in which it is allowed to flourish as music in itself, thanks alone to this illusion [*in welchem sie als Musik an sich, ohne jene Täuschung, nicht zu schwelgen wagen dürfte*]. Myth protects us from music, while on the other hand myth [*er*] alone gives music its highest freedom. For that reason, music in return lends [*verleiht . . . Gegengeschenk*] tragic myth a penetrating [*eindringliche*] and persuasive metaphysical significance which word and image could never achieve without that unique help. (112-13; 130)

Tragedy is the most perfect form of art because in it the Dionysian and the Apollonian work together in a dynamic balance of tension and harmony. Each is necessary in order for the other to exert its full effect upon the audience as part of the work of art. Ancient Greek tragedy is the highest form of art because of its union of the real and the ideal. For Nietzsche, however, it is important to note that despite the successful combination of the

to tell you what it is best for you not to hear? The very best of all things is completely beyond your reach: not to have been born, not to *be*, to be *nothing*. But the second best thing for you is—to meet an early death” (27). This anecdote is found in *A Letter of Condolence to Apollonius*, 115b-115f (ch. 27, p. 179), where Plutarch introduces it as a quotation from Aristotle’s *Eudemos*.

Apollonian and the Dionysian in tragedy, and the profound experience such tragedy produces, the full meaning of the work is never entirely graspable:

In particular, it is precisely here that the tragic spectator experiences a certain presentiment of a higher joy [*Vorgefühl einer höchsten Lust*], the highest joy which lies at the end of the path through destruction [*Untergang*] and negation [*Verneinung*], so that it appears to him [*so dass er zu hören meint*] as if the innermost abyss [*Abgrund*] of things speaks to him audibly. (113; 131)

Important to note here is Nietzsche's qualification ("so that it appears to him as if"), which marks the purely illusory nature of the spectator's experience of the deepest metaphysical truth. Even the grasping of this great Dionysian truth through tragedy is an instance of Apollonian appearance only, for the genuine actuality of the Dionysian remains unrepresentable.

The tension between tragedy's expression of truth and the (mis)encounter with this truth reflects the tension in Nietzsche's own vision of the regeneration of art through music in the modern world: this regeneration is necessary but ultimately incapable of being fully realized. Whereas Winckelmann had found ancient Greek sculpture to be the highest art form in reflecting the supplementary entanglement of the real and the ideal, and thus argued for imitation as the principle of modern artistic practice, Nietzsche finds tragedy to be the highest art form of ancient Greece, and argues for the mobilization of music as a means of realizing the latent aesthetic potentiality of the Dionysian in the creation of modern tragic myth. Crucial to Nietzsche's argument in *The Birth of Tragedy* is therefore his claim of the necessity of the revival in his own age of the same dynamic process which energized ancient Greek art. In section sixteen he positions his preceding line of argument as a foundation for his concern with the direction which modern art

should take, and argues for the importance of music with a discussion of Schopenhauer.⁷² Nietzsche's own hope was for the revival of true art in his own day through Wagnerian opera—a hope with which he later became disillusioned (Smith xxvii). The subsequent development of Nietzsche's thought clarifies the ramifications for modern art of what was already implied in *The Birth of Tragedy's* discussion of the ungraspability of the Dionysian: we can never really solve the “*Greek problem*” (10) and so the nature of tragedy and the revival of tragic myth in the modern world remain issues to be worked through in the reading and writing processes. Just as ancient Greek art was energized by the dynamic and dialectical tension between the Dionysian and the Apollonian, so too are modern art and criticism energized by the tension between their aim to recuperate that dynamic and their fidelity to the epistemological limitations which define that very dynamic. The dialectical tension between the Dionysian and the Apollonian which Nietzsche illuminates finds a counterpart in the tension between fragmentation and system in the Romantic conception of Greek mythology, which I discuss in chapter four with reference to Keats's Hyperion poems and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*.

Nietzsche continues in the tradition of Romantic Hellenism by reading *through* ancient Greek culture and *out* of ancient Greek myth the two originary aesthetic drives of nature which he claims are the twin sources of all true art. Like the other thinkers I have analyzed, Nietzsche argues that the culture of ancient Greece—here in Nietzsche's case, tragedy in particular as that culture's highest form—is the epitome of art on account of its

⁷² Citing *The World as Will and Representation*, Nietzsche writes, “music, unlike all the other arts, is not [a] copy of the phenomenon but an unmediated copy of the will itself, and so represents the *metaphysical in relation to the whole physical world* and the thing in itself in relation to the phenomenal world” (86). Hence music “stimulates the *allegorical contemplation* of Dionysian universality” and can thus “give birth to . . . *tragic myth*” (89).

capacity to combine the real and the ideal. By characterizing the relationship between the Apollonian and the Dionysian as a historical and phenomenological dialectical struggle, Nietzsche's theory can be read as a deconstruction of the unity of the reconciliation of the real and the ideal found in thinkers such as Winckelmann and Hegel. Nietzsche makes integral to his theory the tension that was in earlier thinkers for the most part only implicit, and thus shifts the focus from a conception of ancient Greek art as the embodiment of idealized beauty, to a conception of ancient Greek art as the ground on which the metaphysical and aesthetic drives engage in a ceaseless dialectic. Ultimately, Nietzsche makes explicit a terrible necessity that was to haunt many of the authors and artists of the Romantic period—the necessity of facing up to the legacy of ancient Greece and acknowledging its importance for the theoretical understanding of art and for the artistic productions of contemporary culture, even as that process entails the acceptance of a perverse sort of cultural fatalism according to which the modern world is almost certainly doomed to fail in its Hellenizing artistic endeavours:

one feels ashamed and fearful before the Greeks; unless one respects truth in all things [*Einer die Wahrheit über alles achte*] and so also dares to admit [*Wahrheit einzugestehn wage*] to oneself that the Greeks as charioteers hold the reins of our and every other culture in their hands, but that almost always the chariot and horses are too slight and frail to live up to the glory of their drivers [*Wagen und Pferde von zu geringem Stoffe und der Glorie ihrer Führer unangemessen sind*], who then consider it a jest to spur such a team into the abyss: while they themselves jump to safety [*über den . . . hinwegsetzen*] with a leap of Achilles. (81; 93-94)

Chapter 2

2 Fragmentation and the Aesthetic Potentiality of Greek Material

'Tis but a vision now—yet thou hast been
 More than the brightest vision might pourtray;
 And every stone, with but a vestige fraught
 Of thee, hath latent power to wake some lofty thought.
 (Hemans, *Modern Greece* 797-800)

In my introduction I mentioned that Romantic texts often impart aesthetic potentiality to Greek objects and texts which are somehow incomplete, ruined, or fragmentary. The introduction to Mary Shelley's novel *The Last Man* served as an example of how the composition of a new, modern work operates through the manipulation of these Greek fragments in a sort of hermeneutic rape in which the processes of reading and writing are intertwined. Winckelmann demonstrates a similar fascination with fragmentation in the strikingly lyrical passage at the end of his *History*, where he claims that connoisseurs such as himself study ruins and copies of ancient Greek art with greater attention than they would the originals. In this chapter I examine the theoretical implications of fragmentation for Hellenism in more detail. Through my analysis of Richard Polwhele's *Grecian Prospects*, Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Felicia Hemans' *Modern Greece*, Keats's "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles," and Blake's *Laocoön*, I demonstrate that the aesthetic potentiality of Greek fragments consists in the dynamic relationship between the real and the ideal involved in the operation of the imagination. In the first place, the materiality of the fragment or ruin (its status as 'real') embeds it in history, linking the existence of the fragment in the present with the supposed wholeness and completion of the Greek art object in the past. The present fragment testifies to the previous existence of fully realized perfection, but such past

perfection is only presumed and in fact merely *posited* by the imagination (as an ‘ideal’). Thus, the material or the real of the present serves as evidence of the actual realization of the ideal in the past (the existence of the imagined ideal in past material reality). The imperfection of the fragmented or ruined object in the present thus endows it with aesthetic potentiality by inspiring the viewer’s imagination to attempt to conceive of the object’s past greatness and perfection. Such perfection is conceived of as having been actual even as in the reality of the aesthetic experience it is constructed by the violent hermeneutic process within the viewer’s own psyche. Romantic texts thus employ the trope of fragmentation in order to figure the imagination as reconstructive or restorative of an original lost Greek perfection (the real), even as they expose the fact that the imagination is in fact constructive or constitutive of the Hellenic art object (the object is ideal). Fragmentation intersects with Hellenism in Romantic aesthetics because both derive their aesthetic potentiality from dynamic indeterminacy which opens up a space of creative possibility for the operation of desire in the reading and writing processes.

2.1 Fragmentation and Romanticism

As Alexander Regier points out (25), scholars who have addressed fragmentation in relation to Romanticism have usually focused on the fragment as a particular form or genre.⁷³ Their work examines the connection between Romanticism and a certain structural poetics of fragmentation at the level of literary form, integrating a degree of formalist literary history with their theoretical analyses of the significance of the

⁷³ E.g., Bostetter, Raubner, McFarland, Levinson, Harries, Balachandra Rajan.

fragment for Romanticism. For many scholars, the fragment is important because of how it resists the finality that would be imposed by a fixed form or a single interpretation. Fragments are fascinating because they oppose tidiness and promote free play in the hermeneutic process, and thus emphasize the role of the reader in the production of the text's meaning.⁷⁴ This body of scholarly work on the fragment suggests that the fragment possesses a heightened aesthetic potentiality for criticism vis-à-vis its relationship to Romanticism.

In this chapter I am concerned primarily with representations of ruins and fragments in relation to ancient Greek art and culture. Although scholars such as Thomas McFarland (18-19), Marjorie Levinson (*Romantic Fragment Poem* 28-34), and Sophie Thomas ("The Fragment" 504) have noted the intersection between fragmentation and Romantic representations of antiquity, they have for the most part addressed this phenomenon as only incidental to the broader rubric of the Romantic fragment. The relationship between fragmentation and Hellenism in Romanticism has not yet been addressed as an issue in its own right. While the focus on fragmentation in Romantic representations of ancient Greek art certainly participates in the Romantic focus on fragmentation in general, I suggest that in the context of the self-reflexive engagement with the notion of Greece in the aesthetic theory of Romantic Hellenism, fragmentation and Hellenism work together to illuminate one another for our understanding of Romantic aesthetics. In particular, the aesthetic potentiality of the Greek fragment operates in part by means of the imagined materiality of the absent whole in the past.

⁷⁴ Cf. Tilottama Rajan on transactional texts, cited above in my Introduction.

Fragmentation in the representation of ancient Greek art objects thus exhibits a significant difference from the structural manifestation of fragmentation in Romantic poems. A fragment such as Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan" or Percy Shelley's poem *The Triumph of Life* is incomplete, and, some critics would claim, incompletionable.⁷⁵ It might be possible for a given reader to speculate on what the finished poem might look like, but the remainder of the poem (presumably) has never existed and will never exist. A ruined Greek statue, on the other hand, was presumably whole at some point in the past, so the imaginative reconstruction of such an object through the process of viewing (or 'reading') is justified by what is supposed to be historical actuality. The productive aspect of the aesthetic potentiality of the reading of fragmentation manifests as a rewriting of ancient Greek art, and, furthermore, as the creation of something new—yet this process characterizes itself as directed toward the lost and absent past material object.

As my focus on desire indicates, there is something of a psychoanalytic dimension to my reading of the aesthetics of the Hellenic fragment. Thus, my argument can be elucidated by André Green's study *The Work of the Negative*. The negative bears a close connection to the process of fragmentation, for as Andrew Weller comments in his note to his translation of Green, "[o]ne of the essential properties of the negative . . . is to

⁷⁵ Balachandra Rajan makes a distinction between fragmentary poems and unfinished poems. According to Rajan, the aesthetic appeal of the fragment or the ruin consists in the reader's contemplation of the relationship between the present part and the absent whole, while the unfinished poem does not operate in relation to an imagined whole but rather "falls short of finality . . . or resists it . . . because of forces that have been demonstrated to be grounded in its nature and that forbid arrival at a closure" (5). Therefore, "[a] poem that is properly unfinished should be less satisfactory if we were to pursue any of the conceivable ways of finishing it" (5). Thus Rajan distinguishes between what he calls "[i]ncomplete poems," "poems which ought to be completed," and unfinished poems, "which carry within themselves the reasons for arresting or effacing themselves as they do" (14). Rajan suggests that unfinished poems, through their abjuration of closure, exhibit a more radical textual structure than fragments which simply happen to break off.

contest unity” (vii). One of the features which distinguishes Greek fragments from others is the manner in which such fragments engage with the Hellenic ideal. Green’s work on the negative is useful because it suggests an important link between the idealization of ancient Greek culture and its frequent representation in fragmentary forms:

Our suggestion is that *idealisation ought to be considered as a negativised drive investment*. The ideal is the very type of the work of the negative which establishes itself as a mode of satisfaction when the drive is not satisfied, completely or incompletely (intentionally sometimes). (71, translation modified)

In other words, the process of idealization is bound up with a lack or deficiency in the object of desire, even as its operation obfuscates that lack through a rewriting of the very nature of the desired object. It is telling that the lack of fulfillment of the drive is sometimes intentional on the part of the subject—such a purposeful denial of fulfillment, evident in the closing passage from Winckelmann’s *History*, is also discernible in Romantic representations of antique sculptures as ruined and fragmentary rather than in their unmarred ancient state.⁷⁶ Green notes that this process of idealization produces

a sort of contentment, as if the drive had been entirely, fully satisfied in the manner of an ideal perfection, more satisfying than if it were real because of its deliverance from its dependence on the object. (71, translation modified)

The process of idealization is a compensatory way of freeing the subject from the enslavement resulting from the direction of its desire toward the object that may not, in

⁷⁶ Thomas discusses “popular scenes of antiquity that situated characters and events amid ruined structures that would have been in perfect condition at the putative time represented” (*Romanticism and Visuality* 80). In his essay “On Picturesque Beauty” in *Three Essays* (1792), William Gilpin suggests that fragmentation is crucial to pictorial representations of artworks: “A piece of Palladian architecture may be elegant in the last degree. The proportion of it’s parts—the propriety of it’s ornaments—and the symmetry of the whole, may be highly pleasing. But if we introduce it in a picture, it immediately becomes a formal object, and ceases to please. Should we wish to give it picturesque beauty, we must use the mallet, instead of the chissel: we must beat down one half of it, deface the other, and throw the mutilated members around in heaps. In short, from a *smooth* building we must turn it into a *rough* ruin” (7-8, long *s* and ligatures modernized).

fact, fulfill its desire in the way that it wishes. In the case of ancient Greek art, the viewer is freed from the dependence upon the object because the object is supposed to have existed in the past, and therefore cannot be experienced directly. The issue is that the object itself is not sufficient to satisfy the desire. The subject, at some level, realizes this, and so chooses to direct its desire toward an object which is *imagined* to have been completely capable of fulfilling that desire, but only in a past state which is now absent and lost. Desire is directed toward fragmentary objects in accordance with the work of the negative which takes place in the process of idealization. The direction of desire toward fragmentary objects allows for fulfillment-by-proxy while also allowing the subject to maintain the fiction of the perfection of the object which is lacking or absent. Green's model thus shows how it is the representation of ancient Greek art and culture as fragmentary which allows for the continued conceptualization of the Hellenic ideal *qua* ideal, and helps explain Winckelmann's observation that the "shadowy outline" and "copies" of ancient Greek art solicit "greater attention" than "the originals" would (*History* 351).

The *Athenaeum Fragments*, particularly those written by Friedrich Schlegel, have been particularly influential for scholars' views of fragmentation in relation to Romanticism. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy point out that Jena Romanticism emphasizes the importance of the fragment "[a]s an indicator of a process rather than of a fixed state" (43), which recalls Schlegel's characterization of Romantic poetry in *Athenaeum* fragment 116 that "its real essence [is] that it is always only becoming and can never be completed" (39, my trans). The focus on becoming or process relates to dialogue and thus links the fragment to the project of 'symphilosophy', which

aspires toward the production of a form of discourse that treats knowledge as performative rather than merely the assertion of a set of propositions with a fixed content. “A dialogue,” Schlegel writes in Athenaeum fragment 77, “is a chain or a garland of fragments” (170). Ernst Behler in *German Romantic Literary Theory* suggests a link between Schlegel’s writing in fragments and his valorization of irony (141-53). Although Behler does not say so explicitly, his discussion suggests that what links irony and the fragment is how they both participate in an aesthetic of desire, since both have to do with process rather than closure, with striving after or attempting to grasp their object rather than fulfilment or completion. Thus, in his 1829 Dresden lectures Schlegel states, “[t]rue irony . . . is the irony of love. It arises from the feeling of finitude and one’s own limitation and the apparent contradiction of these feelings with the concept of infinity inherent in all true love” (qtd. in Behler 151). That is to say, irony, like the fragment, is about how desire, like eros in Plato’s *Symposium* as I discuss in the following chapter, mediates between incompleteness and infinity by instigating a continual striving after an absent object.

This passage from the Dresden lectures points toward Michel Chaouli’s reading of the fragment in Schlegel’s work. Chaouli characterizes the aesthetics of the Schlegelian fragment in relation to the *Critique of Judgment*, in which Kant presents reflective judgement as the faculty which reconciles the chaos of empirical experience with the ordering principle of purposiveness:⁷⁷

we can read the genre of the fragment . . . as a literal instantiation of the tension between parts and whole that we observed in Kant’s aesthetics. The fragments . . .

⁷⁷ Cf. my discussion of the tension between chaos and system in the Romantic view of mythology in chapter four.

perform, *in their form*, the play between manifold and unity. What makes them a significant intervention into aesthetics is that their position remains in play as much as possible, hovering *between* manifold and unity. (53-54)

The fragment hovers between manifold and unity because it is always experienced in relation to the absent whole or totality of which it is a part, even as it continually emphasizes the absence of such a whole which it evokes only negatively. This play of the fragment between the sensuous manifold and the transcendental unity finds its parallel in my focus on the Hellenic fragment as evoking the interplay between the real and the ideal. This interplay occurs not in the fragment itself—that is to say, not in the fragment in terms of its materiality—, but through the processes of the reading and the rewriting of the fragment. In a manner reminiscent of the role that *Studium* plays in *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, Schlegel clearly evokes the connection of the process of reading with the interplay between the real and the ideal within the fragment when he writes, “studying [*Studium*] is [an] intentional fragment” (qtd. in Chaouli 57; 229 n. 55). Schlegel’s statement here makes explicit the connection between the process of reading (‘studying’) and the ardent striving toward a deferred object, for the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* defines the primary sense of the Latin *studium* as “[e]arrest application of one’s attention or energies to some specified or implied object, zeal, ardour” (def. 1), as well as “inclination towards a thing, desire, fancy” (def. 1b). The word *studium* also suggests the entanglement of the critical process with the material object of study, since it can refer both to the desire or the process of the pursuit as well as to the object pursued (defs. 3 and 4). Schlegel’s aesthetic theory emphasizes the aesthetic potentiality of the fragment in terms of both the creative and the critical processes.

Hans-Jost Frey in his meditation *Interruptions* makes some important points about the nature of textual fragmentation and the paradoxes it entails for us as critics. According to Frey, the study of fragments involves the literary scholar in a number of paradoxes that call into question the efficacy of the hermeneutic processes employed in the reading of texts. The problem is that literary scholarship interprets texts by assigning meaning to them through the process of contextualization, that is, by establishing interrelationships between various elements, “[b]ut the fragment is what it is precisely because there is no context for it” (25). To comprehend the fragment in relation to an absent whole is, for Frey, to rob it of its fragmentariness and thus to destroy the very object of study one set out to comprehend in the first place (25). On the other hand, if one reads the fragment under the rubric of the unfinished in line with the approach of Balachandra Rajan—that is, if one finds within an unfinished work the essential reasons *why* it remains unfinished, then “the incompleteness of the alleged fragment is precisely what brings it to its completion as all it can be, and thus makes it into a whole” (25). In other words, if one reads the fragment as containing within itself the reason(s) for its incompleteness, one simply imposes an alternate structure of meaning and thus institutes a form of hermeneutic closure. Frey’s analysis thus exhibits a similar awareness of the violence of the ordering structure of the hermeneutic process as that which I argued is figured in sexual terms as a sort of rape in Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn.” For Frey, fragments *qua* fragments continually resist the critical processes which attempt to impose order and mastery over textual material. By showing how fragments are, by their very nature, in a certain sense fundamentally unknowable, Frey reveals precisely why the representation of ancient Greek art and culture as fragmentary is so important. The

fragmentariness of objects of ancient Greek art is what allows for the intertwined processes of reading and rewriting, even as it ensures that such processes can never attain their aim of a complete comprehension of the objects toward which they are directed, thereby preserving the mysteriousness and aesthetic potentiality of ancient Greek culture.

As the “Ode on a Grecian Urn” suggests, one of the ways to think about this reading process is in terms of the asking of questions. As Frey observes, “[t]here can only be question when knowledge is lacking. Thus the question is at the same time an appeal for what it does not know and a confession of the lack of this knowledge” (34-35). The question is thus a deployment of desire which makes explicit how desire is rooted in lack. Accordingly, in a short creative piece titled “Asking i,” Frey describes a paradoxical situation which, I suggest, can be characterized as a description of our mode of inquiry into the understanding of the fragment:

I ask about it. I wait for it and hope that it will happen. But it is uncertain, this other thing. Perhaps it is nowhere but in the asking about it. Then I have it precisely when I don't have it and ask about it. If it is so, then I must continue to ask in order to keep it as that which I don't have. (18)

“Asking” is so important to the epistemology of the aesthetic of the fragment because it avoids what Frey calls “the illusion of the mastery-producing statement of fact, into which the discourse that speaks in affirmative clauses slides over and over again” (32-33). Frey, like Friedrich Schlegel, thus associates the fragment with a discourse of process rather than a discourse of closure and mastery:

Since discourse is relation, it is impossible to talk about the fragment, unless any relation that inevitably arises from the moment that there is talking is also immediately dissolved, since it does not hold any more than any other one, which is in its turn also posited [*gesetzt*] only so that it can be deposed [*zersetzt*]. (33)

Frey's point that any rigorous discussion of the fragment must take part in an ongoing process of negotiation rather than aiming at fixed conclusions explains why fragments are so aesthetically productive—why, in the words of Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, “[t]he genre of the fragment is the genre of generation” (49). Through my analysis of how the trope of fragmentation is deployed in relation to representations of ancient Greek art and the Greek landscape, I shall argue that the intersection between fragmentation and Romantic Hellenism serves to engage with the very paradoxes Frey points to, paradoxes which inform the aesthetic theory of Romanticism on a constitutive level. Fragmentation, like Hellenism, evokes the operation of the aesthetic of desire through the dynamic relationship between the real and the ideal.

2.2 Ruins and the Fragmentation of Modern Greece

A comprehensive treatment of the intersection between fragmentation and Romantic Hellenism is not my aim. In the remainder of this chapter, I wish merely to present a few case studies to illuminate the theoretical basis of their interrelationship. The first part of my discussion focuses on three poems of moderate length: Richard Polwhele's *Grecian Prospects* (1799), the first two cantos of Lord Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812), and Felicia Hemans's *Modern Greece* (1817). These poems exhibit a concern with the relationship between modern poetry and the fragmentation both of ancient Greek art and of the modern Greek landscape. Thus, part of how these works represent the connection between fragmentation and aesthetic potentiality is their integration of the fragmentation of Greek art and the Greek landscape into a historical vision which includes the relationship between past and present. Fragmentation imbues

ancient Greek works with aesthetic potentiality through the dynamic relationship between the real and the ideal through the operation of the imagination. In the final portion of this chapter, I turn to two works which offer snapshots of how Hellenizing works move to incorporate fragmentation more thoroughly into the hermeneutic and formal level of how the work represents the materials of ancient Greek art. Keats's sonnet "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles" (1817) extends the fragmentation of Hellenic material into the phenomenological experience of the viewer of ancient Greek art, and into the writing of this experience of viewing, while Blake's plate *Laocoön* (c. 1826) demonstrates through its form the fragmentary nature of the intertwined processes of the reading and rewriting of ancient Greek art in the production of a modern work. Rather than merely describing ancient Greek artworks in terms of fragmentation, these texts represent themselves as assemblages of series of fragments of the experience of ancient Greek art objects. In this way, the intertwined processes of reading and rewriting are shown to be bound up with the process of fragmentation itself. In extending fragmentation to the level of the composition and the viewing of the Hellenizing work, these texts demonstrate the productivity of the self-reflexivity of Hellenizing aesthetics, which is to be deployed at greater length with respect to mythology in works such as Percy Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* and Keats's Hyperion poems.

Although politics is not my primary concern throughout this project, it is important to consider the political aspects which manifest in the representations of ruins in Hellenizing locodescriptive poetry. The existence of the present-day Greek landscape, along with the decaying material remains of ancient Greek art, serves as a way of embedding ancient Greek culture within history. Authors' reflections upon the modern

Greek landscape thus become entangled not only with the ruins of ancient Greek art, but also with their visions for European political and military history. In the poems of Polwhele (1760-1838) and Hemans (1793-1835), the fragmentation of ancient Greek art and of the modern Greek landscape allows for the operation of the imagination in creating speculative future histories for British imperialism. Recalling Green's work of the negative, the idealization involved in the process of writing in the context of such fragmentation serves as a way of obfuscating the radical implications suggested by ruin: the conclusion that the British imperial project itself is merely one more turn in a historical cycle of the rise and collapse of empires. At the same time, this idealization also embodies a disavowal of Greece itself, for Polwhele and Hemans do not so much wish to reclaim Greece as they wish mobilize the *idea* of Greece in order to proclaim the triumph of British imperialism in Greece's name. Yet by engaging with the fragmentation that makes their historical speculations possible, they at the same time cast doubt upon their imperialist projects, by revealing how fragmentation as process resists the structured hermeneutics of political domination—a state of affairs which Byron (1788-1824), like Frey, openly celebrates.

Poets' historical and political deployments of the fragmentation of the Greek landscape reflect the changes in the political climate from the post-revolutionary period until after the Battle of Waterloo (1815). Polwhele, writing in the late 1790s, envisions the Greek landscape as the site upon which Britain might conquer France and thus achieve military and cultural supremacy. In this context, the subsumption of the ruin of works of ancient Greek art into the Greek landscape participates in an attempt to rehabilitate Greece by sheltering from ruin within the progress of (imagined) British

imperial history. On the other hand, Hemans, writing after Waterloo, in a climate of British military supremacy, envisions the Greek landscape as a reservoir of artistic taste which is ultimately to be transported onto English soil as a souvenir of Britain's cultural hegemony. The first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, written during the Napoleonic wars, can be read as a critique of the imperialist visions of Polwhele and Hemans, for Byron aestheticizes fragments in the form of cultural and historical ruins as scars, markers of trauma that cannot be exorcized. Through embracing fragmentation's resistance to totalization, Byron's poem more explicitly figures the tensions and contradictions which emerge to trouble the imperialist fantasies of Polwhele and Hemans.

Richard Polwhele's poem *Grecian Prospects* self-consciously thematizes the poetic process in which it engages by portraying a British poet who composes poetry in the course of the process of his reflection on Greece.⁷⁸ In other words, it provides an excellent example of the self-reflexive and metapoetic tendencies of Romantic Hellenizing poetry, for it is a British poem about Greece that depicts a British poet who composes poetry about Greece. The poem, which consists of forty-three Spenserian stanzas divided into two cantos, depicts a Welsh bard upon the Greek island of Lesbos who contemplates the prospect before him, lamenting the ruins of ancient Greek art and the degradation of the modern Greeks under Ottoman rule.⁷⁹ Polwhele emphasizes the

⁷⁸ Polwhele is perhaps best known for his authorship of the poem *The Unsex'd Females* (1798), an anti-Jacobin polemic against Mary Wollstonecraft and other women writers of the 1790s whom Polwhele considered indecorous and radical. A politically conservative Cornish clergyman, he published actively as a poet and historian, and was a contributor of *The Gentleman's Magazine* and *The Anti-Jacobin Review*.

⁷⁹ In his choice of a Welsh bard as the representative of a modern British poet, Polwhele participates in the trend among some thinkers in the Romantic era to characterize Welsh culture as descending from authentic ancient 'British' culture. Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch writes, "[t]he speculations of Celtomaniacs like William Stukely, Edward Williams, and Edward Davies . . . convinced [Southey] . . . that the religious 'system' of the Medieval Welsh 'bards' was the 'patriarchal faith' as derived, via the Druids, from the 'real

harsh reality of modern Greece when the bard is snapped out of his reverie by the scream of a person struggling with an assassin. After this rather Gothic incident, the bard falls into a slumber and is approached by a spirit, the guardian angel of Greece, who sings the praises of the modern Greeks and concludes by prophesying the regeneration and renewal of Greek glory with British assistance. The poem is accompanied throughout by frequently lengthy footnotes, many of which cite various antiquarian works, such as James Stuart's *Antiquities of Athens* (1762), William Eton's *Survey of the Turkish Empire* (1798), and James Dallaway's *Constantinople Ancient and Modern* (1797).

In *Grecian Prospects*, the fragmentation of Greek art and the decay of ancient Greek ruins into the landscape allow for melancholy reflection upon the demise of past greatness. Polwhele's Welsh bard often seems to slide toward nostalgia for the irrecoverable Hellenic past, as he considers the ruins of ancient Greek art and the modern Greek nation. The movement of the poem as a whole, however, works to mobilize the potentiality of this fragmentation for history, by employing the ruin of present-day Greece as a canvass for the painting of its imperialist vision. This imperialist vision arises in response to the political turmoil of the late 1790s, when in the wake of the Reign of Terror France fought extended military campaigns on the continent and frequently clashed with Britain in naval engagements. In prophesying the military union of Britain and Greece as achieving the victory of Greece's liberation, the guardian angel of Greece deploys a future-oriented aesthetic in order to redirect the energy of ruin and

and true faith' of the Celtic descendants of Japhet. Wales was the true Britain, the once and future England of Gray's *Bard*" (qtd. in Brewer 170). Brewer notes that Hemans, for example, often "uses the adjectives 'British' and 'Welsh' interchangeably, which reflects her belief (and that of the other Celtomaniacs) that the Welsh are the direct descendents of the ancient Britons who were driven to Wales by the Saxon and Norman invasions" (171).

fragmentation toward an envisioned political triumph. In the poem's "ideal views" (1.4, original in majuscules),⁸⁰ the progress of British imperial history marches onward above the decayed ruins of ancient Greek art, whose essence inheres within the landscape as justification for Britain's foretold cultural hegemony.

Felicia Hemans' poem *Modern Greece*, like Polwhele's *Grecian Prospects*, reads the fragmented modern Greek landscape in the course of articulating an imperialist history through the aesthetic relationship between Britain and Greece. The poem, which is composed of 101 ten-line stanzas rhyming ABABCDCDEE with the final line an alexandrine,⁸¹ begins with a description of the present-day Greek landscape from the perspective of an enthusiastic traveller. Then, rather curiously, the landscape is described from the perspective of a hypothetical Greek immigrant to America experiencing nostalgia for the homeland he has left behind, before the poem moves into a roughly chronological account of ancient Greek military history in relation to the present day landscape and its subjugation under the Ottomans. The speaker then moves on to a description of Athens and the Acropolis, before ending with the optimistic prediction of the glory and regeneration of British culture on the basis of ancient Greek models, including the Elgin Marbles in particular.

Polwhele, writing in the 1790s, had worked to mobilize fragmentation for speculative imperialist history by envisioning Britain's future military triumph. Hemans, writing after Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, employs fragmentation not for the space of

⁸⁰ Verse citations of *Grecian Prospects* are given by page number and the line numbers on the cited page.

⁸¹ Comet notes that this stanza form was developed by Matthew Prior "for his Anglocentric, royalist imitation of Spenser, *An Ode to the Queen* (1706)" (72).

articulating a future military vision, but rather for legitimizing Britain's military victory by affirming the empire's cultural and aesthetic continuity with ancient Greece. Hemans articulates this aesthetic continuity in a similar vein to Byron and Polwhele, figuring the ruin of Greece using imagery of death and decay in order to suggest the organic process of the renewal of its aesthetic potentiality:⁸²

o'er the low, dark dwellings of the dead,
Verdure and flowers in summer-bloom may smile,
And ivy-boughs their graceful drapery spread
In green luxuriance o'er the ruined pile;
And mantling woodbine veils the withered tree,—
And thus it is, fair land, forsaken Greece! with thee. (75-80)

These lines begin by presenting a contrast between graves and the bright, vibrant plants which grow above them. Hemans' speaker articulates similar contrasts between the ivy and the pile and the woodbine and the tree. In all these images, however, the negative element against which vibrant life is contrasted is in fact the foundation of the organic growth which makes the beautiful element possible: the flowers are fertilized by decaying animal matter just as the ivy grows upon the ruined pile and the woodbine upon the withered tree. Although the speaker does not explicitly acknowledge the fact at this point, modern Greece is fair not *in spite of* its ruined state, but *because of* it. Also worth noting here is the use of the word "drapery" to refer to the growth of the ivy upon the pile, since drapery in the context of Greece is usually used to refer to the flowing folds of ancient Greek clothing depicted on the limbs and bodies of ancient statues, such as those examined by Winckelmann and Hegel. Referring to the ivy with the term "drapery," therefore, reverses the expected relationship between art and nature by describing nature

⁸² My reading of *Modern Greece* contrasts with that of Comet, who reads Hemans in opposition to (rather than alongside) the aesthetics of Byron and Winckelmann (70-83).

using the imagery of art. Hemans' speaker thus demonstrates the subsumption of the aesthetic potentiality of ancient Greek culture back into the organic processes of nature—in other words, the assimilation of the ideal of ancient Greek art back into the “real” of material nature in order to infuse it with aesthetic potentiality for the poet's description. These lines reveal the paradox that the apparent opposition or tension between ruin or decay and growth or creation, between culture and nature, the real and the ideal, actually masks a more complex and dynamic relationship wherein the two are inherently entangled with one another, like nature and culture in Winckelmann and the naive and the sentimental in Schiller.

Despite the productivity of the aesthetic potentiality imparted to the landscape through the subsumption of art into nature through the process of fragmentation, ruins frequently embody a sense of loss as well as of generation. Hemans demonstrates this tension between the awareness of ruin as marring the perfection of ancient Greek art and the recognition of fragmentation as necessary for the creative engagement with Greece's aesthetic potentiality:

Yes; in those fragments, though by time defaced,
 And rude insensate conquerors, yet remains
 All that may charm th' enlighten'd eye of taste,
 On shores where still inspiring freedom reigns.
 As vital fragrance breathes from every part
 Of the crush'd myrtle, or the bruised rose,
 E'en thus th' essential energy of art,
 There in each wreck imperishably glows!
 The soul of Athens lives in every line,
 Pervading brightly still the ruins of her shrine. (901-10)

The first quatrain of this stanza presents a contrast between the ruined state of the fragments of ancient Greek art and their ability to inspire observers with the perception of their past greatness. This quatrain therefore suggests that the monuments remain

charming *in spite of* their fragmented and ruined state. Yet the continuation of the stanza with the comparison of ruined art to crushed plants releasing fragrance embodies a logical shift that moves from the characterization of fragmentation as an unfortunate defect to the valorization of such fragmentation as a vital means of unlocking Greek art's aesthetic potentiality. To crush a flower is to ruin or to fragment it by damaging the physical structure of the plant, yet this destructive act allows for a heightened sensory experience of part of what makes the flower so aesthetically pleasing in the first place: its lovely scent. Unlike crushed flowers, however, whose scent is fleeting and decay is imminent, ruined works of ancient Greek art can continue to release their "essential energy" which "imperishably glows." The aesthetic potentiality of ruin operates in both visual and linguistic art, which are brought together in the word "line," which literally describes the outline or lineaments of Greek art objects (the process of viewing), but also evokes the poetic line which describes them (the process of writing). The fragmentation of art is what allows for the observer to perceive the vital existence of the Greek ideal ("[t]he soul of Athens") through the sensuous experience of the present-day existence of Greek material (the real).

The essential issue, of course, is how to deploy such aesthetic potentiality in the production of a new modern work of art, in order to legitimize Britain's imperial dominion through artistic excellence. This is the issue toward which Hemans turns near the end of *Modern Greece*. The poem's speaker makes strong claims for Britain's capability of continuing the cultural legacy of the greatness of ancient Greece:

And who can tell how pure, how bright a flame,
Caught from these models, may illumine the west?
What British Angelo may rise to fame,
On the free isle what beams of art may rest?

Deem not, O England! that by climes confined,
 Genius and taste diffuse a partial ray;
 Deem not th' eternal energies of mind
 Sway'd by that sun whose doom is but decay!
 Shall thought be foster'd but by skies serene?
 No! thou hast power to be what Athens e'er hath been. (981-90)

Like Hemans' contemporaries such as Benjamin Haydon, the speaker expresses a hope for the improvement of the public taste in Britain through the first-hand study of the Elgin Marbles as "models." This view has an affinity with Winckelmann's argument in *Reflections* that the study of ancient Greek art provides the ideal basis for the development of proper aesthetic principles in the production of plastic art, and the reference to Michael Angelo suggests a continuation of the Renaissance tradition. At the same time, this stanza also launches an argument against Winckelmann—specifically, against his emphasis on the importance of climate for the development of art. Hemans' speaker asserts the irrelevance of the British climate to its artistic endeavours, emphasizing instead the political ideal of British freedom. This stanza also connects artistic achievements to military and political greatness, linking the empire of Britain with the empire of classical Athens.

After lauding Britain as the heir to the renewal and regeneration of ancient Greek culture, however, Hemans ends *Modern Greece* not by proclaiming the glory and the beauty of such a realization of Britain, but by imagining that future people will look on the ruins of Britain with the same awe as the present-day British look on the ruins of ancient Greece. The speaker proclaims to Britain,

So, should dark ages o'er thy glory sweep,
 Should *thine* e'er be as now are Grecian plains,
 Nations unborn shall track thine own blue deep,
 To hail thy shore, to worship thy remains;
 Thy mighty monuments with reverence trace,

And cry, "This ancient soil hath nurs'd a glorious race!" (1005-10)

By imagining the aesthetic achievements of the British empire as future ruins, the speaker heightens their glory in the same manner as ruins heighten the glory of ancient Greece: that is, the speaker makes reference to the great achievement of British art and culture while also allowing the actualization of such greatness to remain off-stage, hinted at and imagined rather than described directly. This passage also adds an interesting twist to an observation made by Anne Janowitz in *England's Ruins*. Janowitz notes how ruins in the British landscape served both as a "figure of decay" while also evoking a political and cultural legacy that "was . . . used to authorize England's autonomy as a world power" (2). Whereas Janowitz focuses on representations of ruins in the British countryside which exist in the present as relics of the past, Hemans represents future ruins of British art which does not yet exist, shifting the significance of ruins from the discourse of nostalgia to the discourse of prophecy. Chaouli notes,

The fragment . . . can be understood to partake of two radically distinct forms of temporality when it is brought in relation to a whole: as a part severed from something assumed to have been whole (thus making use of the logic of castration and mourning), or, reversing the order of part and whole, as a prospect of a future completion. (65-66)

By imagining future fragments, Hemans' speaker evokes both temporalities of the fragment simultaneously; the speaker describes bits and pieces of art objects which do not yet exist in the present, but describes them in the mode of ruins existing in the future as remnants from what at that time will be the past. By mobilizing this double relationship of the fragment with temporality, Hemans links the aesthetic potentiality of ancient Greek ruins to the production of British artworks. The fantasy of the ruins of Britain being visited in the future as Greek ruins are visited in Hemans' time serves to

assert the possibility of British art tapping the aesthetic potentiality of ancient Greece. The highest achievement of British glory the speaker can present is its future transformation into idealized ruins in the vein of the present-day experience of ancient Greece. Fragmentation becomes the means not only of representing the aesthetic potentiality of ancient Greece, but also of deploying it for the production of modern works of art which engage with the same essential 'spirit' of idealized greatness.

For Hemans and Polwhele, the fragmentation of Greece and the Greek landscape endows it with a fascinating potentiality in relation to European and British history in their day. The unformed status of modern Greece as a wild region subject to Ottoman rule, its lack of a centralized political organization of its own, imbues it with a historical malleability which allows for the imagination to project alternative narrative possibilities considering its role in future history. In other words, the reading of fragmented modern Greece becomes part of the writing of the future possibilities for British history. Greece's fragmentation cries out for integration into a historical vision which encompasses a relationship to its past artistic and cultural achievement, even as it exposes the disconnect between the idealized past and the ruins of the present. In response to this impasse Polwhele and Hemans present British cultural and political imperialism as the external forces which are to step in to erect political greatness on the foundation of Greek ruins.

At the same time, the overblown grandiosity embodied in the conclusions of *Modern Greece* and *Grecian Prospects* marks them as acts of hyperbolic rhetoric rather than efficacious predictions. The state of Greece's ruin which allows for such grand imaginings also serves to reinforce the disconnect between the actuality of the present and the ideality of the proposed future. The poems' attempts at writing out of Greece's

fragmentation a progressive imperial vision for British military and cultural history expose the status of history itself as an imaginative fantasy produced by the writing process, maugre its claim to a basis in past materiality (which it shows may be purely illusory). The historical narrative's satisfaction in the lack of the ideal toward which it strives troubles the imperialist visions of Polwhele and Hemans even as it aestheticizes them by making the work of the negative a constitutive element of the writing process.

Byron is more openly critical of the cultural and political appropriation celebrated by Polwhele and Hemans. Even as Byron shamelessly exploits the aesthetic potentiality of Greece as subject matter, his speaker expresses harsh criticism of the British appropriation of ancient Greek art through the removal of the Elgin marbles, lamenting that “the free Britannia bears / The last poor plunder from a bleeding land” (2: 2.113-14). Whereas Polwhele and Hemans are more optimistic about the appropriation of ancient Greek culture by modern Britain, and link such aesthetic appropriation to a valorization of the political progress of British imperialism, Byron undercuts such fantasies, and in the process explicitly voices what emerges as an implicit awareness in *Grecian Prospects* and *Modern Greece*—that the ruined past remains irrecoverable:

A thousand years scarce serve to form a state;
An hour may lay it in the dust: and when
Can man its shatter'd splendour renovate,
Recal its virtues back, and vanquish Time and Fate? (2: 2.797-800)

The answer solicited by this rhetorical questions is, of course, ‘never’. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* the historical narrative of Greece, like the course of life of the Byronic hero, remains one of decline from a past greatness which is irrecoverable, indeed which *never really existed in the first place* despite the poem's insistence that it did. Any attempt to recuperate such an ideal is ruthlessly exposed as a misguided and delusional fantasy.

History in Byron becomes bound up with a kind of tragic fatalism that can lead only to madness or resignation, both of which are evident in the playful distance from history the poet-narrator ultimately adopts in the irreverent and interminable epic *Don Juan* (1819-1824). The end result for the speaker and the reader is not to adopt hope for future renovation but to revel in the ruins of Greece and the ruins of the speaker, deriving perverse satisfaction from the lack of fulfillment in the operation of the work of the negative.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, as is well known, derived much of its popular appeal through its projection of individualized subjectivity, frequently conflating the perspective of its narrator with that of its eponymous Byronic hero. The poem thus differs from *Grecian Prospects* and *Modern Greece* in that its true subject is not so much the external landscapes it describes in the course of its travelogue (of which Greece is only one) as it is the inner landscape of Harold's/the narrator's psyche. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* adds an additional, overdetermined layer to its engagement with the issue of fragmentation by portraying not only the decayed ruins of the Greek landscape, but also the shattered ruins of its disillusioned and world-weary champion. Whereas Greek ruins are the tenuous remains of cultural and artistic glory which have been thus reduced by the relentless march of history, the Byronic hero is the cynical personality remaining after his flowering idealism has been shattered in its collision with the decadence of modern British society. Like the scattered remains of ancient Greek art at the end of Winckelmann's *History*, both the ruins of the Greek landscape and the ruins of Harold/the narrator himself are more interesting in their ruined states than they would be if they were whole.

This heightened degree of interest associated with the forms of ruin in Byron is bound up with ruin's resistance to history. Rather than attempting to assimilate the ruins of the Greek landscape into a historical narrative, Byron demonstrates how fragmentation's resistance to totalization precludes any such project. The fragmentation of ancient Greek art involved in organic processes of decay exemplifies the transient nature of human-made structures of meaning. Byron portrays fragmentation not merely as a state in which the extant materials of the artistic productions of ancient Greece exist, but rather, in a manner reminiscent of Jena Romanticism, as a continual process in which such ruins take part as a means of releasing their aesthetic potentiality.⁸³ For example, the speaker of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* addresses Greece thus:

Thy fanes, thy temples to thy surface bow,
 Commingling slowly with heroic earth,
 Broke by the share of every rustic plough:
 So perish monuments of mortal birth,
 So perish all in turn, save well-recorded Worth;

Save where some solitary column mourns
 Above its prostrate brethren of the cave;
 Save where Tritonia's airy shrine adorns
 Colonna's cliff, and gleams along the wave;
 Save o'er some warrior's half-forgotten grave,
 Where the grey stones and unmolested grass
 Ages, but not oblivion, feebly brave,
 While strangers only not regardless pass,
 Lingering like me, perchance, to gaze, and sigh "Alas!" (2: 2.805-18)

In this passage, the speaker initially employs the image of ancient Greek monuments mingling with the earth and being plowed by a farmer to suggest the transience of material art objects in comparison with (linguistic) historical narratives that have the

⁸³ Cf. Regier, who distinguishes between *fragmentation* and *fracture*, writing, "fracture can be likened to a condition, part of a structure; fragmentation more to a process, an unfolding" (7).

capability of preserving past greatness more accurately and for a longer period of time: fragmentation of material demonstrates the contrast between “monuments of mortal birth” and “well-recorded Worth,” thus elevating the status of literature over that of material art, and suggesting that historical narratives can attain lasting mastery of their subject matter. The following stanza overturns this idea, however, by adding more clauses beginning with “[s]ave” to list additional exceptions to the previous blanket statement “[s]o perish all in turn.” Ironically, the three further exceptions listed are indeed examples of the “monuments of mortal birth” which the speaker previously dismissed as transient in contrast with literary and historical texts, and these monuments also participate in processes of ruin and fragmentation in which they are being assimilated into nature. In the penultimate line of the latter stanza the speaker introduces the figures of foreign travellers and his own persona as the observers whose aesthetic experience involves this entanglement or dialectic of the ruins of ancient Greek culture with present-day nature, along with the melancholy reflections of their imaginations upon the demise of past greatness. Through the thought process of this stanza, therefore, the speaker moves from a point of view which is dismissive of ruins as emblematic of an inevitable process of the decay of material art leading to oblivion (to be recuperated only through written history), to a point of view which valorizes ruins on account of the dynamic process of how they interact with the surrounding natural world in a manner expressive of their aesthetic potentiality for foreign observers.

In shifting the significance of ruin from ordered historical narratives about the past to modern sentimental reflections upon ruin and the affect involved in such reflections, Byron valorizes the irrecuperability of ruins as evidence of the finality of

decline and irreparable trauma. In a pessimistic viewpoint quite appropriate for a time during which Europe was being ravaged by the Napoleonic wars, ruins become not materials to be used in the construction of visions for the future, but rather scars which will never fully heal. The potentiality of irrecuperable ruins is capable of manifesting only in the aesthetic realm—rather than in the realms of politics or history—in which the various cycles of the rise and collapse of empires can appear, from a position of detachment, to possess a kind of savage beauty in exemplifying the futility of human endeavour. Such futility is bound up with the idealization of Greece, whose past perfection seems all so real while remaining tragically ungraspable.

The rather cynical conclusion of the pointlessness of history and the irreparability of ruins seems to point toward an almost nihilistic detachment, a retreat from political and historical engagement into the realm of the aesthetic. But the tragedy in Byron is that despite the futility of human endeavour, such a retreat is not possible. The ruins of ancient Greek art and the modern Greek landscape are indeed efficacious only aesthetically, but Byron himself cannot help but attempt to actualize the desire for them in material reality, to “turn / [a]ctor or victim in this wretchedness” (Shelley, *The Triumph of Life* 305-06). The self-destructive vanity involved in the attempt to reclaim the ruins of Greece manifests not only in the overblown and nostalgic rhetoric of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, but also in events from Byron's own biography and their fictionalization in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*. As is well known, despite the apparent futility of the Greek uprising against Ottoman rule in the War of Independence, Byron himself joined the war effort in the philhellenic spirit, only to die of sickness at Missolonghi in April of 1824. In *The Last Man*, the character Lord Raymond, a

fictionalization of Byron, makes a similarly doomed and heroic military endeavour in his attempt to occupy Constantinople. After Raymond enters the deserted city which has been devastated by the deadly plague, the city erupts in explosions, causing his death (197-201). Raymond's attempt to actualize militarily the idealization involved in the conception of Hellenic ruins is a futile effort to counteract the disavowal operative in the work of the negative. Recalling Green, the work of the negative involves the perverse pleasure derived from the lack of satisfaction in the idealized object of desire, such that sometimes this lack of satisfaction is intentional on the part of the subject. In both Byron's taking of military action for the Greek cause, and in Raymond's attempt to occupy the deserted city of Constantinople, is evident the self-destructive futility in pursuing satisfaction through attempting to attain possession of the idealized object. While there is indeed a certain nobility involved in both attempts, which is in keeping with the spirit of the narrator of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, both can also be read as misguided efforts, in the vein of Polwhele and Hemans, to mobilize politically the aesthetic potentiality of the Greek landscape—though in the case of Byron the political cause is the independence and regeneration of modern Greece itself rather than Britain's imperialist appropriation of Greece's cultural legacy. Nevertheless, regardless of what perhaps seem admirable aims in the case of Byron, the streak of disintegrative cynicism evident in *Childe Harold*, which Byron later pushes to its limit in *Don Juan*, foretells the doom of such endeavours. Byron's work embraces a concept of ruin akin to that which Frey considers in his meditation on fragmentation: that it is of such a nature that it can never be successfully mobilized for political or historical purposes, because the very

quality which defines it as ruin consists in its refusal to accommodate a reading process whose hermeneutics insists on the finality of an outcome.

Fragmentation's resistance to history is also evident in *Grecian Prospects*, not at the level of the poem's argument, but rather at the level of its form. While Byron explicitly embraces the resistance to totalization embodied by Greek ruins, Polwhele's poem, despite its imperialist ambitions for the deployment of the Greek landscape, unsettles its future vision for British history through its fragmentary characteristics—though it does not self-consciously thematize fragmentation to the same extent as Keats's sonnet "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles" and Blake's *Laocoön*. Following the poem's second canto Polwhele appends a Postscript in which he describes the history of the poem's composition. He writes that it was originally a poem of three cantos titled "Visions of the Grecian Isles," which contained a tale integrating a love plot with the political struggle of Greece against France. Polwhele then presents this tale of twenty-eight more stanzas as a supplement to the poem. In this section the Spirit first speaks to the bard and then shows him a vision: the young, impetuous Greek chief Araxes inspires his followers with his tales of the glory of the Greek past.⁸⁴ Araxes' betrothed, Eucharis (lit. 'charming one'), is snatched from their wedding by French ruffians. The scene then shifts to a battle between French forces and the Greek rebels led by Araxes, who strives to rescue Eucharis, and eventually succeeds, defeating the French when the British arrive to aid the Greeks.

⁸⁴ This character is perhaps named after the Araxes, "a celebrated river which separates Armenia from Media [i.e., Persia], and falls into the Caspian Sea" (Lemprière, long s modernized).

Thus, Polwhele not only presents *Grecian Prospects* as a transactional text consisting of a poet's spoken effusions and dialogue with the spirit of Greece, but also presents it as a text which is radically unfinished and fragmented, which highlights its own status as imperfect and incomplete. First of all, the poetic portion of the postscript, being twenty-eight stanzas in length, is about 65% of the length of the poem proper, so rather than appearing simply as a specimen of the previous organization that gives the reader a glimpse of the earlier state of a 'finished' poem, it serves as an extended supplement which unsettles the structure of what is ostensibly the 'final version' (that is to say, cantos 1-2 on pp. 7-46 which Polwhele presents as the finished poem proper). The length of the poetic portion of the postscript in relation to the "final form" of cantos 1-2 causes it to appear as part of the work in its own right, even as its status as part of the postscript and a discarded earlier version (as well as its repetition of passages from the 'main' text) emphasizes its failure to harmonize with stanzas 1-43 on pages 7-46 in the formation of a single 'poem.' That Polwhele emphasizes his decision to exclude the poetic material of the "postscript" from the finished version of the poem, but then goes on to print it along with the poem anyway suggests that the poem is a fragmentary work in progress rather than a completed organic whole. If the poem fails to live up to the reader's expectations by presenting a satisfactory integration of the aesthetic, the sexual, and the political in its portrait of modern Greece, that is a function of the fragmentary nature of its form serving to evoke potentiality rather than actuality—to present, as its titles announce, only "Prospects" or "Visions" of Greece, rather than an authoritative historical account. The manner in which Polwhele deploys the aesthetic potentiality of Greece in his modern Hellenizing work unsettles his imperialist visions by including the

very incompleteness of the process of fragmentation which is vital to the aesthetic potentiality of Greece itself.

2.3 Hermeneutic Fragmentation in Representations of Greek Art

Keats's sonnet "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles" and Blake's *Laocoön* intertwine their hermeneutic fragmentation with their engagement with Hellenic subject matter in a more sustained manner than does *Grecian Prospects*. Keats's well-known sonnet enacts a different kind of fragmentation in relation to ancient Greek art than that seen in the descriptions of ruins I have discussed above. One of the defining characteristics of the Elgin marbles was, indeed, their rather fragmentary state,⁸⁵ yet Keats does not describe the ruin of the marbles directly. Rather, what the sonnet describes is the fragmentation of the speaker's psyche and of the poet's language in the face of the ancient art object. The poem is therefore a writing of the phenomenological experience of the speaker's reading of the Elgin marbles. Blake's *Laocoön* presents what is perhaps the most striking example of the connection between fragmentation and Greece. Through its non-linear formal structure, the plate evokes the process of fragmentation and the work of the negative involved in the production of a modern work and the articulation of aesthetic theory through the reading and writing of ancient Greek art.

Because Keats's sonnet does not portray the fragmentation or ruin of the Elgin marbles directly, it engages more with fragmentation on the level of hermeneutics than on the level of imagery such as that which I have cited from *Modern Greece* and *Childe*

⁸⁵ Benjamin Haydon in a letter recounted overhearing the following exchange between two men who went to view the Elgin Marbles: "'How broken they are, a'ant they?' 'Yes', said the other, 'but how *like life*'" (qtd. in McFarland 25).

Harold's Pilgrimage. The sonnet self-reflexively intertwines its own hermeneutic fragmentation with its description of the process of the speaker's viewing of the Elgin marbles. The poem begins by presenting the contrast between "mortality" (1) and "godlike hardship" (4), thereby establishing the relationship between the limitation of human experience (the real) and the divine perfection of ancient Greek art (the ideal) as one in which the ideal cannot be fully grasped through the real. The opening thus emphasizes the poem's participation in a hermeneutic of failed striving. We can associate this kind of aesthetic with the work of the negative involved in the process of idealization as described by André Green, wherein a sort of contentment is produced through the very lack of actualization. Such contentment is evident in the longing in the speaker's statement "Yet 'tis a gentle luxury to weep / That I have not the cloudy winds" (6-7). Yet Keats also suggests that the affective engagement with idealization in Romantic Hellenism exhibits an important distinction from the dynamic analyzed by Green. As Keats makes evident, there is indeed a sort of contentment or pleasure, a "gentle luxury," in the denial of the gratification of the actualization of the ideal. Yet on the other hand, there is also a certain degree of trauma produced by such longing, as the speaker experiences frustration in his inability to ascend to the heights of the ideal. Romantic Hellenism remains torn between reveling in the lack and longing for the actualization. The fragmentariness of the speaker's experience is both what makes his pleasurable engagement with ancient Greek art possible, and what leaves him longing for more than he is able to experience or to describe. Keats's sonnet shows that the operation of fragmentation extends not only to the materiality of objects of ancient Greek art, but also to the operation of the reading function on a phenomenological level.

Thus, when he finally does describe the marbles, the speaker does so only in abstract terms: he calls them “wonders” (11), emphasizing the effect of astonishment they produce upon the viewer (rather than their material, spatial, or visual characteristics). In a manner typical of Keats, the extreme of aesthetic experience produced by the “wonders” is characterized as “a most dizzy pain” (11), which oddly forms the subject of the relative clause of the following lines: “That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude / Wasting of old time” (12-13). It ought to be noted how counterintuitive it is for the speaker to make the emotional effect of the aesthetic experience of the marbles into the *subject* of the verb which describes the physical characteristics of the marbles—specifically, their fragmentation. It is the “dizzy pain” experienced by the speaker which “mingles” together the characteristics of the grandeur of the materialization of the Hellenic ideal with the ruin and fragmentation inflicted upon it in the course of history. In other words, the phrasing suggests that the *affect* resulting from the phenomenological aesthetic experience of the material art object *produces* the physical characteristics of that object. This radical reversal of the order of aesthetic experience, whereby affect is said to shape the materiality of the object rather than to result from the object’s materiality, demonstrates the entanglement of the real and ideal in relation to the aesthetics of Hellenism and fragmentation. Keats’s description of the phenomenological experience of the Elgin marbles exposes the tensions and the contradictions within the operation of Romantic Hellenism. The viewer’s experience of the ancient Greek art object is rooted in his longing for an authentic sensory encounter with the object’s materiality, even as this longing configures the act of viewing such that the *lack* of unmediated sensory experience remains constitutive of the operation of the aesthetic on an imaginative level.

The image of the sun in the poem's final line shows that the ancient Greek ideal cannot be experienced on a sensory level without mediation. The sun is a beautiful source of warmth and illumination, but is so bright that it cannot be looked at directly—only glimpsed in fragmentary bits and pieces, such as in a reflection or the viewer's peripheral vision. In keeping with the implications of the image of the sun, the Elgin marbles are not described directly in the poem but rather approached through their effect and the speaker's affect. The poem seems to break off, or, rather, to fade out with the indistinct images of its final description: "with a billowy main— / A sun—a shadow of a magnitude" (13-14). In breaking off, the poem emphasizes the failure of the speaker to describe adequately his aesthetic experience of the Elgin marbles. The poem ultimately becomes about the writing of the impossibility of writing the speaker's viewing of the marbles. The breaking down of the poem's form, evident in how its ending, rather than provide satisfying closure as is traditional for a sonnet, describes only an indistinct and abstract image, reflects the fragmentation of the speaker's phenomenological experience and thus evokes the aesthetic of desire at work in the interplay between the real and the ideal.

While Keats's sonnet employs hermeneutic fragmentation to reflect the fragmentation of the viewer's phenomenological experience of ancient Greek art, Blake's *Laocoön* exhibits a more radical degree of fragmentation in relation to the reading and writing processes. In order to examine how Blake's *Laocoön* engages with the intersection between fragmentation and Romantic Hellenism, it is important to keep in mind the iconic status of the *Laocoön* statue group in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century aesthetics. The statue group *Laocoön and His Sons*, which depicts the

Trojan priest Laocoön and his two sons under attack by two serpents, was widely considered to be one of the finest extant statues of ancient Greek antiquity. Winckelmann dated the *Laocoön* group to the 4th century BCE, the period of the master Lysippos (*History* 313).⁸⁶ For Winckelmann the aesthetic achievement of the *Laocoön* group consists in the balance and tension between the body's expression of extreme agony and the outward manifestation of mental fortitude and resolve in the face of such suffering: "[t]he physical pain and the nobility of soul are distributed with equal strength over the entire body and are, as it were, held in balance with one another" (*Reflections* 35).⁸⁷ The great achievement of the sculptor of the *Laocoön* was the portrayal of inner tranquility in the midst of such suffering (rather than showing an abandonment to passion), thus according with Winckelmann's claim that ancient Greek art is characterized by "a noble simplicity and quiet grandeur" (*Reflections* 33). Winckelmann emphasizes this tranquility of mind by pointing out that while Laocoön screams in Vergil's account of the myth in the *Aeneid*,⁸⁸ in the statue group the opening of his mouth is too small to be consistent with a scream (33-35). Lessing argued against Winckelmann's reading of the Laocoön, citing passages from Homer and the tragedians to demonstrate that "a cry, as an expression of bodily pain, is not inconsistent with nobility of soul" (7).⁸⁹ According to Lessing, the *Laocoön* group depicts a sigh rather than a shriek because visual arts must adhere to different aesthetic criteria than literature, so the statue's form exhibits a

⁸⁶ Many classical scholars now believe the statue to date from the Julio-Claudian period (Howard 422). It remains on display at the Vatican.

⁸⁷ Winckelmann adds more detailed description in the context of a quite similar reading in *History* 313-14.

⁸⁸ Vergil describes Laocoön as "Sending to heaven his appalling cries / Like a slashed bull escaping from an altar, / The fumbled axe shrugged off" (2.300-02; in original 2.222-24).

⁸⁹ For a more detailed examination of Lessing's ideas in relation to Blake's *Laocoön*, see Wright 6-13.

compromise wherein “[t]he master was striving to attain the greatest beauty under the given conditions of bodily pain” (13), so “[s]creams must be reduced to sighs, not because screams would betray weakness, but because they would deform the countenance to a repulsive degree” (13). Visual art, claims Lessing, must often sacrifice verisimilitude in order to produce the most beautiful forms. Goethe argued against Lessing, claiming that because “sincerity was the first law their art” (qtd. in Trevelyan 48), the Greeks would represent the most terrible suffering in sculpture as well as in poetry. The reason why the Laocoön of the statue group sighs rather than screams, Goethe explains, is because the snake’s bite causes a muscle spasm throughout Laocoön’s body and abdomen, rendering screaming impossible (Trevelyan 46-47). The *Laocoön* group thus became the centre of a debate about whether plastic art could remain true to lived experience while also depicting the highest beauty; or, in other words, whether it could conform to both the real and the ideal. The *Laocoön* group was widely regarded as an exemplary ancient Greek statue, but the determinate characteristics of its beauty and its “Greekness,” and thus the nature of its aesthetic achievement, were characterized in different ways. The statue thus became for many thinkers a case study of sorts, a site through which Hellenism and aesthetic theory could be rethought. The debate over the interpretation of the *Laocoön* group is yet another example of my claim that Hellenism becomes the ground of Romantic aesthetic theory.

I read Blake’s plate the *Laocoön* in this context, in which nothing less was at stake in the treatment of the statue group than the nature of ancient Greek art and thus the defining principles of aesthetic theory. The print, measuring 27.6 by 22.9 centimetres, is



Figure 1: The Laocoön

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dominated by the central image of the *Laocoön* statue group, an engraving which was originally created by Blake as an illustration to Abraham Rees's *Cyclopaedia* (1819). In the untitled print now known as the *Laocoön* (Figure 1), which has been dated to around 1826, the image of the statue group is surrounded by various notes which serve as annotations or commentary.⁹⁰ Lines below the base of the statue read left to right; those to the left run vertically sideways reading from bottom to top; those to the right read mostly vertically sideways from top to bottom, some from left to right; and those above in the centre read generally from left to right, with the closest lines curving around the contours of the upper outline of the depiction of the statue group. The surrounding notes deal with various subject matter; the writing is in English excepting five Hebrew words and one Greek word. The text below the base of the depiction of the statue reads as follows:

יה & his two Sons Satan & Adam as they were copied from the Cherubim
of Solomons Temple by three Rhodians & applied to Natural Fact or History of
Ilium

יה is the Hebrew word “‘Yah’, one of God’s divine names, a shortened form of ‘Yahweh’” (Eaves et al.). Blake thus labels the *Laocoön* group as a Greek copy of a Hebraic work rather than an original, thereby assimilating the art of the ancient Greeks into the Judeo-Christian cultural tradition. This radical displacement allows Blake to engage productively with the significance of ancient Greek art in relation to his own aesthetic theory.

⁹⁰ I refer to a digitized reproduction of one of two extant copies, which is currently in the collection of Robert N. Essick. Wright notes that on the basis of a watermark and other bibliographical evidence Essick and Joseph Viscomi make a good case for a date of around 1826 (5, 179 n. 9).

In the *Laocoön* plate Blake engages with Romantic Hellenism by presenting his aesthetic theory in the form of a reading of ancient Greek art. Like the German thinkers I discussed in chapter one, Blake in the *Laocoön* intertwines the process of his reading of ancient Greek art with the writing of his own aesthetic theory, and thus grounds his aesthetic theory in ancient Greek culture—though of course with the twist that for Blake part of this very process involves the appropriation of ancient Greek culture into the Judeo-Christian tradition. Julia Wright observes that rather than merely reproducing an image of the statue group, Blake’s engraving enacts a process of creative re-visioning, for he alters the position of some of the figures.⁹¹ This engraving of the *Laocoön* group is put in dialogue with annotations such as “Art can never exist without Naked beauty displayed” and “The Old & New Testaments are the Great Code of Art.” By assimilating ancient Greek art into the Judeo-Christian tradition, Blake shifts the Hellenic ground of aesthetics to a Biblical ground, thereby articulating the connection between his religion and metaphysics and his aesthetic theory, including his ideas about the divinity of the human imagination and individual creative endeavours.⁹²

Through its form, Blake’s *Laocoön* engages with fragmentation and its relationship to the aesthetic potentiality of ancient Greek art on two levels: at the level of the artist’s composition of the work of art, and at the level of the viewer’s experience or *reading* of the work of art. In the first place, the plate’s structure as a central image surrounded by a series of short annotations portrays the process of the composition of a

⁹¹ Wright notes, “[i]n the restored sculpture . . . the child on the left extends his arm straight up, but Blake bends it at a right angle” as well as modifying the position of the fingers of the other child’s hand and orientation of the head of the snake (11).

⁹² Cf. *Jerusalem*: “I know of no other Christianity and of no other Gospel than the liberty both of body & mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination” (plate 77).

new modern work of art on the basis of Hellenic material as the piecing together or assemblage of various fragments, most of which relate to aesthetics (or, at the very least, to Blake's own aesthetics, which assimilate the Imagination to the realm of the divine and thus are intertwined with his religion and metaphysics). Blake's *Laocoön* thus evokes the mobilization of the aesthetic potentiality of Greek art through the creative grafting of a series of fragments, in the form of annotations, onto the imitative (yet creative) engraving of the image of the *Laocoön* statue group. Through his reading of the *Laocoön* group, Blake presents his own idiosyncratic rewriting of the statue's aesthetic significance. On the second level, the structure of the *Laocoön* plate, through its visual and theoretical presentation of annotations, solicits a fragmentary form of aesthetic experience on the part of the viewer. Unlike most linguistic works, including Blake's illuminated books, the *Laocoön* does not encode within its form a clear or correct 'order' in which to read its various annotations, rendering the linguistic elements of the plate non-linear.⁹³ By allowing the viewer to read these annotations in any order or in any direction, Blake emphasizes the haphazard experience of bits and pieces of his work—the work as a whole not only portrays itself as an assemblage of fragments, but through its very structure enacts the process of fragmentation through the viewer's reading of it.⁹⁴ In other words, while the viewer might glance over the print and experience an illusory feeling of the wholeness of the work, as soon as the viewer attempts to decipher the annotations s/he immediately renders the work graspable only *through* this process of the piecing

⁹³ Wright thus sees the plate as “challeng[ing] G. E. Lessing's oft-cited theory that writing is linear and visual art is spatial” (xxviii).

⁹⁴ Wright notes, “[t]he necessity of repeatedly reorienting the design to make it legible forces an engagement [on the part of the reader] with the physicality of the printed page” (16).

together of a series of fragments. Through allowing the viewer interpretive freedom by making the reading process one of a non-linear fragmentation of the work itself, Blake allows the viewer to participate in the reading of the *Laocoön* in a manner which produces the *writing* of the text.⁹⁵ In other words, the plate gives the viewer's participation in the process of fragmentation a constitutive role in the formation of the text's meaning, recalling Novalis's remark that "the true reader must be the extended author" (470, my trans.). The viewer's reading of Blake's *Laocoön* participates in the rewriting of the *Laocoön* statue group, while the author's reading of the *Laocoön* group participates in its rewriting in the production of a modern work at once imitative and creative. Fragmentation is fundamental both to the experience of ancient Greek art and to the deployment of its aesthetic potentiality in the intertwined processes of reading and writing. One can never finish reading Blake's *Laocoön* any more than one can finish reading ancient Greek art. The fragmentation of its form renders full comprehension of the plate forever unrealizable, like ancient Greek art itself—forever in possession of a vital aesthetic potentiality.

By disavowing the Hellenic origin of the *Laocoön* statue group, Blake performs a radical twist which deploys Romantic Hellenism even as he steps away from it. The impulse to assimilate the *Laocoön* group to the Judeo-Christian tradition may very well be a playful rewriting of art history, but it nevertheless discloses an anxiety about the pagan origin of Western plastic art. This appropriation thus attempts to bridge the gap

⁹⁵ Wright argues along similar lines, "[l]inearity and definitive order are repressed and so process as an ongoing investigation of alternative orders—none of which is sanctioned by the text or the author—is made possible" (23). I differ slightly from Wright in that I understand the *Laocoön* as implicitly sanctioning *every* such interpretation, by making the interpretive choices of the reading process constitutive of the text's form.

between Western (Christian) metaphysics and (Hellenic) aesthetics—the same sort of gap with which Hegel engages in his *Aesthetics*, in which he associates Christianity with the expression of the inner life characteristic of the Romantic art form, in contrast to the identity of external form with content exhibited by the Classical Ideal. By reading the *Laocoön* through Hegel's *Aesthetics*, we can see that the trope of fragmentation serves as a method of creatively deploying the aesthetic potentiality of ancient Greek art by *writing together* or attempting to perform an *Aufhebung* of the Romantic and the Classical, as Schiller (in the form of the sentimental and the naive) had argued was the impossible yet necessary goal of art in *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry*. At the same time, however, the *Laocoön* reveals the inherent fragility of this process and indeed the impossibility of the *formation* of such a synthesizing work. Instead, the union of Hellenism and Hebraism, the Classical and the Romantic, is capable of being evoked only as the goal toward which the work strives through its fragmentary processes, through its refusal of a fixed form or narrative. What the *Laocoön* strives to accomplish through its fragmentary form and content is therefore the presentation not of an aesthetic object or work itself, but of the *aesthetic potentiality of fragmentary processes*. The sleight-of-hand by which Blake rewrites art history discloses the operation of desire in this aesthetic, and the work of the negative in the experience of the interplay between real and ideal.

The fragment intersects with Hellenism because both are dynamic spaces of possibility which allow for the creative process to take place in an interplay between freedom and limitation. Like Hellenism itself in the works of the thinkers I examined in chapter one, the fragment strives to articulate the relationship between the real and the ideal, between actuality and potentiality. It accordingly inhabits a space between finished

and unfinished (Frey 54), finitude and infinity (Frey 72), manifold and unity (Chaouli, cited above). The process of the dynamic negotiation between these opposed categories endows the fragment with its vital aesthetic energy. The Hellenic fragment further adds to these qualities by evoking the relationship between past and present, nature and culture, imitation and creation, reading and writing. The fragmentation of objects of ancient Greek art and of modern Greece itself may produce feelings of nostalgia and loss, but such fragmentation is also what makes Greece and Greek culture so fascinating, and inspires the aesthetic of desire at work in the processes of reading and rewriting. It is necessary for Greece to be fragmented in order to evoke an absent whole which one wishes to grasp but which can never be fully made present—a whole which is presumed to have once existed in material reality even as it is indeed only posited by the viewer's imagination. As I pointed out in chapter one, Winckelmann states the necessity of assuming ahead of time the greatness of antiquity in order to aid in the process of studying its fragmented remains and thus to perceive their true greatness. Along similar lines, Frey writes,

Every attempt to understand always already makes the assumption that there is a meaning there that can be determined. One posits order before having it. The reductive understanding of the fragment from the point of view of the order of whole and parts bears witness to this tacit presupposition of order. (28)

The representation of ancient Greek art objects as fragmented reveals how desire operates in aesthetic experience through its self-defeating imposition of what Wallace Stevens calls “[t]he maker’s rage to order” (52). Perhaps the understanding of the relationship between Hellenism and the fragment that I have attempted to sketch here is incomplete and not entirely satisfactory; and perhaps this failure to grasp fully the significance of the fragment is vitally necessary for the integrity of our attempt to understand it.

Chapter 3

3 Eros and the Cultural Translation of Ancient Greece

ὁ ἔρως ἔμφυτος ἀλλήλων τοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ τῆς
ἀρχαίας φύσεως συναγωγεὺς καὶ ἐπιχειρῶν
ποιῆσαι ἓν ἐκ δυοῖν καὶ ἰάσασθαι τὴν φύσιν τὴν
ἀνθρωπίνην.

(Plato, *Symposium* 191d)

“mutual Love has naturally existed in human beings; that
reconciler and bond of union of their original nature, which
seeks to make two, one, and to heal the divided nature of
man.”

(Plato, *The Banquet* 431)⁹⁶

In the previous chapter I discussed how the fragmentation of Greek art objects and of modern Greece evokes a dynamic relationship between the real and the ideal in the reading and writing processes. The entanglement of ideality and materiality within the fragment mobilizes its aesthetic potentiality through the desire which comes into play in the work of the negative. In this chapter I turn to focus on how a number of Romantic texts engage with the desire for Greece in terms of erotic relationships. By framing my analysis with Plato’s *Symposium* and Percy Shelley’s “Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love,” I demonstrate how the Romantics characterized sexuality as an integral aspect of ancient Greek culture, as well as an important means of conceptualizing the relationship between ancient Greek culture and their own. In this context, I undertake readings of three Romantic Hellenizing poems which deal with erotic relationships: Keats’s *Endymion* and *Lamia*, and Percy Shelley’s

⁹⁶ Lit., “*Eros* for one another is inborn in human beings, and the uniter of their original nature, and what strives to make one from two and to heal human nature” (my trans.). Throughout this chapter I cite the English from Shelley’s translation of the *Symposium*, entitled *The Banquet*.

Epipsychidion. I argue that these poems figure the aesthetic of desire as participating in an impassioned yet futile attempt to employ cultural translation as a means of bridging the gap between the authors' contemporary culture and the cultural other of ancient Greece.

The examination of Shelley's translation of Plato's *Symposium* with which I begin this chapter serves two purposes. First, I consider the *Symposium* as an important text in itself for the consideration of Romantic ideas about the relationships between aesthetics, philosophy, culture, and sexuality. Although it is true that of the authors I consider in this chapter, only Shelley can be shown to have been influenced directly by the *Symposium*, the dialogue's ideas resonate with the works of other Romantic authors, as well. As with the German thinkers I examined in the first chapter, Romantic Hellenism in Britain intertwines ideas about ancient Greek culture with literary and aesthetic theory, such that the reading of the *Symposium* becomes entangled with the articulation of the theory of a sexualized Hellenic aesthetics. There is thus a meta-element at work here: the *Symposium* is both an ancient Greek source text *for* the relationship between aesthetics and sexuality, and a source text which associates ancient Greek culture itself with sexualized aesthetics and thus provides the basis for engaging with ancient Greek culture through representations of sexuality.

Second, Shelley's preface to his translation of the *Symposium* establishes the notion of cultural translation as a means of engaging with ancient Greek culture in an honest attempt to know and to understand it in spite of the barrier of cultural and historical difference. Shelley's attempt at cultural translation, like Romantic Hellenism itself, is riddled with paradoxes. To begin with, it is important to note the sincerity and

earnestness of Shelley's attempt to translate ancient Greek culture. He expresses his regret that

There is no book which shows the Greeks precisely as they were; they seem all written for children, with the caution that no practice or sentiment, highly inconsistent with our present manners, should be mentioned, lest those manners should receive [sic] outrage and violation. (407)

The preface is quite progressive insofar as it characterizes cultural difference as a barrier to be overcome in spite of the prejudices of Shelley's contemporary English readers.

Shelley attempts to use utilitarian humanism as a sort of meta-language with which to translate ancient Greek culture such that it will be understandable to his contemporary English readers—and this project is indeed not without some measure of success in the essay. At the same time, however, Shelley's preface does violence to ancient Greek culture and to Plato's text, thereby exposing both the coercive violation involved in the process of cultural translation, and the inherent impossibility of cultural translation.

3.1 Eros, Aesthetics, and Translation in Plato's *Symposium*

As a number of scholars have pointed out, the *Symposium* was one of the most influential dialogues for the Romantic reception of Plato. The dialogue is framed as a discussion between Apollodoros and some friends of his, who ask him to describe the evening of the symposium at which Agathon, Socrates, and Alcibiades were present. Apollodoros was not there himself, but agrees to recount to his friends the events as he heard them from Aristodemos. Aristodemos encountered Socrates one evening as the latter was on his way to Agathon's house, and Socrates invited him to come along. The guests had supper and then decided to drink in moderation and take turns delivering encomia to Eros. The majority of the dialogue thus consists of seven (reported) speeches:

Phaidros, Pausanias, Eryximachos, Aristophanes, Agathon, Socrates, and Alcibiades speak in turn. After Alcibiades' speech, a group of revelers crashes the party and the gathering is broken up. The *Symposium* is a complex text and is often considered the most literary of Plato's works, for it treats a dramatic situation in its entirety rather than consisting mostly of Socratic question-and-answer dialogue. Each of the speakers presents a view of eros which is rooted in his own character and personal experience, suggesting that eros is itself a highly personal and individual phenomenon.

The *Symposium*'s theorization of eros has important implications for my argument in this chapter. In particular, the dialogue advances a view of eros as a fundamental aspect of human nature rooted in lack of the beautiful (τὸ καλόν), and goes on to characterize eros as an intermediary—I would say 'translator'—which moves between opposed realms which cannot interact with one another directly: the mortal and the divine, ignorance and knowledge. After Agathon delivers his speech of great technical virtuosity, Socrates insists on questioning him in order to expose some of his contradictions. He gets Agathon to agree that eros is always *of* something which is lacking, and thus does not possess the qualities toward which it is directed, such as beauty (199c-201b).⁹⁷ Socrates then proceeds to recount a discussion which took place between himself and the priestess Diotima, who through a series of questions lead Socrates to the conclusion, first, that eros "is collectively the desire in men that good should be for ever present to them," and then finally that eros is in fact *of* "generation and production in the beautiful," since "[g]eneration is something eternal and immortal in

⁹⁷ Eros being *of* its object is expressed by the genitive case in the Greek. Socrates uses the analogy that a father, mother, or brother is always a father, mother, or brother *of* a particular person (199c-199e).

mortality” (*The Banquet* 445). Describing the function of eros in terms of myth, Diotima explains that Eros was born of the coupling of Poverty (Πενία) with Resource (Πόρος), and is a *daimon* (perhaps best translated “spirit”) which mediates between the realm of the human and the realm of the divine (202d-203e). Eros thus becomes a figure for the philosopher, who as a lover of knowledge operates in between ignorance and knowledge (204a-204b). In characterizing eros as being directed toward the begetting within the beautiful which one always lacks, the *Symposium* defines eros as a fundamentally aesthetic phenomenon, and establishes an intimate connection between aesthetics and philosophy.

This connection between aesthetics and philosophy can help to illuminate a curious part of the dialogue: the *Symposium*’s denouement briefly paraphrases a discussion between Socrates, Aristophanes, and Agathon which at first seems unrelated to the primary subject of the work:

it was terminated by Socrates forcing them to confess, that the same person is able to compose both tragedy and comedy, and that the foundations of the tragic and comic arts were essentially the same.⁹⁸ (*The Banquet* 460)

It is quite significant that Plato ends the *Symposium* by referring to a discussion about literary theory, for it sheds further light on the relationship between eros, art, and philosophy. In order to understand the significance of this passage, it is important to consider both the characters involved and the roles they have played in the dialogue.

Aristophanes, a comic poet, had delivered a somewhat tongue-in-cheek aetiological myth

⁹⁸ Lit. “the conclusion was that Socrates forced them to agree that the same man would know how to compose both comedy and tragedy, and that he who is by craft a tragic poet is also a comic poet” (Plato 223d, my trans.).

for his speech, from which I have quoted in the epigraph to this chapter.⁹⁹ Agathon, on the other hand, a tragedian, had delivered a more serious speech of great ingenuity and technical virtuosity. The speeches thus reflect not just the idiosyncratic personalities of Aristophanes and Agathon, but also the qualities traditionally attributed to each of their forms of drama: comedy is playful and tongue-in-cheek while also being grounded in the ‘real’ of human bodily functions (as well as dealing with contemporary political figures), especially those relating to sexuality; tragedy is grandiose and lofty, focusing on the ideals of human action in terms of mythological and royal characters of the distant past. Plato suggests, therefore, by terminating the *Symposium* with the paraphrase of this argument, that aesthetics itself consists in the mediation between opposed categories: playfulness and seriousness, earthiness and loftiness, the real and the ideal. The ending of the *Symposium* sets up a parallel between aesthetics and philosophy, in that both philosophy and art, as engaging with forms of knowledge, are aligned with eros as the source of their creative potential, for eros is what mediates between presence and absence, knowledge and ignorance, the mortal and the divine.

The *Symposium* is important, therefore, not only by virtue of its status as a source text for sexuality in ancient Greek culture (i.e., as a text which reflects ancient Greek ideas about sexuality), but also by virtue of its characterization of both aesthetics and philosophy in terms of eros—and its description of eros as that which mediates between

⁹⁹ Aristophanes says that human beings in the past were originally duplex, with two faces on a single head, two sets of genitals, four arms, and four legs, with the legs and back on the outside of each side of the body. There were three sexes: male-female, female-female, and male-male. They were powerful and had the audacity to challenge the gods, so Zeus cut each in half in order to make them weaker. Longing to reunite with one another, they would starve to death in passionate embraces, so Zeus took pity on them and had Apollo refashion their genitals so they might unite with one another in sexual union. Eros thus consists in the primal longing of each individual to unite with his or her other half in an attempt to regain humanity’s ancient state (189d-193d).

presence and absence, the real and the ideal. Human nature and its highest callings, the *Symposium* suggests, are defined by eros. If one accepts this argument, one cannot help but conclude that attaining the understanding of a given culture's erotic practices is crucial to developing an accurate understanding of that culture as an articulation of the human condition. Indeed, this argument also suggests that the fact that all cultures engage in erotic practices allows for the attainment of a certain level of understanding of one another—a certain degree of translation from the terms of one culture to those of another. Furthermore, since eros is directed toward the act of engendering within the beautiful which is lacking, and is what mediates between the lack of and the begetting upon the beautiful, it also becomes the force which strives to translate between Romantic culture and its literary productions about the beautiful and distant culture of ancient Greece.

3.2 Sexuality and the Translation of Ancient Greek Culture in Percy Shelley's "Discourse"

Scholarly analyses of Shelley's translation of the *Symposium* have praised its stylistic accomplishments,¹⁰⁰ while treatments of his "Discourse" have often viewed Shelley as mobilizing ancient Greek culture as part of his larger project of social reform.¹⁰¹ Here I want to explore the essay in more depth, taking as my starting point the claim that Shelley considers his authorship of the preface as an integral part of his role as translator of the dialogue. Through approaching the essay in this way, I show that Shelley

¹⁰⁰ See Notopoulos (390-401) and O'Neil (51-67).

¹⁰¹ Goslee emphasizes Shelley's promotion of women's intellectual equality in romantic relationships (2-5), while Carman reads "A Discourse" as an anti-homophobic text that responds to widespread discrimination on the part of Shelley's contemporaries (58-97).

works both to theorize and to undertake cultural translation.¹⁰² The “Discourse” contains a self-conscious formulation of a methodology for the cross-cultural analysis of sexual practices, employing a utilitarian humanist framework as a sort of meta-language through which to understand ancient Greek culture. Although this endeavour is not without some degree of success, Shelley’s attempt at cultural translation at the same time ends up exposing its own inadequacy. In its inability to assimilate the physical aspects of Greek homosexual relationships, Shelley’s essay comes up against a radical cultural alterity: anal sex remains untranslatable.¹⁰³ Ancient Greek culture, approached through its sexual practices, thus retains an essential foreignness which Shelley’s “Discourse” points toward but cannot fully grasp. This combination of the desire to “know” fully the cultural other (philosophically, aesthetically, sexually), along with the necessity of only pointing toward rather than attaining such fulfillment, finds its counterpart in erotic Hellenizing poems such as Keats’s *Endymion* and Shelley’s *Epipsychidion*.

A number of passages from Shelley’s letters provide evidence that he viewed his authorship of “A Discourse” as a continuation of his role as translator of the *Symposium*—that he felt that he ought to provide an element of cultural translation to accompany his linguistic translation. Indeed, Shelley avows cultural translation as an important motivation for his translation of the *Symposium*, for he writes in a letter to John and Maria Gisborne (10 July 1818) that he is translating the *Symposium* in order “to give

¹⁰² A notion of cultural translation is also evident in the Dedicatory Epistle to *Ivanhoe*. Scott writes, “[i]t is necessary, for exciting interest of any kind, that the subject assumed should be, as it were, translated into the manners, as well as the language, of the age we live in” (17-18).

¹⁰³ My use of the words ‘homosexual’ and ‘homosexuality’ is, of course, anachronistic, but I use such terms not to invoke present-day ideas about sexual orientation or identity, but simply in lieu of a tedious phrase such as ‘(pertaining to) erotic actions and/or sentiments between members of the same sex.’

Mary some idea of the manners & feelings of the Athenians—so different on many subjects from that of any other community that ever existed” (2.20). In this passage, Shelley characterizes the task of linguistic translation as a means toward cultural translation. The goal is that the *Symposium* itself serve as window into ancient Greek culture—more specifically, in this instance, Athenian culture, which had particular significance for Shelley as a democratic society in addition to its literary and cultural achievements.

In particular, cultural translation was necessary in order to overcome a prejudicial barrier to the appreciation of Plato’s *Symposium* by contemporary British readers: the widespread abhorrence of homosexuality in Shelley’s time. Hence, in a letter to Peacock dated 16 August 1818, Shelley writes,

I have translated, and Mary has transcribed, the *Symposium* . . . ; and I am proceeding to employ myself on a discourse, upon the subject of which the *Symposium* treats, considering the subject with reference to the difference of sentiments respecting it, existing between the Greeks and modern nations; a subject to be handled with that delicate caution which either I cannot or I will not practise in other matters, but which here I acknowledge to be necessary. (2.29)

Shelley’s use of the word “proceeding” demonstrates that he considers his writing of “A Discourse” as a preface to be a natural continuation of his translation of the *Symposium*. The passage also indicates his awareness of the cultural obstacles for the contemporary reception of his translation, as well as his willingness to be circumspect in his discussion of the highly sensitive topic of ancient Greek homosexuality. In referring to “the difference of sentiments . . . existing between the Greeks and modern nations,” Shelley clearly positions himself as a cultural translator attempting to bridge this gap through his explanation. Although Shelley mentions in the same letter that he does not really have serious plans to publish the translation and the essay, his efforts at being circumspect

show that in the essay's composition he had in mind a potential contemporary British readership.

One of Shelley's first concerns in the preface is to establish the utility of encountering a culture with values different from one's own:

there are many to whom the Greek language is inaccessible, who ought not to be excluded by this prudery to possess an exact and comprehensive conception of the history of man; for there is no knowledge concerning what man has been and may be, from partaking of which a person can depart, without becoming in some degree more philosophical, tolerant, and just. (407)

By referring to the "history of man" Shelley implies that all cultures have value because they are different lenses through which we can view human nature. The examination of the full potentiality of humanity, "what man has been and may be," leads to moral improvement not because all such potentiality is good, but because it leads to philosophical reflection on human nature. In Shelley's account then, the very gap between one's own culture and the culture studied is precisely what gives such study its intellectual and moral value.

In his role as cultural translator throughout the essay, Shelley applies the same moral standards to evaluate both ancient Greek society and his own. He argues for universally applicable moral values based on utilitarian principles. To explicate this cultural translation by means of an analogy, we might say that Shelley sets up utilitarian humanism as a kind of meta-language through which both cultures may be described and evaluated. Thus he claims that modern society has made improvements over ancient Greek society by abolishing slavery and elevating the status of women (407), though the remaining gender inequality "is a remnant of savage barbarism which we have less

excuse than they for not having totally abolished” (412).¹⁰⁴ In Shelley’s particular form of humanism, although each cultural manifestation of humanity has a certain validity, culture also has the capacity to develop over time to achieve higher forms of society, which are superior because they tend more towards people’s happiness by better fulfilling the inherent potential of human nature. In fact, Shelley’s view of the development of love in culture is much like Diotima’s view of the development of eros in the individual (210a-212a): it begins on the physical level and ascends to the intellectual and the spiritual.¹⁰⁵ Shelley argues that both ancient Greek culture and modern culture are commendable because they achieved that “degree of civilization and refinement” which “produces the want of sympathies still more intimate and complete” so “the gratification of the senses is no longer all that is sought in sexual connexion” but rather “becomes a very small part of that profound and complicated sentiment, which we call Love, which is rather the universal thirst for a communion not merely of the senses, but of our whole nature, intellectual, imaginative and sensitive” (408). Shelley sets out the same ascension from the physical to the intellectual and spiritual that Diotima describes, though his focus on sympathy and communion demonstrates a more social dimension to his conception of eros, which is somewhat reminiscent of the speech of Aristophanes. For Shelley, love is a

¹⁰⁴ Along similar lines, Shelley claims that it is hypocritical for modern British readers to adopt a holier-than-thou attitude in condemning the Greeks for homosexuality, for the widespread practice of prostitution in Britain is, Shelley argues, an even worse vice (412).

¹⁰⁵ Diotima summarizes as follows:

For such as discipline themselves upon this system [lit., “correctly-practiced love of boys”], or are conducted by another beginning to ascend through these transitory objects which are beautiful, towards that which is beauty itself, proceeding as on steps from the love of one form to that of two, and from that of two, to that of all forms which are beautiful; and from beautiful forms to beautiful habits and institutions, and from institutions to beautiful doctrines; until, from the meditation of many doctrines, they arrive at that which is nothing else than the doctrine of the supreme beauty itself, in the knowledge and contemplation of which at length they repose. (*The Banquet* 449-50)

universal principle inherent to human nature, but its fulfillment can only be achieved in particular cultural manifestations, some of which are superior because they allow for the fuller realization of human potential and therefore produce more utility. Eros, as a defining aspect of the human condition, becomes the shared principle across or between cultures which is at the same time a site of difference. This characterization of eros as a site of universality which diverges in different expressions provides the theoretical basis according to which the practices of one culture can be translated into the understanding of another.

In attempting to present ancient Greek sexual practices sympathetically to an imagined audience of contemporary British readers, however, Shelley ends up exposing the element of essential foreignness in ancient Greek culture which remains untranslatable. Shelley advances what we might characterize as an apology for ancient Greek homosexuality, employing a limited form of cultural relativism in the process. He justifies the Greek privileging of homoerotic relationships by arguing that the low status of women in ancient Greek society, and their lack of education, resulted, “except with extraordinary exceptions” (408), in an intellectual degradation that made them inferior objects of affection to men (407-10). Perhaps influenced by the Greek adjective *καλός* as referring both to physical and to moral/intellectual loveliness, or by the passage in the *Symposium* in which Diotima describes physical beauty as a stepping stone to the beauty of higher truth (210a-212a), Shelley argues that this intellectual inferiority affected the physical appearance of most ancient Greek women:

They were certainly devoid of that moral and intellectual loveliness with which the acquisition of knowledge and the cultivation of sentiment animates, as with another life of overpowering grace, the lineaments and the gestures of every form which it inhabits. Their eyes could not have been deep and intricate from the

workings of the mind, and could have entangled no heart in soul-enwoven labyrinths. (408)

Shelley argues that without vivacity of wit Greek women would not have exhibited charming mannerisms or entrancing appearances. In his description of eyes entangling a lover's heart "in soul-enwoven labyrinths" Shelley perhaps has in mind the convoluted windings of the Socratic dialogue, which twists the interlocutor back upon himself into the entrapment of *aporia*. This passage forms a sharp contrast with Shelley's eroticized description of the Greek male youth later in the essay.¹⁰⁶ In offering this explanation, Shelley attempts to present ancient Greek homosexuality to his audience as a cultural phenomenon which can be logically accounted for given historical circumstances, rather than an irrational perversion.¹⁰⁷

But there is clearly a degree of desperation evident in Shelley's argument here. His claim that ancient Greek women were necessarily intellectually degraded as a result of ancient Greek gender roles is highly speculative, as is his blanket assumption that such (supposed) intellectual inferiority would necessarily make them less attractive partners for ancient Greek men (though Plato may very well have agreed with this latter claim). That Shelley can only justify homosexual desire by claiming that ancient Greek women were inferior objects of affection embodies already the assumption that homosexual

¹⁰⁶ Thus:

The men of Greece corresponded in external form to the models which they have left as specimens of what they were. The firm yet flowing proportion of their forms, the winning unreserve and facility of their manners, the eloquence of their speech, in a language which is itself music and persuasion; their gestures animated at once with the delicacy and the boldness which the perpetual habit of persuading and governing themselves and others; and the poetry of their religious rites, inspired into their whole being, rendered the youth of Greece a race of beings something widely different from that of modern Europe. (409)

¹⁰⁷ It is not clear how much of this argument stems from Shelley's own conviction, and how much from concession to the prejudices of his anticipated readers for the sake of rhetorical expediency.

desire is itself an anomaly, the product of cultural circumstances which made women an inferior option, rather than constituting an equally legitimate expression of human beings' inherent eros. In other words, Shelley's argument fails to 'translate' fully the notion of homosexual desire because it assumes beforehand a perspective in which homosexual desire is already only a 'plan B' which emerges in response to gender inequality within a culture. Ancient Greek homosexuality is justified but not validated. Whether he intended to or not, Shelley ends up demonstrating in the course of his argument that cultural translation—just like linguistic translation in the way he describes it in the famous “violet into a crucible” simile of *Defence of Poetry* (514)—necessarily results in a distortion of meaning, because the moral values which provide his analysis with frame of reference are themselves culturally inflected.

A similar stretching is evident in the second main argument in Shelley's apology for ancient Greek homosexuality: his contention that it is unlikely that anal intercourse was commonly practiced “except among the more debased and abandoned of mankind” (411). Although it may seem to modern readers that in making this argument Shelley is subscribing to the very “prudery” (407) he formerly derided, his opinion has some affinity with the conclusion the modern classical scholar Kenneth Dover reaches in his analysis of vase paintings in his book *Greek Homosexuality*. Dover notes that most images of anal sex depict *women* as the recipients, and concludes that even if it was not always followed, there existed an ideal in ancient Greek culture that the male *eromenos* ('beloved') only allow his *erastes* ('lover') to practice intercrural intercourse, and not submit to anal or oral penetration (98-106). Assuming that anal penetration can only be

painful for the receiving partner,¹⁰⁸ Shelley argues that a decent and truly affectionate *erastes* would not want to subject his beloved to it (411). So Shelley proposes an alternative theory:

If we consider the facility with which certain phenomena connected with sleep, at the age of puberty, associate themselves with those images which are the objects of our waking desires; and even that in some persons of an exalted state of sensibility, that a similar process may take[s] place in reverie, it will not be difficult to concieve [sic] the almost involuntary consequences of a state of abandonment in the society of a person of surpassing attractions, when the sexual connection cannot exist, to be such as to preclude the necessity of so operose and diabolical a machination as that usually described. (411)

Shelley undertakes some remarkable linguistic gymnastics in this description. The sentence itself is 101 words long, employing laborious circumlocutions for wet dreams, erotic images, orgasm, and anal intercourse. In this incredibly stretched-out syntax Shelley suggests that the passion and excitement of the *erastes* would allow for him to achieve orgasm without requiring the stimulation of anal penetration. Furthermore, the *erastes* to which Shelley's hypothesis applies is not even referred to via circumlocution, but is in fact completely absent from the grammar of the sentence. Whether the pains Shelley takes in this description stem from his "delicate caution" or his own aversion, his language demonstrates that the very sexual behaviours he wishes to discuss are unspeakable in this context. Shelley does not even consider as a possibility the idea that anal sex might be pleasurable for the receiving partner; he attempts to justify ancient Greek homosexuality not through confronting directly the radical alterity of anal sex (which he assumes is unnatural), but rather through arguing that such a "diabolical" "machination" did not (at least usually) actually take place. What this circumspect

¹⁰⁸ Shelley later cites a passage from Petronius in which a pathic expresses sexual pleasure as proof that the form of satisfaction cannot be anal intercourse (411).

sentence ends up demonstrating is the impossibility of achieving fully the cultural translation toward which Shelley strives.

Despite the limitations of Shelley's efforts, it is important to acknowledge how radically transgressive these writings were in his own day. Shelley was hardly one to fear reprisal for the expression of radical views—as evident in his publication of *The Necessity of Atheism* and *Queen Mab*—yet even he was uncertain about the practicality of publishing his translation of the *Symposium* along with its preface, and indeed neither appeared in print during his lifetime. In fact, the only available English translation of the *Symposium* in Shelley's day bowdlerized the dialogue by removing nearly all its references to homosexuality.¹⁰⁹ In 1840 Mary Shelley finally published a version of the text which she had reluctantly expurgated. Despite Percy Shelley's dedicated effort at exercising "delicate caution," even such an intercrural treatment of the topic of Greek homosexuality remained unprintable. The liminal status of Shelley's "Discourse," as both an essay directed toward an intended contemporary British readership, and a text which remains unpublishable in that cultural context, reflects its uneasy status as cultural translation in its encounter with the foreignness of ancient Greek sexual practices which it remains ultimately unable to subsume. The essay's divided vision, the earnestness of its attempt to grasp honestly the reality of "the Greeks precisely as they were" along with the doublethink involved in its effort to explain away the inassimilable otherness of anal sex, reflects the same tortured ambivalence evident in erotic Hellenizing poems such as *Endymion* and *Lamia*, which are torn between their desire, through translation, to 'know'

¹⁰⁹ Floyer Sydenham's translation of 1761 and 1767, in which "*eromenos* . . . is regularly rendered as 'mistress'" and the Greek word for "boy" as "'maiden' or 'woman'" (Crompton 89; 90). Sydenham also omitted Alcibiades' speech, for in it Alcibiades recounts his failed attempts to seduce Socrates (90-91).

fully the cultural other and their insistence on figuring the necessary yet traumatic failure of this attempt.

In his book *The Experience of the Foreign*, Antoine Berman provides further theoretical support for the connection between culture and translation. Berman shows how German Romantic thinkers theorized the concept of *Bildung* (‘culture’, ‘development’) as involving, like translation, the movement from one’s self toward the foreign other, followed by the return from this experience to one’s self (46). “*Because the foreign has a mediating function, translation can become one of the agents of Bildung,*” Berman concludes (47). Just as how, as Berman shows, the German Romantic conception of their own culture involved the relationship to the otherness of Greek antiquity (49), so too did the British Romantic authors conceive of their own culture, and the role of literature as an expression of that culture, as necessarily bound up with its relationship with ancient Greece as a cultural other. In other words, cultural translation is an important object of study in British literary works not just because such works were concerned with the relationships between cultures, but rather because the notion of culture itself was conceptualized in a manner in which such relationships were in fact constitutive elements of the cultures themselves.¹¹⁰ The notion of British culture, in the Romantic period, was inseparable from how it was thought to relate to the culture of ancient Greece, so the notion of cultural translation becomes bound up with a consideration of the identity of the self.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Bhabha, who writes that “the cultural [is] not . . . the *source* of the conflict . . . [,] but . . . the *effect* of discriminatory practices—the production of cultural *differentiation* as signs of authority” (114).

Cultural translation, as Shelley's "Discourse" shows, remains torn between its desire for a seamless assimilation of another culture, the movement from difference into sameness, and its encounter with an irreducible foreignness that it cannot subsume. This tension is also evident in the different theorizations of translation in Romantic Germany, as demonstrated by Berman and Jacques Derrida. In his essay "Theology of Translation," Derrida's reading of Schelling's *On University Studies* focuses on the notion of a successful or seamless translation between different domains of knowledge (Derrida is himself, of course, quite suspicious of such a view of translation). Derrida argues that the German Idealists rebelled against Kant in large part through their divergent conceptions of the translatability of various disciplines. Kant's frequent schematic distinctions or delimitations in *The Conflict of the Faculties*, such as that between knowledge and action, root his thought within "the untranslatable multiplicity of languages" ("Theology of Translation" 75). German Idealism, in contrast, asserts that

one must start from that from which we will have had to start in order to think dissociation: originary unity. And if we start from this, then all differences will only be translations (not necessarily in a linguistic sense) of the same, which is projected or reflected in different categories. (67)

Schelling, according to Derrida, develops the concept of "uni-totally or uni-formation as generalized translation, onto-theological translation without a rupture, without opacity" (76).¹¹¹ This notion of a seamless translation which Derrida attributes to Schelling, applied to the domain of cultural translation, would support the possibility of the

¹¹¹ It is worth noting that if we examine Schelling's other works, they seem to cast doubt on this view of seamless translation which Derrida sees in *On University Studies*. See, for example, my fourth chapter, in which I discuss a sort of untranslatability of mythology evident in Schelling's lectures on mythology and his *Deities of Samothrace*. Nevertheless, Derrida's reading of Schelling is useful in helping to identify an example of the theorization for efficacious translation which is quite important for many Romantics' efforts to grasp cultural otherness, even as they end up complicating such theorizations.

Romantic project of attaining access to ancient Greek culture by means of the translating process. In the context I have been elaborating, eros would be the shared “originary unity” within human nature and would therefore allow for translation to take place, as the working through of various manifestations of the same underlying drive.

Berman, in contrast to the view Derrida reads in Schelling, shows how the German Romantics theorize translation in a way that complicates the process of any straightforward assimilation of one culture by another—a process which I have shown is operative in Shelley’s essay. Translation, as involving an experience or encounter with the foreign, consists not in “an *annexation* or *reduction* of the other to the same” (46), but rather in a going out from the self toward the other followed by a return again to the self. This movement back-and-forth between self and other involves an encounter with the inassimilable foreignness of the other culture, and points toward a desire not simply to assimilate the other culture, but rather to transform the self through the encounter with the other (8). Translation, according to Berman, ultimately ends up seeking “to establish a *dialogic relation* between foreign language and native language” (9). As I shall demonstrate, a number of British Romantic works seem to point toward the notion of translation as Berman characterizes it. I differ from Berman in terms of my view of the aim and the efficacy of this kind of “translation,” however. In contrast with Berman, I shall argue that in the texts I examine in this chapter, the encounter with an irreducible foreign otherness and the resultant impasse is indeed the necessary result of translation, but constitutes at the same time a failure on the part of translation. These texts figure cultural translation as directed toward the attainment of knowledge of the other: at some level they desire the seamless translation theorized by Schelling according to Derrida,

even as they are aware of its impossibility. Translation therefore fails to accomplish its object when it ends up serving not a clarifying or unifying function (which attains knowledge of the other culture) but instead opens up a sort of missed encounter with the cultural other. Desire is so important to this process because of how the texts represent the process of translation in erotic terms, as the striving to 'know' the other both intellectually and sexually.

Shelley's preface is important not only because of the way in which it develops the notion of cultural translation through theory and practice, but also because of how it establishes sexual practices as the primary *object* of cultural translation through which the Romantic author or reader attempts to know intellectually and aesthetically the otherness of ancient Greek culture. Sexual practices constitute a felicitous object of cultural study because they are very clearly a universality (sex is part of human nature in all known successful cultures) heavily inflected by particularity (sexual practices often vary strikingly from one culture to another). But sexual practices are not merely a particularly apposite entry point into ancient Greek culture; rather, the theorization of eros in Plato's *Symposium*, which integrates it with philosophy and thus unites biological desire with Platonic metaphysics, makes eros the *sine qua non* of ancient Greek culture. As I argued in chapter one, from the latter half of the eighteenth century onward the study of ancient Greek culture became the ground of Romantic aesthetic theory, by virtue of its function of articulating the relationship between the real and the ideal. Eros in Plato's *Symposium* serves this very function, for eros is that which mediates between the mortal and the divine, ignorance and knowledge. In other words, the *Symposium* itself theorizes eros in such a way that eros is aligned with what for the Romantics was the operation of ancient

Greek art itself in terms of its aesthetic achievement. The *Symposium* thus becomes a text of critical importance for the exploration of the aesthetics of Hellenism in terms of sexuality, and the place of eros in the attempt at cultural translation.

In the context established by the reception of the *Symposium*, Romantic authors' erotic narratives do not merely happen to intersect with Hellenism, but rather self-consciously participate in this dynamic of cultural translation, which considers the erotic as a gateway into ancient Greek culture, as the object which must be translated in the attempt to know ancient Greek culture. Eros becomes both the object of study within ancient Greek culture, and the movement of the desire which is at work in the process of cultural translation itself. Like Shelley's "Discourse," the erotic narratives I examine in this chapter present themselves as attempts at cultural translation which attain a limited degree of success while also exposing the impossibility of fully successful cultural translation.

3.3 Sexuality and Aesthetics

In his book *Perverse Romanticism*, Richard Sha traces connections between sexuality and aesthetics in the Romantic period, and his argument dovetails with the claims I shall make about the sexual dimensions of the aesthetics of Romantic Hellenism. Sha advances a Kantian reading of the relationship between aesthetics and sexuality. He argues that discoveries in medicine in the latter half of the eighteenth century, which decoupled sexual pleasure from reproduction, allowed for a "perverse" view of sexuality in terms of a purposiveness without purpose. Art and sexuality are therefore connected by a "distrust of function" (8). Sha also points out that the sensual element of sexual pleasure

links it to aesthetic pleasure according to Romantic notions of nervous physiology, further facilitating the analogy between aesthetics and sexuality.¹¹²

Sha's book points toward the centrality of Hellenism in Romantic aesthetics, for although he does not discuss Hellenism directly, three of the six aesthetic thinkers he examines in his fourth chapter deal directly with Hellenic subject matter: Longinus, Knight, and Winckelmann.¹¹³ Sha's argument about the intersection between Romantic sexuality and aesthetics in terms of "perversion," or the distrust of function, has important implications for my argument in this chapter. In the first place, the theoretical connection between aesthetics and sexuality which Sha traces supports my claim that the intersection between representations of sexuality and Hellenism is not a mere coincidence, but rather a constitutive element of Romantic Hellenism. In other words, the works I examine in this chapter do not merely *happen* to deal both with ancient Greek culture and with sexuality. On the contrary, their self-reflexive aesthetic concerns with ancient Greek culture are bound up with their representations of sexuality. Secondly, Sha's emphasis on perversion as an important concept helps to contextualize the often bizarre and contradictory attitudes embodied in Romantic Hellenism. Romantic Hellenism shares the "distrust of function" element of perversion which Sha stresses, but it also exhibits some of the qualities more literally associated with the adjective *perverse*,

¹¹² The perversion of sexuality and aesthetics also imparts to them a political function, according to Sha, because it allows for "a site for thinking about mutuality rather than hierarchy" (2), a sort of disinterestedness which nevertheless maintains the affective charge that is the basis of social bonds in many Romantic thinkers.

¹¹³ This strong Hellenic element in Sha's sources on aesthetics supports the argument of my first chapter, in which I claimed that Hellenism became the ground of aesthetic theory in the latter half of the eighteenth century, and thus entangled the articulation of aesthetic theory with the study of ancient Greek art and culture.

such as a paradoxical contrariness to its own aim. Romantic Hellenism, even more so in the context of the desire for cultural translation, is perverse because it earnestly sets out to accomplish that which it knows is impossible—because it truly wishes to desecrate and to violate the object of its desire through “knowing” it, while retaining an awareness of the impossibility of this self-defeating aim.

As my discussion of Frey’s *Interruptions* in the previous chapter made clear, bound up with the trope of fragmentation in representations of Greek art objects is the corollary of the violence involved in the operation of the intertwined processes of the reading and writing of ancient Greek art. Such violence, which I have argued is figured as a form of hermeneutic rape, is clearly articulated in Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and in the introduction to Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*. Fully “knowing” the ancient Greek cultural other, intellectually, aesthetically, and sexually—which can be achieved, as I have shown, only through the reading and rewriting of ancient Greek art—necessitates the violation, even the desecration, of the desired object. Present-day Western readers, given current cultural perspectives on sexuality which have been heavily influenced by the notions of companionate love and mutual consent, may find this articulation of sexuality paradoxical. “Why must one—indeed, why would one—violate the object one loves?” the modern reader might ask. Georges Bataille’s study *L’Erotisme* sheds light on the tensions at work in this process. Bataille distinguishes eroticism, which he views as an essentially human phenomenon, from the uninhibited physical interactions of animal sexuality. Drawing on work from anthropology such as that of Claude Lévi-Strauss on the incest taboo, Bataille argues that human eroticism is entangled with taboos restricting sexuality. Sexual pleasure for human beings is bound up with the taboo, for eroticism

always entails violence or violation through the transgression of the taboo, with which each culture often exhibits a perverse fascination.

For Bataille, as for Plato, the erotic stems from the fundamental yearning of human nature to fulfill the lack which is constitutive of the human condition. Bataille writes,

We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity. We find the state of affairs that binds us to our random and ephemeral individuality hard to bear. Along with our tormenting desire that this evanescent thing should last, there stands our obsession with a primal continuity linking us with everything that is. (15)

Bataille understands the human condition as defined by a sense of selfhood which is necessarily individual; human beings are demarcated from the world in a state which Bataille calls “discontinuous.” Recognition of one’s individuality, however, also entails the recognition of one’s mortality and the desire for consciousness to endure in the face of death. Eroticism consists in the desire to substitute continuity for discontinuity, and thus to achieve union with existence. Such a state of union can be attained, of course, through nothing other than death and the negation of the human subject *qua* individual. The achievement of continuity in this life is not possible. Hence eroticism is energized by the tension between the individual’s desire to continue to exist *qua* individual, and his or her desire to attain continuity through reproduction and death. Eroticism is therefore most visible not in the act of fulfillment (the moment of death or orgasm in which desire is fulfilled only in being annihilated), but rather “this continuity is chiefly to be felt in the anguish of desire, when it is still inaccessible, still an impotent, quivering yearning” (19).

The affinity of Bataille’s notion of eroticism with the manner in which I conceptualize the aesthetic of desire at work in Romantic Hellenism should now be

apparent. The viewer of works of ancient Greek art desires a union with ancient Greek culture, even as s/he maintains the awareness that this (impossible) union would negate the constitutive elements of the mode in which s/he relates to ancient Greek art. In addition to shedding light on the element of violence involved in sexual desire, Bataille's work helps to articulate in more depth the connection between sexuality and aesthetics in Romantic Hellenism. The paradoxical relationship between self and other which occurs in both the aesthetic and sexual realms has to do with the focus—shared by both Romanticism and Existentialism—on the meaning of the experience of the individual in the face of the lack of transcendent metaphysical values. Along with the valorization of the individual comes the question of how this individual is to relate to the world—how does the subjective experience of the “I” engage with the “other”? This space in between self and other, difference and sameness, is the space which eros energizes with the desire to possess and to violate the other and the knowledge that “that way madness lies” (*King Lear* 3.4.21).

English literary history provides further evidence for my assertion about the link between erotic narratives and cultural translation. Mythological erotic poems such as *Endymion*, *Lamia*, Thomas Love Peacock's *Rhododaphne*, and Letitia Landon's *The Lost Pleiad* stem from Renaissance Ovidian erotic poems, or epyllia,¹¹⁴ such as Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* and Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*.¹¹⁵ I shall cite the work of a

¹¹⁴ The poetic genre of the epyllion (term derived from the diminutive form of the Greek ἔπος ‘story’, ‘poem’) originated in Hellenistic and Roman poetry. In modern classical terminology, it describes narrative poems of medium length in epic metre (hexameters) which usually deal with mythological subject matter. It has also been adopted by English literary scholars to refer to Renaissance mythological poems.

¹¹⁵ In a letter to Reynolds of 22 November 1817 (1.188-89), Keats follows a discussion of the composition of *Endymion* with talk of his reading of Shakespeare, and quotes from *Venus and Adonis*.

number of scholars to show how these English Renaissance epyllia set the stage for the Romantic poems by following Ovid in articulating a link between eros and culture in terms of metamorphosis, and thus emphasizing the at times tender, at times violent, processes of erotic negotiation which take place between the lover and the beloved other. As Gregory Heyworth points out, an important shift in the reception of Ovid took place in the transition from the middle ages to the Renaissance: “[w]hile the medievals tended to read Ovid as a social and political historian, the Renaissance saw in him a poetic theorist as well” (xiv). Heyworth argues that this new view of Ovid also affected the conceptualization of the genre of romance. At the same time, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* provides an important theoretical basis for the notion of cultural translation. Heyworth writes,

the incipit articulates a general theory of cultural evolution through a study of instances of bodily mutilation. . . . Ovid was the first to construe the mutability of form as the simultaneous principle behind both poetry and civilization. In prosecuting this reciprocity wherein poetic postures commute societal customs and vice versa, Ovid invented the history of culture. (4-5)

While Heyworth seems to overstate his claim when he writes that “Ovid invented the history of culture,” his insight about Ovid’s portrayal of the connection between culture and poetry in terms of metamorphosis provides a useful basis for the notion of cultural translation. If both poetry and civilization are constituted by “mutability of form,” it should be possible to perform cultural translation through the processes of transformation involved in the operation of literature. Such processes of transformation include the acts of reading and writing as well as the erotic negotiations which take place between lover and beloved.

Ovid's representation of eros also sets an important precedent for the authors of Renaissance epyllia and the Romantic erotic narratives, for it encompasses both loving tenderness and terrible violence, ironic comedy and serious tragedy. William Keach argues that this Ovidian conception of eros, which he claims is characterized by "ambivalence" (5), is the defining feature of the relationship between the Elizabethan verse epyllia and Ovid's oeuvre. Keach is certainly correct to emphasize this ambivalence, and to recognize its importance in the Renaissance epyllia. I would like to take things a step further by clarifying the link between culture and sexuality toward which Keach only gestures.¹¹⁶ I want to suggest that for the authors of Renaissance epyllia and the Romantics that followed, the form of the erotic narrative articulates a link between aesthetics and sexuality, in which both are torn between the desire to know/possess the other and the awareness of the self-defeating nature of this impulse.

As Victoria Rimell argues,

Ovidian desire often works to break down boundaries, and thus to threaten autonomy, identity, and to collapse difference into incestuous sameness, yet at the same time it often resists and dodges Narcissus' fate, recognizing that connectedness is not synonymous with homogeneity, that the dynamic of relationality is also the vim of creative process, both of writing and reading. Ovidian erotics can be read as a constant battle to transcend a compulsive logic of the same in order to sustain desire, or poetry itself. (5)

Ovid's work reveals how sexuality and aesthetics engage with similar paradoxes in their relationship to desire. The issue at stake is how one can be capable of accessing the aesthetic or the sexual potentiality of the other culture or the beloved other without utterly violating it by translating difference into sameness. Each of the Hellenizing erotic

¹¹⁶ E.g., he writes, "[i]n the *Metamorphoses* . . . sexual desire figures prominently in almost every episode in which the gods and goddesses are the protagonists. The very idea of metamorphoses may have deep-lying psycho-cultural connections with sexuality" (14), but does not expand on this observation.

Romantic poems I analyze in this chapter can be understood as bringing to bear its own approach to this problem. For example, one possible response, as suggested by *Endymion* (see below), is the mode of romance and its continual deferral of the moment of possession in order to maintain the movement of the poem's language as a striving in desire toward that object. The bizarre negotiations and contortions these texts undertake in the course of their projects energize them with a dynamic tension that is both sexual and aesthetic, although none is entirely successful in its endeavour.

By codifying the poetic treatment of erotic relations in ancient mythological settings, Ovid and the authors of Renaissance epyllia not only provided a generic model for Romantic erotic narratives, but also articulated the analogy between the relationship between lovers and the relationship between cultures, as consisting in a desire which struggles for possession while remaining rooted in lack. What distinguishes the Romantic erotic narratives from the Elizabethan epyllia is that in the case of the Romantics more is at stake. The grounding of literary and aesthetic theory in the reading of ancient Greek culture, inaugurated by the work of Winckelmann, along with more serious considerations of the value of pagan mythology as a fascinating worldview (e.g. Knight), endows ancient Greek subject matter in the Romantic poems with a heightened significance when compared to the more playful Renaissance treatments of ancient myth. In keeping with these divergent attitudes, the Renaissance epyllia do not earnestly attempt cultural translation in the same way as the Romantic erotic narratives. The epyllia play with mythological material and rewrite it, but they are not particularly concerned with accessing an authentic cultural core while doing so. One might say that the epyllia glibly accept the impossibility of cultural translation because that is not really their goal.

The Romantic erotic narratives, however, are motivated by an ardent desire to achieve this impossible goal, and thus end up staging the failure of cultural translation with an agonizing and traumatic pathos.

3.4 Keats's *Endymion* and the Erring of Romance

A glance at the critical reception of Keats's *Endymion* suggests that it ranks among the most baffling lengthy poems of the major Romantic poets. The poem's difficulties arise chiefly from its idiosyncratic narrative structure, or lack thereof, which leads Patricia Parker to write that "[t]he thread of the line is frequently the only clue to this labyrinth" (177). As Karen Swann observes, one of the most salient features of the poem is "the way *any* account of its plot seems only to misrepresent the experience of reading it" (27). What are we to make of the fact that this ostensibly narrative poem of 4050 lines seems to offer little in the way of narrative at all, the intervening space between Endymion's opening procession and his anticlimactic union with Cynthia at the end of book four being filled with only a perpetual flow of Cockney couplets, produced by Keats's rigorous self-imposed quota of fifty lines per day? As Swann suggests, the most fruitful approach to this poem is to read it not in terms of the slim narrative which supposedly forms its subject, but rather from the perspective of the poem's aesthetics. Keats's goal to "make 4000 Lines of one bare circumstance" (*Letters* 1.170) can be considered as an idiosyncratic avant-garde approach to the aesthetics of Hellenizing poetry.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Keats writes this in a letter to Benjamin Baily of 8 Oct 1817, claiming to be quoting from "a Letter [he] wrote to George in the spring" (1.169), which has not survived (1.169 n. 8).

Keats's approach to the composition of Hellenizing poetry in *Endymion* forms a sharp contrast to that of many English Hellenizing works of poetry written prior to it. Poems such as Polwhele's *Grecian Prospects*, Hemans' *Modern Greece*, Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, and Peacock's *Rhododaphne* all attempt to justify their authority through the use of various notes which include the citation of ancient sources and antiquarian works, as a way of grounding the operation of the imagination with scholarly evidence.¹¹⁸ For his project in *Endymion*, in contrast, Keats self-consciously set out to compose a Hellenizing poem on a subject on which ancient sources provide few details. The ancient Greek subject matter of the poem remains significant, but it acquires a different kind of significance which entails important ramifications for the model of cultural translation the poem implies. Rather than attempt cultural translation through the piecing together of fragmented sources, a scholarly activity in which reading and writing are combined, the poem attempts cultural translation through the process of poetic composition—the disciplined action of writing fifty lines a day along with the deployment of imagination and imagery. This idiosyncratic model of cultural translation places even more emphasis on the operation of desire in the aesthetic of Hellenism. In this case, however, rather than being directed toward something of which pieces of a former whole remain, such as ruins or fragments, the desire is directed toward *the*

¹¹⁸ Peacock's poem *Rhododaphne: or, The Thessalian Spell* (1818), is another example of the Hellenizing erotic narrative poems I discuss in this chapter. The poem of seven cantos in irregularly rhyming iambic tetrameter presents itself as a transcription of a tale from the spirits of Greek bards, and recounts the story of a love triangle. Anthemion is enspelled by the enchantress Rhododaphne who wants him for herself. She slays Anthemion's beloved Calliroë through a magic poison kiss on Anthemion's lips, then enspells Anthemion until Uranian Love arrives in a *deus ex machina* and slays her for her affront. Calliroë, it turns out, had only been put to sleep by the spell and she and Anthemion are reunited.

Peacock cites no fewer than fourteen classical authorities in the poem's notes, which the preface describes as "few" and claims consist only of those "such as seemed absolutely necessary to explain or justify the text" (6).

composition of the Hellenizing work itself. This self-reflexivity, wherein the object of desire on the part of the poet is no longer ancient Greek culture per se but rather the Hellenizing work which successfully translates ancient Greek culture through the operation of the poetic imagination, renders *Endymion* not so much a poem about an ancient Greek story as a poem about translating ancient Greek culture through imaginative composition. The poem exposes, ultimately, the impossibility of the success of its own project. The poem becomes its own unwriting. Through its spectacular failure, *Endymion* provides a striking example of the figuration of the impossibility of cultural translation as part of the attempt at cultural translation.

Throughout *Endymion*, Keats exhibits a concern with the project of cultural translation into an English mode through the union of British and ancient Greek culture, even as this assertion of a straightforward, progressive lineage is at odds with the poem's errant form. In earlier poems such as "Sleep and Poetry" (1817) and "I stood tip-toe upon a little hill" (1817), Keats employed references to ancient Greek culture in a mostly decorative and appropriative fashion. The earlier poems' attempts to situate themselves in the English literary tradition by appropriating the trappings of classical learning harmonize with Marjorie Levinson's argument in *Keats's Life of Allegory*, in which she suggests that Keats's stylistic excesses participate in a masturbatory project to lay claim to middle-class respectability (26). In the sonnet "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles" (1817), Keats had turned away from the decorative appropriation of Greece evident in his earlier poetry by evoking the denial of satisfaction operative in the work of the negative, and thus valorizing the aesthetic potentiality of fragmentation for hermeneutics. *Endymion* marks a further stage in the development of Keats's Hellenism, by exhibiting a tension

between its desire to root itself, as a member of the English poetic tradition, in Greece's cultural greatness, and its necessity of working through its own inability to consummate adequately the classical tradition. For example, in book two, the narrator says that

Endymion

saw not fiercer wonders—past the wit
Of any spirit to tell, but one of those
Who, when this planet's sphering time doth close,
Will be its high remembrancers: who they?
The mighty ones who have made eternal day
For Greece and England. (2.249-54)

This assertion of a special relationship between Greece and England as great cultural powers recalls similar claims made in Polwhele's *Grecian Prospects* and Hemans's *Modern Greece*. Intriguingly, this passage praises the great cultural figures of Greece and England for being capable of describing "fiercer wonders" which Endymion does not see and the narrator does not detail. Through this apophatic aside, the narrator claims that the greatest artistic achievements resulting from the harmony between British and Greek culture are yet to be revealed. Keats describes the most accomplished poets of England and Greece not only as those who ensure the glory of their nations, but also as those who are "remembrancers" of the world itself after its time has passed. These lines thus suggest that the aesthetic achievements of the poets of England and Greece extend into the metaphysical and anagogic realm. As I shall demonstrate, despite the grandiosity of such invocations, the poem as a whole ultimately exposes its own inability to unite with the classical tradition.

In addressing the British muse at the beginning of book four, Keats's narrator again evokes the relationship between English and Greek culture. The narrator describes the muse as having patiently waited for the flowering of British culture: "Long didst thou

sit amid our regions wild / Rapt in a deep prophetic solitude” (4.8-9). The British muse steadfastly ignored the summons of other, earlier cultures throughout history:

There came an eastern voice of solemn mood:—
 Yet wast thou patient. Then sang forth the Nine,
 Apollo’s garland:—yet didst thou divine
 Such home-bred glory, that they cry’d in vain,
 “Come hither, Sister of the Island!” Plain
 Spake fair Ausonia [i.e., Italy]; and once more she spake
 A higher summons:—still didst thou betake
 Thee to thy native hopes. O thou hast won
 A full accomplishment! (4.10-18)

Ironically, Keats’s narrator lauds the development of native British culture in a Hellenizing poem which strives unabashedly to touch “the beautiful mythology of Greece” (Preface 103). In refusing to respond to the summons of earlier cultures, the British muse has attained a higher degree of artistic accomplishment in the present day, as the heir to the cultural legacy of the West. This passage thus suggests a progressive view of cultural history in which Britain becomes the crowning achievement of human civilization. The passage implies, therefore, the possibility of cultural translation through the progressive teleological narrative of history, similar to the idea of culture gradually moving from the East to the West.¹¹⁹ British culture, the narrator suggests, can both supersede ancient cultures through its own unique character, and encompass their great legacy through translation. Despite this triumphant declaration, however, the address to the muse concludes with the narrator’s despair:

Great Muse, thou know’st what prison,
 Of flesh and bone, curbs, and confines, and frets
 Our spirit’s wings: despondency besets
 Our pillows; and the fresh to-morrow morn

¹¹⁹ In *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, Hegel claims, “[w]orld history travels from east to west; for Europe is the absolute end of history, just as Asia is the beginning” (197).

Seems to give forth its light in very scorn
 Of our dull, uninspired, snail-paced lives.
 Long have I said, how happy he who thrives
 To thee! But then I thought on poets gone,
 And could not pray:—nor can I now—so on
 I move to the end in lowliness of heart.—— (4.20-29)

The narrator's confinement in his bodily prison expresses the division between the earthly real and the spiritual ideal. The memory of the greatness of past poets, rather than serving as inspiration, becomes an insurmountable obstacle to the poet-narrator's creative communion with the muse of his native land. The movement to the end is one of despondency due to the poet-narrator's tragic knowledge of his incapability of writing a conclusion which will satisfactorily achieve the cultural translation toward which the poem strives. The poem's inability to portray this promised conclusion stems from the tension between, on the one hand, its nationalist aesthetics, through which it claims the ability to translate ancient Greek culture by means of the progress of literary history (which we can associate with Schelling's theory of a seamless translation as described by Derrida); and, on the other hand, its engagement, through the form of romance, with the erotics of translation as the striving to attain (comm)union with an otherness it can never fully penetrate (Berman's theory of translation as an encounter with the foreign).

Another way in which Keats draws attention to *Endymion's* status as an act of cultural translation is through alluding to other English poems in the literary tradition even as his poem deals with ancient Greek characters, setting, and subject matter. The addresses to the muse which I have discussed above recall the invocations in *Paradise Lost* (1.1-26; 3.1-55; 7.1-39; 9.1-47). Furthermore, Keats's use of the phrase "wandering

steps” (3.108) echoes the famous final lines of *Paradise Lost*.¹²⁰ More generally speaking, it seems to me that the errancy of books three and four in particular exhibits the influence of *The Faerie Queene*.¹²¹ *Endymion*’s continual deferral of the “narrative” through random encounters, such as the procession and court of Neptune (3.766-1018), is reminiscent of the frequent disregard for temporal linearity found in Spenser’s more sprawling poem—for example when Florimell is locked up in a dungeon by Proteus for resisting his sexual advances in canto eight of book three (41.6-43.9), to be left languishing by the narrator until she is finally freed at the command of Neptune in canto twelve of book four (31.1-33.9), 821 Spenserian stanzas later.¹²² There is clearly a tension of sorts between Keats’s desire to touch “the beautiful mythology of Greece” through the composition of a poem which tells a mythological story in an ancient Greek setting (Preface 103), and his allusion to poems of the English literary tradition which were written after the time in which his poem is set. By exhibiting so clearly the influence of prior great English poets, Keats foregrounds *Endymion*’s status as an English poem which treats with ancient Greek subject matter in an alien literary tradition and idiom. Just as Shelley’s “Discourse” exposed the limits of cultural translation by conceptualizing ancient Greek sexuality in terms of the ideological idiom of Shelley’s society, so does *Endymion* demonstrate an awareness of the fact that the process of literary composition can never escape the cultural and historical context in which it takes

¹²⁰ “They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow, / Through Eden took their solitary way” (12.648-49).

¹²¹ In a letter to Taylor and Hessey of 16 May 1817 (1.145-46), Keats describes his composition of *Endymion* in heroic terms, with numerous allusions to *The Faerie Queene*.

¹²² It is also worth noting, in light of the importance of the Renaissance epyllia which I have discussed above, that a number of scholars have shown that *The Faerie Queene* engages extensively with Ovid (e.g. Lyne 80-141).

place, and thus always involves a certain degree of distortion in its attempt at cultural translation.

Endymion's errant parallels with *The Faerie Queene* dovetail with the poem's idiosyncratic form, which can be read as a staging of the incessant striving of desire in its attempt at cultural translation. The poem's subtitle, *A Poetic Romance*, also points toward this tendency, for as Geraldine Heng writes, "[r]omance must be defined by the structure of desire which powers its narrative" (qtd. in Heyworth 10).¹²³ Romance inscribes this desire within its own structure because it is, as Parker notes, "a form which simultaneously quests for and postpones a particular end," which is often a "posited Other" (4). Keats himself seemed to demonstrate an awareness of the narrative errancy of *Endymion*'s romantic mode, and its connection to an aesthetic of desire rather than completion. In the original preface he writes, "[b]efore I began I had no inward feel of being able to finish; and as I proceeded my steps were all uncertain. So this Poem must rather be consider'd as an endeavour than a thing accomplish'd" (739).¹²⁴ The poem's status as an endeavour is reflected in its wandering movement, in which Endymion proceeds through various locales and encounters a number of characters, mostly mythological. The poem contains no fewer than three prophecies foretelling Endymion's eventual union with Cynthia: those of the Naiad (2.121-29), Cynthia herself (2.806-14), and Venus (3.906-16). All these prophecies stress the fact that Endymion will be united

¹²³ Heyworth argues, "[e]xistential estrangement is the structuring motive of romance desire. Romance's narrative method is to create situations of estrangement that feed a vexed desire whose by-product is an art of loneliness and its consolations. It learns this technique from Ovid" (10).

¹²⁴ In the published version of the preface this was revised to, "the reader . . . must soon perceive great inexperience, immaturity, and every error denoting a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished" (102).

with Cynthia, but at some time in the future rather than immediately. Yet the poem does not explain precisely why this union must be deferred. While an account of the poem as a traditional quest narrative might view Endymion as having set out on a journey and having to overcome obstacles and prove himself in order to win Cynthia—for in book one he declares to his sister Peona that he sets out on a “pilgrimage for the world’s dusky brink” (977)—such a reading seems untenable given the nature of the seemingly random, phantasmagoric series of scenes in which Endymion often appears quite passive. Indeed, *Endymion* generally seems to offer none of the kind of narrative development necessary to support a quest-motif reading, leading Parker to claim that the poem “raises the question of whether all sense of ‘progress’ in this kind of romance is simply an illusion” (179).¹²⁵ Hence it turns out that fulfilment is deferred in order to provide the very occasion for the writing of the poem itself. The deferral of consummation, which symbolizes the union of the real and the ideal which is supposed to be performed by ancient Greek art, is the very condition of possibility for Keats’s composition of Hellenizing poetry. Or, to put this differently, the reason why the poem’s narrative seems so strange is because the poem does not serve to tell the ‘narrative,’ but rather the ‘narrative’ (that is, the continual deferral of consummation) exists so that the poem itself can be written. The writing of poetry is thus aligned with the striving of desire, which, as in the *Symposium*, is always directed toward what is lacking. *Endymion*’s form, a combination of errant romance and erotic mythological narrative, shows how Hellenizing poetry attempts cultural translation through the staging of the aesthetic of desire.

¹²⁵ Dickstein makes a similar claim, arguing that *Endymion*’s form as a “‘Region’ . . . makes successiveness an illusion” (94).

While *Endymion*'s bizarre form seems to suggest a certain jouissance in its spectacular failure, it is important not to forget the degree of anguish that goes along with it. "[T]here is not a fiercer hell than the failure in a great object" (102), Keats writes in his preface, reminding us that as impossible as its fulfillment might be, the desire to know ancient Greece through cultural translation was real and urgent, and the erotic narrative's staging of its failure is disappointing and traumatic. Keats's published preface also demonstrates an awareness of the degree of desecration involved in the attempt at cultural translation through the writing of a Hellenizing work: "I hope I have not in too late a day touched the beautiful mythology of Greece, and dulled its brightness: for I wish to try once more, before I bid it farewell" (103). Keats expresses the fear that his belatedness as heir to the great cultural tradition of Western literature renders him incapable of doing justice to his inherited subject matter. The poem is an attempt to address the problem of Keats's own position as a budding modern poet heir to this great tradition, and particularly as one who has not received the benefit of a full classical education. The anxiety is that by coming into contact with this Hellenic material, Keats risks sullyng it through his very efforts to access it; by touching it he dulls its brightness. While not nearly as violent as the representations of desecration in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and in Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, this fear of dulling the brightness of Greece is of no small significance, for it forms part of Keats's own admission that his treatment risks a distortion of ancient Greek culture which robs it of its beauty through the very attempt to know and to represent it. Although Keats phrases this modestly in the negative form ("I hope I have not"), his other claims in the preface that the poem is incomplete and unsalvageable demonstrate his awareness that his attempt at cultural translation has not

only failed but may even have violated his Hellenic subject matter.¹²⁶ Keats's phrase carries an awareness of the fact that for the modern poet, to touch Greece is to sully it, to dull its brightness. There can be no translation without trespass and desecration of the sacred ground of ancient Greek culture, just as for Bataille there can be no eroticism without violation.

Endymion reinforces its status as a poetic failure through its conclusion, which, having been deferred for so long, delivers not a satisfying sense of closure but a bathetic anticlimax. After Endymion finds himself by chance returned to his native locale with the Indian maid, and has been reunited with his sister Peona, the Indian maid reveals herself as Cynthia and says,

“Drear, drear
Has our delaying been; but foolish fear
Withheld me first; and then decrees of fate;
And then 'twas fit that from this mortal state
Thou shouldst, my love, by some unlook'd for change
Be spiritualiz'd.” (4.988-93)

After this pronouncement, the two kiss Peona goodbye, Endymion kneels before Cynthia, takes her hands, and the two of them kiss and vanish. This bizarre ending has all the suddenness and artificiality of a *deus ex machina*, yet is preceded by no instigating crisis to be resolved. Cynthia appears not in response to circumstances having come to a head in a difficult situation, but apparently simply because Keats's four thousand lines have been completed. Because the union between Endymion and Cynthia represents the union of the real and the ideal within ancient Greek culture, the Hellenizing work's portrayal of

¹²⁶ Keats's “I hope I have not” thus carries the same sense as the “I hope” one says when one asks for an inconvenient favour and, after it has been granted, says, belatedly, “I hope I'm not imposing.” It is not so much a sincere hope as a doomed wish, and the sense it carries is less a statement about the speaker's true desires than an apology to the addressee.

such a union is supposed to enact the function of ancient Greek art even as it represents ancient Greek subject matter.¹²⁷ The perfunctory and unsatisfactory nature of the poem's ending dramatizes the poem's own failure to perform its act of cultural translation through embodying the union of the real and the ideal as ancient Greek art is supposed to do. The most the poem is capable of doing, Keats seemed to realize, is *claiming* its resolution through the union of Endymion and Cynthia, rather than portraying that actual union itself. Endymion's foretold apotheosis and union with Cynthia is only pointed toward through their sudden disappearance. This moment of vanishing beyond sight, beyond the scope of the poem's language and narrative, figures the impossibility of representing an actualized union of the real and the ideal in the modern Hellenizing work, for it demonstrates that the closest the poem can get is to defer the union indefinitely such that the only possible resolution exists in the *contemplation* of the union in the reader's imagination. The ending of *Endymion* repeats in a finer tone Winckelmann's claim at the end of his *History* that the aesthetic potentiality of ancient Greek art consists in the fact that we can glimpse only a "shadowy outline" (*Schattenriß*) rather than the fully realized actuality (351; 393).

The poem's inability to achieve its promised ending springs from the contradictions at the heart of its aesthetic project, which reflects conflicting attitudes toward translation. As I mentioned above, the narrator several times makes the claim for

¹²⁷ Letitia Landon's poem *The Lost Pleiad* (1829) is similar in this respect; it too attempts to perform the function of ancient Greek art by figuring the union of the real and the ideal through the pairing of a mortal/divine couple. *The Lost Pleiad*'s narrative forms something of an inversion of the plot of *Endymion*: where *Endymion* is (ostensibly) about the ascent of a mortal man to become the lover of a heavenly goddess, *The Lost Pleiad* is about the descent of a heavenly maiden, Cyrene, to become the beloved of a mortal man, the somewhat disillusioned and Byronic prince Cyris. After Cyrene descends to unite with her lover, Cyris soon tires of her and abandons her, causing her to fade away and perish.

a special connection between British culture and ancient Greek culture, and thus presents the poem as a culmination in the course of this literary tradition. The erotic narrative of the *Endymion* myth serves, in this model, as the shared form which would allow the poem to deploy the aesthetic potentiality of ancient Greek art through translation even as it becomes the crowning achievement of literary history—and this shares affinity with the notion of seamless translation Derrida attributes to Schelling. On the other hand, the erotic narrative, as articulated through the form of romance, allows for an exploration of the irreducible otherness of ancient Greek culture, which becomes the object the poem is directed toward yet continually defers. This more perverse element of the poem's erotic narrative, by which it seems to exhibit a distrust of function and a kind of purposiveness without purpose, evokes Berman's notion of translation as the encounter with a foreign otherness that cannot be subsumed. In this context, Endymion's return at the end of the poem to his native locale is perfectly appropriate, given how Berman claims that translation ultimately aims, after going out to encounter the foreign, "*to return to its point of departure*" (46)—a return which the poem describes even as it marks it (contra Berman) as insufficient. The poem's grand aspirations toward translation, as demonstrated in its invocations, are incompatible with the complexities of translation highlighted by its web of relationships with other texts, of which its direct allusions are only the most obvious manifestation. As its ending demonstrates, the poem remains caught between its desire for a seamless cultural translation and its awareness of the impossibility of achieving it.

Yet despite the necessity—indeed, the appropriateness—of *Endymion*'s ending, this very ending also constitutes the deconstruction of the poem, through the exposure of

the futility and the failure of its sincere attempt at the cultural translation of ancient Greece through the medium of the erotic narrative. The union of Endymion and Cynthia has been the very point toward which the poem has ostensibly been leading, as the repeated prophecies have made clear. The unsatisfactory and anticlimactic ending, which jettisons all hope for a real conclusion or resolution, is necessarily jarring and disappointing, perhaps even alienating, for many readers. In failing to deliver on the promise which has been so frequently deferred even as it has been reiterated, *Endymion* strikingly exposes its own status as a poetic failure, to which Keats had alluded in the poem's preface. The impossibility of sexual fulfillment mirrors the impossibility of textual fulfillment, and the poem becomes the record of the impossibility of its own writing of Greece: "[a] hope beyond the shadow of a dream" (1.857).¹²⁸

3.5 Keats's *Lamia*: Rape and the Bidirectionality of Aesthetic Violence

Romantic mythological poems share certain theoretical preoccupations which illuminate the intersection between Hellenism and sexuality in Romantic aesthetics. As Tilottama Rajan writes, such poems "deal with the search for a love beyond mortality and with the desire for escape from the present into a mythic or imaginary space" (*Dark Interpreter* 99). Both these quests evoke the motif of translation as the process which allows for the movement between the opposed realms of the mortal and the divine, the

¹²⁸ Keats echoes *Hamlet*:

Ham. O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself a king of infinite space—were it not that I have bad dreams.

Guil. Which dreams indeed are ambition, for the very substance of the ambitious is merely the shadow of a dream. (2.2.253-59)

present and the mythic. The erotic narrative stages the process by which poetic language engages with the dynamic tension created by such opposed categories in the attempt to move from one to the other. In both *Endymion* and *Lamia*, eros is the striving force which attempts to mediate between the two realms and to allow for the translation of ancient Greek culture into a Romantic poem. *Lamia*, like *Endymion*, attempts to perform cultural translation through the medium of the erotic narrative, only to stage *eo ipso* the failure of cultural translation. *Lamia* takes this project in darker and more disturbing directions, however. The perversity of *Endymion* centers primarily on the wandering of the poem's romance form, which continually displaces and defers the poem's textual and sexual desire for Greece. The perversity of *Lamia*, in contrast, appears more explicitly in the mismatched coupling between Lycius and the eponymous mythological snake-woman, which inflects translation with elements of violence and fears of cultural contamination. The more chaste and spiritualized eroticism of the earlier poem, which can be read as an attempt to sublimate physical sexuality through the ascent toward the ideal realm, now appears as a refusal on Keats's part to confront the issues that *Lamia* raises. By evoking the notion of a deficiency within the self as part of the motivation for the desire for translation, and by exposing the bidirectionality of translation as involving what Berman calls "a tinge of the violence of cross-breeding" (4), *Lamia* exposes Hellenism's deeper cultural anxieties, toward which *Endymion* only gestures.

Lamia begins with a frame that situates its events in the distant past, emphasizing the gap between the reader's present day and the mythological realm of ancient Greece, which the poem will attempt to bridge. The narrator begins part one with the following temporal clause:

Upon a time, before the faery broods
 Drove Nymph and Satyr from the prosperous woods,
 Before King Oberon's bright diadem,
 Sceptre, and mantle, clasp'd with dewy gem,
 Frighted away the Dryads and the Fauns
 From rushes green, and brakes, and cowslip'd lawns (1.1-7)

This passage portrays the evolution from the classical mythological creatures of ancient Greece to those of the European middle ages and Renaissance. In so doing, it describes culture in terms of the supernatural powers which inhabit the landscape. Although Oberon, the king of the faeries, appears in a number of sources, the most salient intertext in Keats's English context is Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which has particular relevance because it involves entanglements between supernatural beings and mortals, and plots of erotic desire fueled by enchantment—in addition to the theme of magical transformation when Puck gives Bottom an ass's head (3.1.101-25). This passage asserts a certain degree of historical continuity between classical Greece and modern Greece, in terms of the landscape, while also suggesting that a cultural shift has taken place with respect to folk mythology, which creates an obstacle that must be overcome. The indirect recollection of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* highlights the modern cultural context of the English literary tradition. The “Dryads” and “Fauns,” the passage suggests, readers can see only in relation to the changes which have since taken place. The poem's opening thus asserts a certain continuity between the culture of Greece and the culture of Britain, with regard to the literary representation of erotic entanglements between supernatural powers and mortals, while also emphasizing the temporal gap between the two. In performing this double movement, the narrator sets out a space in which the poem presents itself as attempting to overcome these obstacles by means of cultural translation through the medium of the erotic narrative along with the operation of the imagination.

Lamia also expresses the tension involved in the aesthetic of desire, which at the same time wishes to know both the beloved and the cultural other through the act of possession which would despoil them, and also wishes for them to remain pure and virgin—unknown and mysterious. The following description of *Lamia* conveys this paradox:

A virgin purest lipp'd, yet in the lore
 Of love deep learned to the red heart's core:
 Not one hour old, yet of sciential brain
 To unperplex bliss from its neighbour pain;
 Define their pettish limits, and estrange
 Their points of contact, and swift counterchange;
 Intrigue with the specious chaos, and dispart
 Its most ambiguous atoms with sure art;
 As though in Cupid's college she had spent
 Sweet days a lovely graduate, still unshent,
 And kept his rosy terms in idle languishment. (1.189-99)

In order to make *Lamia* at once knowable and desirable, the narrator must describe her in contradictory terms: as an experienced virgin, a virgin seductress.¹²⁹ The narrator further highlights the impossibility of this paradoxical combination by claiming that *Lamia* has the ability to “[t]o unperplex bliss from its neighbour pain.” The entanglement of pain and pleasure is a commonplace in Keats, and in the context of the aesthetics of Romantic Hellenism this trope expresses not only the connection between pleasure and pain on a physiological and affective level (the level of the individual’s own sensual experience), but also the connection—theorized by Bataille—between consummation and violation in the realm of the erotic. The narrator’s description of *Lamia* as a woman whose nature promises to allow Lycius to eat his cake and have it too demonstrates how the passionate

¹²⁹ Berman notes, “Herder . . . compared a language that has not yet been translated to a young virgin” (4).

longing for knowledge of the other/beloved through cultural translation dooms itself to failure by its own nature even as it strives insistently toward its desired object.

Through its repeated figurations of rape, the poem emphasizes the element of desecration or violation involved in the attempt to know the cultural other. In the description of Lamia early in the poem the narrator alludes to “Proserpine” (1.63), who was raped (carried off) by Hades while gathering flowers in a field in her youth.¹³⁰ This allusion to the rape of Persephone signals the poem’s engagement with the issue of coercion involved in the process of seduction, which the poem figures as involving bidirectional violation, or a sort of two-way rape.¹³¹ Lamia takes the initiative in this process, by abducting Lycius with her magical charms and deception. Through this reversal of gender roles, the poem emphasizes the instability in the directionality of power in erotic relationships—and by extension in the relationships between cultures, which, as postcolonial scholars such as Homi Bhabha have shown, involve much more complex dynamics than the unilateral assertion of the power of the colonizer over the colonized.¹³² Lamia seems, to a certain extent, to violate Lycius by ensnaring him under her spell and deceiving him. The narrator emphasizes the coercive sexual power of Lamia’s magical charms by describing her as possessing a “Circean head” (1.115),

¹³⁰ The story is told in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* (4-20). Keats may also have had in mind Milton’s allusion to the myth in *Paradise Lost* 4.268-72.

¹³¹ Although the legal definition of rape in Keats’s time was rather narrow, and not at all in accordance with our present-day notions of sexual consent (see Clark 21-45, 59-75; Constantine 1-92), literary texts represented wider ranges of coercive sexuality as expressions of power and violation, and thus suggest a more expansive conception of rape than that adopted by the courts (cf. Constantine 8, on Fielding and Richardson). For the suggestion of thinking about seduction as involving a sort of two-way rape I am indebted to Tilottama Rajan (personal correspondence).

¹³² See, for example, his discussion of hybridity. Through readings of *Heart of Darkness* and the *Missionary Register*, Bhabha shows how representations of the English book in colonial settings expose the inherent instabilities involved in cultural contact between colonizer and colonized: “colonial domination is achieved through a process of disavowal that denies . . . its dislocatory presence” (111).

alluding to the enchantress in the *Odyssey* who lured Odysseus' sailors into a feast to turn them into captive swine (10.208-43), as well as recalling Glaucon's story of being seduced by Circe in *Endymion* (3.407-601). Lamia's motives seem mostly selfish, for she wishes to seduce Lycius for her own pleasure, apparently without any concern for his long-term wellbeing. At the same time, Lycius himself is no struggling, suffering victim. Indeed, he seems to enjoy, even to welcome, the violation that he becomes subject to in being thus deceived and put under Lamia's spell.¹³³ He appears an all-too-willing victim of Lamia's charms.

To complicate matters further, Lamia, on her part, while taking on the active role in the seduction process by making the first move in pursuing Lycius, nevertheless seems to experience violation herself in the process of transformation she undergoes in order to seduce him:

She writh'd about, convuls'd with scarlet pain:
 A deep volcanian yellow took the place
 Of all her milder-mooned body's grace;
 And, as the lava ravishes the mead,
 Spoilt all her silver mail, and golden brede;
 Made gloom of all her frecklings, streaks and bars,
 Eclips'd her crescents, and lick'd up her stars:
 So that, in moments few, she was undrest
 Of all her sapphires, greens, and amethyst,
 And rubious-argent: of all these bereft,
 Nothing but pain and ugliness were left. (1.154-64)

The narrator describes Lamia's experience of transformation as a rape in which she suffers great pain in the course of the desecration that destroys her beauty (n. especially the words "ravishes," "[s]poilt," and "undrest"). In order for the mythical creature Lamia

¹³³ Cf. Greene: "Seduction is a form of deception, but people want to be led astray, they yearn to be seduced. If they didn't, seducers would not find so many willing victims" (xxiv).

to unite with Lycius, even temporarily, she must undergo a traumatic process of translation which is figured as a rape despite the fact that she undertakes it of her own free will. This process of translating the mythical into human form is analogous to the process of materializing the ideal in order to make it accessible for the real. In such a process certain qualities which are indispensable to the ideal's existence *qua* ideal are necessarily annihilated. In associating the attempt at cultural translation with a traumatic rape, *Lamia* shows that the element of violation involved on the part of the seducer does not necessarily (contrary to our present-day understandings of sexual violation) take place contrary to her consent. For Lamia suffers this rape of her own free will, and accomplishes it by her own endeavour, according to her own desire. Lycius, in contrast, does not experience physical violation, but is violated to the extent that he is seduced coercively by means of Lamia's trickery. While Lycius really does desire Lamia, he does so under deceitful pretences. Both Lamia and Lycius suffer violation in the course of their erotic relationship, and this dual figuration of rape emphasizes the violence involved in its attempt at cultural translation. In portraying a degree of violation occurring to both parties in the course of their erotic relationship, *Lamia* shows that the violence involved in cultural translation is not unidirectional but can work both ways.

Like Freudian dreamwork, the poem is overdetermined, for it represents early on another instance of a rape in which a powerful supernatural being pursues a lesser being whose consent is rendered ambiguous by circumstances. Lamia, we may recall, is transformed into a woman by Hermes, in exchange for abjuring her spell in order to reveal to him the beautiful nymph with whom he is enamoured. The narrator describes the subsequent encounter between Hermes and the nymph as follows:

upon the nymph his eyes he bent
 Full of adoring tears and blandishment,
 And towards her stept: she, like a moon in wane,
 Faded before him, cower'd, nor could restrain
 Her fearful sobs, self-folding like a flower
 That faints into itself at evening hour:
 But the God fostering her chilled hand,
 She felt the warmth, her eyelids open'd bland,
 And, like new flowers at morning song of bees,
 Bloom'd, and gave up her honey to the lees.
 Into the green-recessed woods they flew;
 Nor grew they pale, as mortal lovers do. (1.134-45)

After her magical concealment has been stripped away, the nymph initially reacts with terror in the face of Hermes' sexual advances. The simile in which the narrator compares her to a flower folding into itself suggests her fear of being violated (deflowered). After Hermes takes her hand, however, the nymph responds by enthusiastically reciprocating his sexual desire, and it seems fairly clear that the two have sex and elope together happily. Given the power dynamic involved here, it does not seem that the nymph has much of a choice. This episode exposes the gap between modern conceptions of sexuality and those of Greek mythology. Part of the function of this episode is to evoke a mythological Hellenic ethos in which sexuality may be expressed free of the puritanical moral constraints of Keats's contemporary Christian culture. Like the narrator's Greek island in Shelley's *Epipsychidion*, the world of *Lamia* provides an imaginary space in which the free expression of sexuality is not merely permitted but in fact becomes constitutive of the cultural milieu. Bound up with the poem's attempt at cultural translation is its representation of the sexual practices of ancient Greek mythology, which differ markedly from those of the culture of Keats's contemporary readers. Yet another function of this episode is to problematize further the conception of will in relation to desire. Hermes and Lamia are both prisoners to their desire for their beloveds even

though they are the sexual aggressors.¹³⁴ Therefore, the poem expresses anxiety over the vulnerability involved in the desire for cultural translation, for such desire involves a certain abnegation of one's own culture in favour of the effort to know another culture, which necessarily implies a degree of subservience because it acknowledges that the lover is not completely self-sufficient. As Berman writes,

The very aim of translation—to open up in writing a certain relation with the Other, to fertilize what is one's Own through the mediation of what is Foreign—is diametrically opposed to the ethnocentric structure of every culture, that species of narcissism by which every society wants to be a pure and unadulterated Whole.
(4)

In other words, the desire for cultural translation in the first place exposes a lack in one's own culture which is the basis of the eros directed toward the other culture. Therefore, despite the fact that cultural translation is often figured as a violent rape or desecration of the object of desire, the lack which inspires it undercuts the translator's position of power.

The poem figures the failure of cultural translation, in part, through the failure of Lycius to unite with Lamia in marriage. Like *Endymion* and *The Lost Pleiad*, *Lamia* stages the failure of the erotic narrative to unite the mortal with the divine, the real with the ideal. Whereas in *The Lost Pleiad* this failure resulted from Cyrene's descent to the sublunary realm such that she no longer existed in her divine, distant form, and thus was no longer desired by Cyris (i.e., Cyris's lack of desire for the ideal as it has been transformed in order to be made accessible to him), in *Lamia* the failure results from Lycius's attempt to move from private desire to public realization (i.e., his excess of

¹³⁴ Cf. Greene, who argues that pleasure is “a feeling . . . of being overwhelmed” and is used by seducers to manipulate those they seduce, while at the same time seducers “train themselves to be sensitive to pleasure,” and experience a similar vulnerability (xxiii).

desire for the illusory ideal as it has been transformed in order to be desired by him). The erotic relationship between Lamia and Lycius is only sustainable in the private realm of illusion and enthrallment, not in the clarity of the social and public sphere, because it is rooted in longing rather than actualization. Lycius's desire to pin down Lamia, to make permanent their erotic relationship through a contractual agreement, is ultimately misguided and self-defeating, for it is inimical to the transgressive mode of desire by which they relate to one another.

Through the confrontation between Apollonius and Lamia at the poem's conclusion, Keats demonstrates the incompatibility of fully realized knowledge with the aesthetic of desire, which thrives on mystery. When Apollonius directs his ruthlessly truth-seeking gaze upon Lamia, the narrator says,

Do not all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
...
Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine—
Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made
The tender-person'd Lamia melt into a shade. (2.229-38)

The conception of "philosophy" expressed in these lines differs quite sharply from Shelley's notion of philosophy, as influenced by Plato's *Symposium*. In the latter, philosophy is associated with eros because it mediates between the mortal and the divine, ignorance and knowledge. Philosophy, like desire, consists in being directed toward and striving toward that which it lacks. In Keats's conception of philosophy in these lines, however, philosophy is associated with the mastery of attaining possession of the object, and is thus antithetical to such desire because of how it desecrates the mysterious purity of the beloved other. Apollonius does not so much dispel the ideal *qua* ideal, however, as

the misguided *belief in the possibility of the complete success of cultural translation*. He shows that the nature of the ideal, the beautiful and mysterious cultural other, is such that it cannot be married with the real. The attempt to translate the mode of the relationship between Lycius and Lamia from private infatuation to public consummation can only result in a traumatic failure, concluding with Lycius's death after Lamia vanishes:

And Lycius' arms were empty of delight,
As were his limbs of life, from that same night.
On the high couch he lay!—his friends came round—
Supported him—no pulse, or breath they found,
And, in its marriage robe, the heavy body wound. (2.307-11)

This ending forms something of an inversion of the conclusion of *Endymion*, in which the vanishing of the mortal/divine couple creates an anticlimactic deferral of the union between real and ideal, and thus exposes the impossibility of the poem's attaining the conclusion which is its (ostensible) aim. In *Lamia*, Keats represents the failure to unify real and ideal, and thus translate ancient Greek culture through the medium of the erotic narrative, in the form of tragic extinction rather than bathetic anticlimax. Lycius's body being wrapped in his marriage robe, which ought to have been a symbol of life and reproduction, seems ironic at first glance. On closer examination, however, this macabre image appears more appropriate, given the link between the consummation of marriage (involving sexual intercourse and orgasm) and death (cf. also the common end-rhyme "womb" "tomb," which occurs in the plural in *Endymion* 1.786-87). As Bataille notes, eroticism involves the longing to substitute continuity for discontinuity, and the ultimate form of continuity consists in the dissolution of the boundaries between the subject and the external material world which takes place upon death. The graphic pun on "wound," in this context 'wrapped' but also silently evoking the noun *wound* (injury), demonstrates

the profound trauma which results from the poem's staging of the failure of its attempt at cultural translation.

A number of illuminating treatments of *Lamia* have understood the poem as concerned with the relationship between art and illusion (e.g. Rajan, *Dark Interpreter* 115-29). In particular, one might say that a common approach to reading the poem focuses on its ambivalence concerning the priority of illusion versus reality, dream versus flesh (concerns shared by, for example, Keats's *The Eve of St. Agnes*). By highlighting the poem's concern with ancient Greek culture in the context of Romantic Hellenism, I have emphasized another level of the poem on which it engages self-reflexively with the nature of art. When we read the poem as an attempt to translate ancient Greek culture through the medium of the erotic narrative, only to stage through that attempt the traumatic failure which results from the impossibility of cultural translation, we develop a more nuanced understanding of the poem's ambivalence, which is rooted in the paradoxical relationship between eros and aesthetics. By repeatedly figuring different instances of rape and seduction, *Lamia* problematizes modern notions of consent and confuses the directionality of the operation of power in the sexual violence involved in the attempt to translate the cultural other and thus to "know" it aesthetically and sexually. The tragic pessimism of the poem's ending, in which the desire to realize sexually and aesthetically the translation of the cultural other results only in death, dovetails with what I called Nietzsche's perverse cultural fatalism in chapter one. In *Lamia* Keats portrays the desire for cultural translation not only as traumatic and futile but ultimately as irresistible and self-destructive, a form of aesthetic suicide.

3.6 Shelley's *Epipsychidion*: The Intellectual Erotics of Translation

In my introduction I cited *Epipsychidion* as an example of an autonarrative Hellenizing work which figures Greece through Shelley's social relationships. Here I want to explore further the implications of the poem's erotic elements, in order to demonstrate how the intersection between Greece and the speaker's courtship of Emilia mobilizes the speaker's desire for an unattainable translation of the cultural other. By entangling the speaker's erotic desire for Emilia and his desire for Greece, Shelley shows how all desire is rooted in the longing for the overcoming of difference through unity—or, in Bataille's terms, the erotic consists in the wish to substitute continuity for discontinuity. Erotic desire is aligned with cultural translation because both are mediators between the speaker and his object(s) of desire: Emilia and Greece. *Epipsychidion* presents itself as an attempt to translate Emilia into the speaker's idyllic vision (through both its lush fantasies and its status as an act of rhetoric), as well as to translate Greece itself into the speaker's intellectual and material possession. Even as the poem expresses a profound longing and heroic effort in its attempt(s) at cultural translation, it also shows how the impossibility of fully achieving that object results from the theoretical contradictions in both eros and Hellenism itself.

In his "Discourse" Shelley had attempted cultural translation through the public form of the prefatory essay directed toward a wide audience. The cultural context in which his audience was situated necessarily imposed upon the text significant constraints, which are visible in Shelley's evasive approach to the issue of anal sex between men. The essay presents the homoeroticism of ancient Greek culture as sympathetic only through defining it in terms of a purely intellectual understanding of romantic relationships—

though this approach may very well be in line with certain readings of Plato.

Epipsychidion, in contrast, takes up the erotics of translation in a more private space, both through its frame as a second-person address to Emilia, and through its coded allegorical elements (which would be comprehensible only to a small circle of cognoscenti).

Whereas the project of cultural translation in “A Discourse” was to present ancient Greek erotic practices in a sympathetic light to a broad public, translation in *Epipsychidion* strives for the realization of the potentiality of Greece in the inner, (inter)personal realm of the relationship between the speaker and Emilia. The poem’s status as translation in part has to do with its transgression against the bounds of sexual morality in Shelley’s culture. Greece becomes part of the engagement with alternative erotic practices of free love. While *Epipsychidion* does not charge the erotic with the same element of transgression as we find in *Lamia*, there is indeed a kind of threat of violation evoked by the address from a (re)married English expatriate to an Italian virgin confined by her father in a convent in preparation for marriage—and indeed Shelley published the poem with a disingenuous “Advertisement” which disavowed the scandalous circumstances of its biographical origin, by presenting it as the work of an anonymous and deceased “unfortunate friend” (130). While *Epipsychidion* does not as explicitly evoke the violence and deception involved in seduction as does *Lamia*, it nevertheless presents itself as an act of rhetoric which strives to penetrate the defences surrounding the young virgin and to lead her away. In line with the parallel between Emilia and Greece, there is a transgressive and illicit element to the speaker’s own desire for the realization of Hellenism, which embodies a disturbing implicit speculation: ‘what if Greece is something that we really aren’t supposed to know?’ By transposing the engagement with

Greece and the feminine other into this personal realm, *Epipsychidion* dwells with the psychological dynamics of erotic desire more sustainedly than do third-person erotic narratives such as *Endymion* and *Lamia*. In so doing, *Epipsychidion* reveals that the paradoxes which both inspire and frustrate the translation of Greece as other do not result merely from the dynamics of the relationships between cultures, but rather—as suggested by Plato and Bataille—from the nature of eros itself as a defining characteristic of human beings.

Epipsychidion undertakes multiple levels of translation that reveal new dimensions of the role which cultural translation plays in relation to erotic narratives in Romantic Hellenism. Whereas *Lamia*, *Endymion*, and *The Lost Pleiad* are all explicitly Hellenizing works which directly represent ancient Greek subject matter, and thus attempt to perform cultural translation through the writing of ancient Greek erotic narratives, *Epipsychidion* takes the form of an impassioned address to Emilia, and thus eschews a narrative of ancient Greek subject matter in favour of the rhetorical situation of speaker and addressee.¹³⁵ In doing so, the poem figures the desire for cultural translation as more personal and immediate, as bound up with the speaker's impassioned affect. This personalization of eros derives from the idea of the individual human being's inherent desire for what Diotima in the *Symposium* calls "generation and production in the beautiful" (*The Banquet* 445). The several forms of translation attempted by *Epipsychidion* are as follows: 1) The attempt to "translate" the erotic relationship between the speaker (a Shelley figure) and Emilia (a Teresa Viviani figure) into a poetic

¹³⁵ The Shelleys and Claire nicknamed Theresa "Emilia" after the character in Boccaccio's *Teseida*, better known by most English readers as Emily from "The Knight's Tale" in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

idiom expressing Socrates' view of eros in Plato's *Symposium*. In other words, the poem attempts to translate a fictionalized social dynamic into the model provided by Plato's ancient Greek philosophy. This translation also encompasses elements of lifewriting and thus autonarration, as I mentioned in my introduction. The speaker rereads and rewrites his own life through his interpretation of Plato's *Symposium*. *Epipsychidion* thus tries to perform the same function as eros itself, by acting as an intermediary between the real of the Shelley-speaker's life and the ideal of Plato's philosophy. It is at once an act of autonarrative lifewriting and a deeply personal gloss on the *Symposium* itself. 2) The attempt to 'translate' the relationship between the speaker and the addressee into the locale of the modern Greek island which is so idyllically described. Greece, as a place of sexual liberty and free love, is figured as both a physical space free from outsiders and prying eyes, as well as an ideological space free from the prejudices and constraints of early nineteenth-century European restrictions on sexuality. 3) The attempt to 'translate' the addressee into the physical space of the island by convincing her through the poem's act of rhetoric to elope with him there. Of course, this act of rhetoric is part of the poem's "subjunctive mood of desire" (Rajan, *Dark Interpreter* 24) and thus somewhat tongue-in-cheek with regard to more literal understandings of the speaker figure. 4) Lastly, the attempt, similar to the other poems, to achieve the supposed function of ancient Greek art by performing the role of eros itself as a mediator between the real and the ideal. In this way, *Epipsychidion*, like the other poems, stages the failure of cultural translation through the impossibility of its realization of its dramatization of eros. In other words, through the very act of its rhetorical attempt at achieving a realization of its desire for Emilia/Greece (the poem equates the female beloved with Greece more closely than any

other poem I discuss in this chapter), *Epipsychidion* exposes the fantastic nature of this desire and the absurdity of its realization. The poem encompasses an awareness of the fact that the beauty of its vision, like the beauty of Greece itself, depends upon its never being actualized, for it has its being on the level of potentiality and desire.

“Emilia” in the poem functions not only as an index of the historical Teresa Viviani, but also as a representation of the object of desire according to Plato’s *Symposium*, what Socrates (quoting Diotima) defines as “generation and production in the beautiful” (*The Banquet* 445; 206e). Emilia is at once a flesh-and-blood woman and the unattainable Hellenized knowledge of the beautiful itself (τὸ καλόν). Shelley represents Emilia, like eros according to Diotima, in between these two registers of the mortal and the immortal, the earthly and the divine, the real and the ideal. The mortal Teresa attains her significance as a form through which the speaker attempts to access this higher realm of beauty, much like Diotima’s description of the ascent from physical to intellectual beauty (qtd. above). For example, near the opening of the poem the speaker addresses Emilia as follows:

Seraph of Heaven! too gentle to be human,
Veiling beneath that radiant form of Woman
All that is insupportable in thee
Of light, and love, and immortality! (21-24)

The veil is, of course, a common image in Shelley which exhibits his fascination with what can be glimpsed but never seen fully or directly, and thus retains an occult and mysterious significance. It is important to note here how Shelley’s use of the verbal word form, “[v]eiling,” shows that this in-between space—between the oppositions seen/unseen, determinate/indeterminate, known/unknown—consists in a continual

process of unfurling/upfurling rather than a fixed state.¹³⁶ In this sense, eros in *Epipsychidion* is not unlike the fragment, which hovers between finitude and infinity, manifold and unity, as I argued in chapter two. The veiling of the ideal within Emilia is both an action which hides it from sight, yet also sequesters it within her form and thus imparts to it the mode of being which calls out for the speaker to access it. In other words, the very process by which she becomes the site of the ideal is also the process by which the ideal is hidden from sight. This paradox reflects the affinity between the representation of the desired beloved and ancient Greek culture itself. Both are able to manifest only in ways which obscure them from complete knowledge, because their very mysteriousness is constitutive of their aesthetic potentiality. It is also important to note that the very ideals which are veiled are those which are necessarily “insupportable” by Emilia. One of the problems this passage grapples with is how the real is unable to live up to or sustain the ideal, yet nevertheless somehow provides a sort of obscure access to it—much like how the veil conceals the form behind it while also revealing the outlines of its contour.¹³⁷ Through these lines about her veiling, this passage portrays Emilia as a figure, like eros itself in the *Symposium*, for the mediation between the real and the ideal through the process of translation. Emilia becomes the point through which the speaker’s

¹³⁶ I refer to a famous crux in “Mont Blanc,” where Shelley writes, “Has some unknown omnipotence unfurled / The veil of life and death?” (53-54). Based on the sense in the context, some commentators believe that the passage refers to the act of the covering of the veil (as would be expected given the literal sense of “unfurled”), while others think that the verb ought to refer to the removal of the veil—and some of the latter accordingly support James Thomson in emending to “upfurling” (Hall 212 n. 27).

¹³⁷ It is worth noting two more salient points regarding the veil. First of all, veils were often worn by women in ancient Greece (Llewellyn-Jones 251), so the veil is an element of exotic dress which emphasizes the otherness of ancient Greek culture. Secondly, the way in which the veil outlines the contours of the face also recalls the hanging, flowing garments of ancient Greek dress, and in particular the artistic technique of ‘diaphanous drapery’ common in Greek statues of female figures who were depicted as clothed. Shelley uses the word *veil* frequently throughout the poem (e.g. see below).

experience of reality, his human eros, strives to ascend to the experience of divinely-directed eros toward the beautiful itself—just as the speaker’s representation of Emilia attempts a translation of the idea of eros as it is set out in the *Symposium*. Emilia and Greece are both objects of desire which participate in the beautiful, and translation is the process by which the speaker attempts to know them.

The manner in which the speaker portrays Emilia as a mediator between the real and the ideal is also evident in the following bizarre description, which warrants quoting at length:

In her mild lights the starry spirits dance,
 The sunbeams of those wells which ever leap
 Under the lightnings of the soul—too deep
 For the brief fathom-line of thought or sense.
 The glory of her being, issuing thence,
 Stains the dead, blank, cold air with a warm shade
 Of unentangled intermixture, made
 By Love, of light and motion: one intense
 Diffusion, one serene Omnipresence,
 Whose flowing outlines mingle in their flowing
 Around her cheeks and utmost fingers, glowing
 With the unintermitted blood, which there
 Quivers, (as in a fleece of snow-like air
 The crimson pulse of living morning quiver,)
 Continuously prolonged, and ending never,
 Till they are lost, and in that Beauty furled
 Which penetrates and clasps and fills the world;
 Scarce visible from extreme loveliness. (87-104)

This passage begins with a description of Emilia’s eyes, stressing their role as the interface between the outer world of sensuous experience and the inner world of the human soul. The woman’s eyes are fascinating because they seem to promise access to her interiority (as the proverbial ‘window to the soul’) even as they deny it through their unfathomable depth. The eye is at once fully transparent and utterly opaque, and thus serves as an overdetermined echo of the image of the veil I have discussed above. Instead

of allowing the speaker access to her, her eyes project outward upon the world and impart to it vital beauty, demonstrating the influence of human perception upon material reality and thus the reciprocal interrelationship of real and ideal which is mediated by eros.¹³⁸

The lush synaesthetic imagery and sprawling syntax of this passage, which sweeps the reader into the intensely beautiful description even as it works to resist the fixity of complete comprehension, reflects the speaker's tumultuous consciousness as he loses himself in his beloved's eyes. This passage grapples with the paradox of how "Beauty" (probably evoking Plato's τὸ καλόν) in the form of the ideal engages with the material world of the senses. Just as the "light and motion" of the glory of Emilia's being become paradoxically an "unentangled intermixture," so does Beauty both "fill[]" and "clasp[]" "the world" at once. Such paradoxes are modes of characterizing how eros, like cultural translation, strives to mediate between the real and the ideal, the earthly and the divine.

Yet the speaker is not content with mediation alone—he longs for possession and union. *Epipsychidion* intertwines the speaker's desire to unite with Emilia with the lovers' imagined union with the Greek island. The desire for the Greek landscape, which *Grecian Prospects*, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, and *Modern Greece* describe as possessing a vital aesthetic potentiality though its fragmentation, is here explicitly eroticized such that the desire for cultural translation becomes entangled with the desire to know the Greek landscape sensually and sexually:

And from the sea there rise, and from the sky
There fall, clear exhalations, soft and bright,
Veil after veil, each hiding some delight,
Which Sun or Moon or zephyr draw aside,

¹³⁸ The idea that the eyes projected beams outward in order to see was common in the ancient world, e.g. Plato, *Timaeus* 45b-46c.

Till the isle's beauty, like a naked bride
 Glowing at once with love and loveliness,
 Blushes and trembles at its own excess. (470-76)

The comparison of the beauty of the Greek island to a “naked bride” sexualizes the aesthetic and intellectual desire for Greek culture. The bride’s assumed chastity imbues her with purity and mysteriousness even as she is portrayed as blushing helpless in the throes of desire on the threshold of consummation and ravishment. The description of “[v]eil after veil” being “draw[n] aside,” in addition to providing an overdetermined echo of the veil image I discussed above, recalls the famous passage from *Defence of Poetry* in which Shelley writes, “[a]ll high poetry is infinite . . . [v]eil after veil may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed” (528). The speaker’s fantasy of the undrawing of veil after veil to reveal the island’s beauty demonstrates his desire for complete possession, which is figured as the act of sexual intercourse—the desire, in Bataille’s terms, to substitute continuity for discontinuity.

Accordingly, the speaker represents Love, the union of the real and the ideal, as the dissolution of subject and object, subject and the surrounding world (reminiscent of orgasm and mystical experiences), in a manner which aligns the possession of the Greek isle with the possession of Emilia:

Possessing and possessed by all that is
 Within that calm circumference of bliss,
 And by each other, till to love and live
 Be one. (549-52)

In this perfect unity the act of loving and the process of being become inseparably entangled with one another. The speaker, island, and Emilia become so entwined through the homogenization of *bios* and *eros* that their identities dissolve into a perfect unity, dramatizing the experience of orgasm and lending a mystical dimension to the poem’s

eroticized aesthetic of Greece. By thus describing the unity between the lovers and the landscape, however, these lines represent a state which is devoid of the absence in which eros itself is rooted. Complete fulfillment is incompatible with the individual subjectivity that is a function of human identity and knowledge itself as conceptualized by Western metaphysics beginning with Plato. In other words, the desire to translate so successfully such that the distinctions dissolve between speaker and beloved, present-day poet and Greece, would result in the destruction of the difference in which that desire is rooted, through the creation of an artificial unity. This passage therefore not only exposes such an idealized union as a fantasy, but also shows that the attainment of such a union would negate the motivation for the desire for cultural translation in the first place. This passage is in fact antithetical to eros as conceived in Plato's *Symposium* and as conceptualized by Shelley, which is always a mediator *in between* the real and the ideal, the lover and the (necessarily absent) object of desire. In eliminating all the veils between lover, beloved, and the island, such consummation would destroy the aesthetic potentiality of the island, for it radically contradicts Shelley's insistence that in the case of true Poetry, "the inmost naked beauty of the meaning" can never be exposed. The passage represents consummation itself as that which is antithetical to the nature of eros, and thus highlights the dynamic tension at work in the desire for cultural translation, which aims for the complete efficacy described in Derrida's reading of Schelling, even as it comes up against the limitations described by Berman.

Although fragmentation is not my primary concern with *Epipsychidion*, it is worth pointing out that the poem engages with the dynamic I analyzed in my second chapter. In the first place, Shelley's "Advertisement" presents the poem as incomplete, claiming that

it “appears to have been intended by the Writer as the dedication to some longer one” (129). Shelley thus frames *Epipsychidion* not as a self-contained, finished work, but as only the entry point to a greater project which remains absent and will never be completed. In addition to its self-proclaimed status as a fragment, the poem also portrays the beauty of the Greek island as intertwined with its fragmentation: “It is an isle under Ionian skies, / Beautiful as a wreck of Paradise” (422-23), Shelley writes. The reference to the sky recalls Winckelmann’s comment near the beginning of *Reflections* that links the Greek sky to the achievements of ancient Greek art and culture.¹³⁹ This simile comparing the beauty of the Greek island to “a wreck of Paradise” warrants discussion in depth. The word *wreck* derives from the Anglo-Norman *wrec*, which is cognate with Old Norse *wrek*, which derives from the verb *wrekan* ‘to drive’ (OED). Thus, in its literal meaning “wreck” refers to “[t]hat which is cast ashore by the sea in tidal waters; esp. goods or cargo as thrown on land by the sea from a wrecked, stranded, or foundered vessel” (OED I.1). Therefore, the literal meaning of the word suggests that Paradise has somehow been “wrecked,” that is, driven to the shores of the isle which is compared to its beauty. Of course, *wreck* also refers more broadly to a broken-down or ruined object. It may at first seem curious that the poem, which elsewhere idealizes the island to an absurd degree (e.g., it is immune to “Famine or Blight, / Pestilence, War and Earthquake” [461-62]), would compare its beauty to that of a wreck of Paradise rather than directly comparing it to Paradise itself. Shelley emphasizes the wreck of Paradise because Paradise itself cannot be conceptualized. The beauty of the ancient Greek isle consists in part in the fact that it is not fully complete without the lover and his beloved; it remains

¹³⁹ Shelley read Winckelmann’s *History* “in a French translation in the winter of 1818-1819” (Brown 19).

unfinished, for its social, intellectual, aesthetic, and sexual potentiality have yet to be tapped by the speaker and Emilia. In comparing the island's beauty to a wreck of paradise, the speaker suggests that paradise itself is incomplete without eros. The island requires the erotic and aesthetic human element to supplement its natural beauty; and the island's potentiality consists in longing which is incompatible with perfection. Paradise is always already perfectly realized and lacks potentiality because it does not cry out for further completion.

On the other hand, the poem's over-the-top descriptions expose the fact that the idyllic Greek isle is too perfect to exist in actuality:

It is a favoured place. Famine or Blight,
Pestilence, War and Earthquake, never light
Upon its mountain-peaks; blind vultures, they
Sail onward far upon their fatal way:
The wingèd storms, chanting their thunder-psalm
To other lands, leave azure chasms of calm
Over this isle, or weep themselves in dew,
From which its fields and woods ever renew
Their green and golden immortality. (461-69)

Shelley's speaker assimilates the ancient idea of the Golden Age to a present-day Greek island, claiming for the landscape an idyllic mode of existence unassailed by the vicissitudes of earthly life. Nature on the island is so perfect as to become itself unnatural. This passage, by showing that the Greek isle is incapable of existing in reality, exposes the fact that it can only ever be an imaginative, ideal projection of Greece toward which the speaker's desire is directed—and which the speaker employs in part as an overblown rhetorical ploy in his pitch to Emilia.¹⁴⁰ In other words, the aesthetic

¹⁴⁰ *Epipsychidion* thus participates in the English literary tradition of pastoral love lyrics, the most famous of which is Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love."

potentiality of the Greek isle consists in its otherworldly perfection and therefore its unattainability: the fact that one can never arrive at it, possess it, or become united with it as the speaker desires. In this too the isle is like Emilia herself as the poem describes her: an unattainable perfection which is based in material actuality on a certain level (i.e. there really are Greek islands just as there really is a [historical] Teresa Viviani), yet which is (re)written through the desire of the speaker's imagination such that it becomes an unattainable ideal even as the poem insists upon its material actuality. The poem thus figures desire as that which strives, through the act of cultural translation, toward the attempt to know and to possess sensually and sexually both Emilia and the Greek island, the beloved and Greece.

Shelley emphasizes the impossibility of this desire's consummation by describing the two lovers as "ever still / Burning, yet ever inconsumable" (578-79). This inconsumability reflects the inability to consummate the relationship and desecrate the beloved through possessing her. The fact that eros is ever-burning both secures its continual existence as a passion directed toward what it lacks, as well as the vital energy which animates the aesthetic potentiality of the desired object even as it inflicts traumatic suffering upon the speaker due to his inability to fulfill his impassioned longing. Burning produces light and beauty even as it inflicts pain, destruction, and suffering. That the flames are inconsumable shows how desire can never attain its object, and thus is continually inspired by the lack of that object. Keats in *Endymion* expresses a similar desire dynamic in terms of appetite, when Endymion says, "so delicious is the unsating food" (1.816).

Epipsychidion, unlike the other poems I have examined in this chapter, not only figures explicitly the failure of its attempt at cultural translation, but also eroticizes that failure and thus assimilates it to the operation of the aesthetic of desire:

One hope within two wills, one will beneath
 Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,
 One Heaven, one Hell, one immortality,
 And one annihilation. Woe is me!
 The wingèd words on which my soul would pierce
 Into the height of love's rare Universe,
 Are chains of lead around its flight of fire.—
 I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire! (584-91)

The insistent anaphora of “one” is a cry for the speaker’s unity with both Emilia and Greece: a union with sexual, intellectual, and aesthetic dimensions. The poem, as I have shown, represents this unity as the point toward which cultural translation strives. Successful translation is the only means by which the speaker might attain this perfect unity, which, like the union of the real and the ideal, resolves the tension between opposed contraries: life and death, Heaven and Hell.¹⁴¹ The speaker describes the means of achieving cultural translation and attaining this unity as a phallic penetration of his spirit into the feminized and eroticized “Universe” of love, a penetration which would enact possession and domination along with desecration of the desired object. Furthermore, the act of striving to know this universe through cultural translation itself depends upon the deployment of the literary tradition of ancient Greek culture, for Shelley’s phrase “wingèd words” translates the Homeric phrase ἔπεα πτερόεντα, which is a very common poetic formula (e.g. *Iliad* 1.201). Paradoxically, the very act of the process of reading and rewriting eros through ancient Greek literature—an act which

¹⁴¹ Cf. the discussion of Heaven and Hell as “Contraries” in Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (plate 4).

is necessary to accomplish the cultural translation required for the attainment of unity—is at the same time the act which causes the spectacular failure of this impassioned project (for the “wingèd words” become “chains of lead”). Furthermore, this failure is itself imbued with an erotic charge, for the last line of this passage evokes the speaker’s orgasm. One might say, then, that the poem eroticizes the attempt at a cultural translation of Greece through sexual and intellectual possession only to figure the result of this attempt as a premature ejaculation—recalling the passage in “A Discourse” where Shelley argues that the truly impassioned *erastes* would not need to perform anal intercourse with his *eromenos* in order to reach orgasm. This premature ejaculation evokes both pleasure and disappointment, emotional abandonment and failure, striving and failing to attain knowledge through cultural translation. In doing so, it maintains the mysteriousness and unattainability of Emilia and Greece and allows for the continual operation of desire to preserve the aesthetic potentiality of these objects of eros.

By articulating the link between sexuality and cultural translation through a first-person speaker’s impassioned address to his beloved, *Epipsychidion* dramatizes the operation of Romantic Hellenism’s aesthetic of desire with its evocation of a strong affective charge. The poem’s technical virtuosity, evident most strikingly in its combination of beautiful imagery with the cascading flow of open couplets, brings to bear the full repertoire of English poetic language in its attempt to translate the speaker’s relationship with Emilia into the idiom of the philosophy of Plato’s *Symposium*, and thus to translate at the same time the philosophy of the *Symposium* into a concrete example for a select audience of English readers. The poem’s attempt, to mediate like eros itself between these two realms of the real and the ideal, stretches its language to the breaking

point, such that it becomes a striking example of the intersection between eros and Hellenism by virtue of its spectacular failure. More than any other poem I have discussed in this chapter, *Epipsychidion* lays bare the fact that the erotic desire for cultural translation “is chiefly to be felt” as “an impotent, quivering yearning” (Bataille 19).

3.7 Conclusion

By now it should be clear that Romantic Hellenism’s intersection with sexuality, like its intersection with fragmentation, is no mere coincidence but rather a constitutive element of its aesthetics. Taking its cue from Plato’s *Symposium*, Shelley’s “Discourse” situated sexuality at the heart of ancient Greek culture and as, paradoxically, both the medium and the object of cultural translation. In highlighting the importance of ancient Greek sexuality Shelley draws attention to the gap between ancient Greek culture and that of Romantic-period Britain, even as he attempts to bridge it with his explanation. He thus provides the theoretical background through which to understand the array of bizarre poems which treat sexuality together with ancient Greek subject matter. Each of the poems I have examined in this chapter self-consciously undertakes the project of the translation of ancient Greek culture through the production of a modern literary work, and each in its overdetermination parallels its representations of sexual desire for the beloved with the aesthetic desire for ancient Greek culture. Both forms of eros are integral to the poems’ aesthetic effects, and both are rooted in lack and in striving to mediate between irreconcilable poles. At the same time, the dark side of eros, illuminated by Bataille, equates possession with desecration and rape, with the annihilation of the object of desire toward which it strives. This element of violence or coercion in erotic

desire forms a cornerstone of the intersection between sexuality and aesthetics in Romanticism. Cultural translation, these works suggest, can be achieved with a certain degree of efficacy but can never be fully successful, and thus can never satisfy the extent of one's intellectual and aesthetic desire—just as the fragment can never be understood. Cultural translation becomes, like the very eros which drives it, at most a mediator between the ancient and the modern, the past and the present.

Chapter 4

4 “All in a mingled heap confus’d”: Mythology and the Hellenic Ideal

The central question with respect to mythology is the question of meaning. But the meaning of *mythology* can only be the meaning of the *process* by which it emerges into being.

(Schelling, *Historical-critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* 135)

In a well-known passage of the fourth act of *Prometheus Unbound*, the Earth links language to mythology as a way of structuring the chaotic mass of human experience:

Language is a perpetual Orphic song,
Which rules with daedal harmony a throng
Of thoughts and forms, which else senseless and shapeless were. (415-17)

In this model, language operates in the manner of a mythological system to impose the necessary order required for human cognition. Its description as an “Orphic song” suggests a certain degree of magic in addition to symphonic harmony. The interconnection between thought and form, sense and shape, demonstrates how the process by which human beings understand reality is theorized as a kind of structure. Language and myth both function as human means of conceptualizing the world aesthetically, recalling Shelley’s claim in the *Defence* that “Poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted” (515).¹⁴² On the other hand, this triumphant vision of the power of language and myth points to its own antithesis,¹⁴³ revealed in the

¹⁴² Cf. F. Schlegel: “mythology and poetry are one and inseparable” (“Talk on Mythology” 82).

¹⁴³ Shelley considers the limitations of language in the fragmentary skeptical essay “On Life”: “How vain is it to think that words can penetrate the mystery of our being. Rightly used they may make evident [only] our ignorance to ourselves” (506); “[w]e are on that verge where words abandon us” (508).

darker images of the *Defence of Poetry*, where it seems an unpredictable, inconceptualizable power beyond human control and understanding.¹⁴⁴

Like language, the Romantic conception of myth often involves a triumphant transcendence but remains haunted by dark and chaotic underpinnings. In this chapter I explore the Romantic fascination with ancient Greek myth from the perspective of Romantic Hellenism, while bringing to bear the context of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century scholarship on mythology. I show that during this period mythology became an important area of inquiry, and that many of the mythologists theorized an essential connection between Greek mythology and ancient Greek culture. Consequently, the explanation or understanding of Greek mythology becomes part of the project of the cultural translation of ancient Greece, as I showed was the case for eros and sexuality above. Mythology, like ancient Greek art according to Winckelmann and his followers, was itself seen as emblematic of the entanglement of the real and the ideal within the ancient Greek worldview, and as expressing its own kind of conceptual and aesthetic order. At the same time, mythology remained in many respects elusive, chaotic, heterogeneous—in containing aspects beyond scholarly understanding it was incomplete and mysterious, not reclaimable or comprehensible. Mythology embodies already its own fragmentation through the incompleteness of extant sources and the contradictions between different traditions. Romantic views of mythology thus exhibit a tension between myth as a harmonic, systematic whole and myth as a heterogeneous mass of

¹⁴⁴ E.g., Tilottama Rajan points out that the Gothic seems to haunt the Romantic throughout Shelley's corpus, for example in the *Defence* when the image of devouring food is used both as a disparaging description of the literary culture of the Restoration and as a valorizing characterization of the nourishment of thought by poetry ("The Work of the Negative" 15-16).

chaotic, fragmented materials. At the same time, the deep psychological resonance of Greek mythology rendered it ideal subject matter for the creation of original poetic works, for the connection to myth acted as a means of grounding the work by linking it to the authority of ancient Greek culture. Mythology becomes both the locus of ancient Greek culture, and a fragmented and mysterious space in which the modern poet can work with a degree of free play. In this context I undertake readings of Keats's Hyperion poems and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, arguing that such Hellenizing mythological poems operate by staging their own failures at arranging the fragments of Greek mythology into coherent systems, in an act which is at once a reading and a rewriting of ancient Greek culture.

A number of literary scholars have examined the topic of mythology in relation to British Romantic poetry, and their work provides a useful context for my analysis. Arguing for a historicist form of myth criticism, Anthony Harding's book *The Reception of Myth in English Romanticism* charts the different uses of myth by various authors. His study has the merit of pointing out how in the intellectual climate of the Romantic period myth became a rich site of contestation which various authors approached at cross-purposes. Although his study provides useful examinations of particular uses of myth, its discussion remains episodic and does not provide an overall argument about the significance of myth in the Romantic period. What unites the book is really his methodology rather than his argument, and the book serves best, as Harding admits, "more as a way of suggesting and demonstrating an approach" (22). The value of Harding's study lies in how he directs 'myth criticism' more toward the study of the various uses and reinterpretations of myth (rather than the identification and explanation

of ahistorical archetypes in the vein of Frye), and thus emphasizes mythology's heterogeneity.

Douglas Bush and Suzanne Barnett point out that for some Romantics the fascination with myth involved the championing of certain forms of irrational affect contra the dispassionate rationality one might associate with some currents of Enlightenment thought.¹⁴⁵ Other scholars have shown how pagan mythological material provided an alternative mode of expression for Romantic authors who wished to explore pressing ethical and metaphysical issues while dissatisfied with the worldview of mainstream Christianity.¹⁴⁶ I differ from the above scholars in that I emphasize in my discussion the dark elements of myth which are strikingly illuminated by Nietzsche. Rather than understanding the Romantic conception of Greek mythology as entirely positive, an idealized model which serves to subvert the oppressive political and religious ideologies of the early nineteenth century, I emphasize elements such as lack, death, violence, madness, and rape. These dark, negative elements exist both in tension and in tandem with myth's positive and idealized tendencies, and contribute to the discord in mythology between order and chaos. In addition to my emphasis on the darker elements of mythology, my investigation takes a different direction in its consideration of myth.

¹⁴⁵ Bush writes, "[t]he revival of Greek myth in Europe generally was an integral part of the Romantic reaction against a rationalistic and mechanistic view of the world and man" (xi). Barnett argues, "[t]he Shelley circle embraced a specifically pagan ancient world of excess, joy, and ecstatic experiences that test the boundaries between self and other. . . . and frequently employed mythology and imagery from the classical world that was characterized not by philosophy and reason (as it was for many of their eighteenth-century predecessors) but by wildness, excess, and ecstatic experiences, decidedly un-Christian (even anti-Christian) and subversive applications. (iv)

¹⁴⁶ Evert makes this claim of Keats (13-14). See also Priestman, who writes, this *modus vivendi* between Christianity and paganism, which underwrites much poetry from the Renaissance on, could be put under great strain when the high ground was suspected to be empty, as it was by many in the "Romantic" period between about 1780 and 1830. Under these circumstances the "allegorical" classical deities take on a new weight again, as the forces they represent claim renewed autonomy from the single guiding agency of the Christian God. (45)

The work of the scholars I have cited above is concerned mainly with the examination of the nature of the affinity between Romanticism and myth: they seek to answer the question, “what purpose does mythology serve?” This chapter enriches our understanding of mythology by theorizing in a more sustained manner the aesthetic significance of Greek mythology in the context of Romantic Hellenism. Rather than viewing mythology primarily as a tool which Romantic poets employed, I examine it as an issue in its own right, as a problem with which they grappled. In addition to its expression of excess and its subversion of Christianity, the Romantic deployment of mythology exhibits self-reflexive and meta-poetic tendencies in the manner in which it engages with the aesthetic potentiality of Hellenic material, while demonstrating an awareness of cultural otherness. Part of the attractiveness of mythology lay in the fact that it did not present a ready-made unified system of thought but rather evoked a living tradition which existed as part of the dynamic processes of reading and rewriting.

4.1 Romantic-Era Mythologists

Scholars of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries demonstrated an increasing preoccupation with mythology. One of the most pressing concerns was to explain the origin of mythology, and various studies attempted to trace its beginnings, either to the degeneration of an originary monotheism, or to the allegorizing personification of elements of the natural world.¹⁴⁷ A number of syncretizing Christian

¹⁴⁷ Studies in the former camp include Jacob Bryant’s *New System, or An Analysis of Ancient Mythology* (3 vols., 1775-1776) and George Stanley Faber’s *Dissertation on the Mysteries of the Cabiri* (2 vols., 1803). Works in the latter camp include Charles Dupuis’s *L’Origine de tous les cultes* (12 vols., 1795) and its more accessible single-volume authorial abridgement (1798), as well as Richard Payne Knight’s *Inquiry into the Symbolical Language of Ancient Art and Mythology* (1818).

mythologists conceptualized the significance of mythology as being encompassed by a historical and theoretical account of how it came about, and they often argued that mythology was somehow distorted or corrupt rather than being ‘true’ in and of itself. The allegorizing naturalist accounts could be either thoroughly skeptical, treating all myth as essentially delusive (e.g. Hume’s *Natural History of Religion* [1757]), or sympathetic to the mythological ethos as embodying a certain validity as the expression of the human experience of the world (Dupuis, Knight). Spurred on by the British colonization of India and the increasing knowledge of Sanskrit, comparative mythologists such as Sir William Jones traced similar structures between various pagan mythological pantheons, such as those of the Greeks, the Norse, the Indians, and the Egyptians. The study of Indian religion was of particular importance because it allowed mythographical work to engage with polytheistic mythology in the form of a still-living tradition, rather than relegating the field to the examination of the antiquated relics of dead languages and vanished cultures. All this debate shows that scholars in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries considered mythology as a serious area of inquiry in its own right, for the manner in which mythology was conceptualized carried significant implications both for the understanding of particular cultures and for the understanding of human nature.

Here I wish to stress the growing tendency in early nineteenth-century scholarship to view Greek mythology as reflective of the Greek cultural world-view, and thus worthy of study in its own right, both for the knowledge it can reveal about human nature, and for the access it can provide to ancient Greek culture and thought. Like sexuality, as I showed in chapter three, mythology served as a portal of sorts into ancient Greek culture, and thus as an object of study in the process of cultural translation. Like sexuality,

Romantic Hellenism deploys mythology as both an object of study and as a medium through which cultural translation can take place. Indeed, the frequent overlap between Hellenizing narratives dealing with sexuality and mythological subject matter, evident in poems such as *Endymion* and *Lamia*, is no coincidence. Whereas the poems I examined in chapter three were concerned with eros and often featured relationships between mortal and divine characters, this chapter takes a different perspective by analyzing Romantic Hellenizing poems which deal nearly exclusively with divine characters. Thus, my treatment of mythology in this chapter does not include the full range of narratives one might classify as ‘mythological’, such as those which feature predominantly the actions of mortal characters such as heroes (e.g. the Labours of Hercules, Theseus and the Minotaur, the Rape of Philomel). Although confining my study to works dealing primarily with divine characters might seem to some to reflect an unnecessarily limited conception of ‘myth’, it is quite appropriate for a certain Romantic conception of ‘mythology’ as concerned with the pantheon of polytheistic deities. As Friedrich Schelling claims in his 1842 lectures on the philosophy of mythology, mythology deals with its own kind of world, “one standing, to be sure, in multiple relation with the common order of things and of human existence, yet essentially split off from it and proper to itself: *the world of the gods*,” so “mythology is in general the *system of the gods* [Götterlehre]” (*Historical-critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology* 9).¹⁴⁸ It is

¹⁴⁸ Although these lectures took place in 1842, and thus after the traditional bounds of the Romantic period which inform my study, they nevertheless provide a useful lens through which to read earlier works.

with this notion of a kind of ‘system’, ‘teaching’, or ‘doctrine’ of the Gods,¹⁴⁹ what Schelling calls a *Götterlehre*, that I am particularly concerned.

Many Romantic-era scholars argued for an essential connection between the nature of Greek mythology and the ancient Greek cultural worldview, such that the study and understanding of mythology might provide a point of access to ancient Greek culture. Dovetailing with the argument I made in my first chapter, one of the most commonly reiterated views was the notion that Greek mythology sprang from a worldview in which the physical and the spiritual were entangled with one another. For example, Karl Philipp Moritz describes myth as a place “where the realm of imagination and actuality border each other most closely” (266), Creuzer explains myth by writing that “[t]he primitive world . . . that grasped all with naive and direct thought, was still unacquainted with the separation between the corporeal and spiritual so familiar to us” (394), and Coleridge, probably following Creuzer, writes that myth is “a *synthesis* of poesy and philosophy, characteristic of the childhood of nations” (351). Such claims seem to exhibit a patronizing view of myth by explaining it as somehow primitive, beginning before the mind of man had developed the capability for abstraction. According to this sort of view, the form of myth is, as Coleridge writes, “in the form of the vehicle of the truth, an accommodation to the then childhood of the human race” (351). Furthermore, the mythologists often claim that other earlier primitive nations exhibited similar tendencies, but that the Greeks were exceptional and thus developed their mythology in the highest

¹⁴⁹ Schelling’s translators Richey and Zisselsberger discuss these various possible translations. They also note that *Götterlehre* might under some circumstances even be translated as ‘mythology’, but that such a translation would not suit the work “because Schelling employs the word *Mythologie* as the general term designating the topic of [the] lectures” (190 n. 8).

artistic way due to their natural talents.¹⁵⁰ Schelling, on the other hand, argues for a much deeper essential connection between myth and culture, claiming that “[t]he mythology of a people is bound up with its life and essence” (45), and writing,

Now I ask you, however, if the Hellene is still the Hellene, the Egyptian still the Egyptian, if we take away his mythology. Thus he has neither adopted his mythology from others nor created it himself *after* he was a Hellene or Egyptian; he first become a Greek or Egyptian *with* this mythology, when this mythology became his. . . . If it is impossible that the mythology of a people emerges into being from out of or within one that is already present, then nothing else remains except that it emerges with it simultaneously, as *its* individual popular consciousness, with which the people steps forth from out of the general consciousness of mankind and by virtue of which it is just this people and separated from every other no less than it is through its language. (49)

For Schelling, mythology, like language, is a constitutive element of particular peoples, such that neither the mythology nor the people itself can be imagined as having existed apart from the other. This entanglement of mythology with culture imbues it with a much deeper significance than a merely incidental and idiosyncratic system of beliefs adopted by a people through historical contingency. For Schelling, mythology expresses certain essential truths because the emergence of mythology is bound up with the evolution of human religious consciousness. It is the idea of this deeper, more essential connection between mythology and ancient Greek culture that I suggest provides the impetus for the composition of Hellenizing mythological poems which focus on the system of the gods.

Although the syncretic theorizing of comparative mythology provides an important context for the consideration of Romantic mythological poems, the

¹⁵⁰ E.g., Coleridge also argues that the Greeks were approaching manhood, and thus their mythology had only the form of poetry, but the substance of philosophy. Knight asserts that while the mythology of all cultures shares “the same simple principles and fanciful superstructures,” that of the Greeks has been elevated due to the “superiority . . . of the Greek language, and the more exalted genius and refined taste of the early Greek poets” (3).

engagement with Greek mythology in the context of Romantic Hellenism imbued ancient Greek myth with a special significance of its own. In *The Deities of Samothrace* (1815) Schelling argues against the theory, advanced by some comparative mythologists, that Egyptian and Indian mythologies are closer to the original source(s) than Greek mythology. For Schelling, the enduring resonance of Greek mythology reflects its greater proximity to mystical religious truth:

If the Pelasgians, that prehistoric people from whom all Greek power and mastery appears to have come, had received the fundamental conceptions in a form already obscured rather than in natural innocence and freshness, then, however highly we might estimate the lively intelligence of the Greeks, these conceptions could never have unfolded in such unalloyed beauty, never preserved so truly, so guilelessly, so untrammelled in play, those profounder connections the secret magic [*geheimer Zauber*] of which still strikes even us when we allow the divine figures to hold sway before us in their full poetic and artistic independence. (26; 739)

In this passage it is already evident that for Schelling—as he will make more explicit in his later lectures on mythology—Greek myth preserves fundamental elements of human religious consciousness which continue to resonate with modern readers. The aesthetic appeal of ancient Greek myth serves as a guarantor of its privileged ancient origin—its beauty, like Shelley’s veil in *Epipsychidion* and elsewhere (see ch. 3 above), both conceals and reveals an inner truth and thus lends it a sort of obscure, mystical quality which elicits further interrogation.

In my first chapter I examined Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy* as a late evolution of Romantic aesthetic theory in which the nature of art was defined through the examination of the relationship between the real and the ideal vis-à-vis ancient Greek culture. I associated the dark ungraspable truth of the Dionysian with the real and the shining order of the Apollonian with the ideal. Here it is important to note that Nietzsche, unlike the

other thinkers I discussed in the first chapter, characterizes ancient Greek art and culture in explicitly mythological terms drawn from Greek religion itself. Greek mythology, Nietzsche suggests, contains already within itself, in the figures of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, the symbols of the originary drives of human nature in which all culture and art are rooted. It is thus possible to read *The Birth of Tragedy* as a theory of mythology-as-culture, according to which dark and ungraspable underlying drives (the Dionysian) are continually in dynamic tension with systematizing impulses of beautiful harmony (the Apollonian). In suggesting that mythology provides a deeper access to fundamental elements of human culture as manifested in the ancient Greeks, Nietzsche can also be seen as following in the footsteps of Romantic-period thinkers like Schelling who argued for an essential connection between mythology and ancient Greek culture. Furthermore, Nietzsche, like many Romantic-period mythologists, did not view his work as having provided definitive answers to the question of what he called, in his subsequently written “Attempt at Self-Criticism” prefaced to the 1886 edition, the “*Greek problem*” (10), which he described as “the problem *that* there is a problem here—and that the Greeks, as long as we have no answer to the question ‘what is Dionysian?’ still remain completely unknown and unimaginable” (6). Greek mythology—in particular, according to Nietzsche, the issue of the element of madness in Greek culture evident in the Dionysian—remains a problem because we have yet to conceptualize it in a satisfactory way.

Nietzsche’s work thus reflects the tension in Romantic responses to mythology between the desire to resolve this chaos into a systematic order (e.g. Bryant, Faber), and the valorization of this chaos as a dynamic source of aesthetic energy (e.g. Schelling,

Friedrich Schlegel). The tension between system and fragmentation in mythology can be attributed, according to Schelling, to an inherent bias of human beings as scholars. In *The Deities of Samothrace*, Schelling critiques the Neoplatonic theories of emanation as explanations of Greek mythology, writing,

Naturally the sensible researcher has the inclination so far as possible to comprehend everything human in a humane way; therefore in researching the ancient mythology it is natural to seek a means whereby the multiplicity of divine natures may be harmonized with the humanly necessary and indelible idea of the unity of god. (23)

The drive toward unity, evident also in some syncretic Christian mythologists such as Bryant and Faber, is according to Schelling largely a product of researchers' desire to reconcile the facts of ancient polytheism with their own Christian monotheistic worldview. Underlying this desire was the impulse to read and to write Greek religion as part of the foundation of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western culture. With its multiplicity of conflicting narratives and warring deities, ancient Greek polytheism challenges the narrative of the cultural continuity of the West, for it gestures toward the cultural relativism of religious consciousness and thus unsettles the universalism of monotheistic theology. Along these lines, Schelling argues that ancient mythology resists being subsumed into Neoplatonic interpretations:

But it is neither suitable and clear in itself to represent the diverse gods as merely emanations of One into them, as a primal power propagating itself into diverse rays; nor can its indeterminateness and boundlessness be compatible as well with the determinateness and sharpness of the outlines of every individual form, as also with the limited number of these forms. (23)

Ancient polytheism poses a problem because it embodies an alien worldview which cannot be assimilated into a Christian metaphysics. Efforts at systematizing ancient Greek myth are often the result of a failure to accept and to account for its inherent

cultural otherness, which troubles the Christian West by frustrating any straightforward identification of itself with ancient Greece.

A number of mythologists advanced theories to explain the constitutive characteristics of Greek myth. In accordance with the argument I made in my first chapter, one of the ways in which ancient Greek myth was said to reflect a particular cultural worldview was through its entanglement of the real and the ideal. In his *Introduction to a Scientific System of Mythology* (1825), Karl Otfried Müller writes that “the Ideal is often so closely interwoven, so inseparably connected with the Real, that the mythus must have evidently owed its first existence to their union and reciprocal fusion” (49).¹⁵¹ In other words, according to Müller, mythology does not operate mechanically in the manner of an allegorical code, in which characters and events are designed to represent certain preconceived, non-mythological ideas on the part of the mythmaker(s)—a theory propounded by Erasmus Darwin, among others.¹⁵² Instead, mythology is a sort of language or form of expression in its own right, such that at the myth’s very origin the entanglement of the real and the ideal forms a constitutive part of its operation *qua* myth. Greek mythology forms an essential part of ancient Greek culture

¹⁵¹ Cf. Hegel, who cites statues of the Greek gods as an example of the complete unity of spiritual meaning and concrete material which is the defining characteristic of Classical art:

Meaning and sensuous representation, inner and outer, matter and form, are in that event no longer distinct from one another . . . [they are] *one* whole in which the appearance has no other essence, the essence no other appearance, outside or alongside itself. What is to be manifested and what is manifested are lifted into a concrete unity. In this sense the Greek gods, in so far as Greek art represents them as free, inherently and independently self-sufficient individuals, are not to be taken symbolically; they content us in and by themselves. (*Aesthetics* 313)

¹⁵² Priestman gives the following account of Darwin’s *The Economy of Vegetation*:

one of Darwin’s most persistent claims [is] that the Greek myths were based on misunderstandings of Egyptian depictions of physical processes whose accuracy is only now being rediscovered Examples of this are the myth of Adonis, which is “a story explaining some hieroglyphic figures representing the decomposition and resuscitation of animal matter” (II, 586n); and the rape of the flower-gathering Proserpine by the subterranean Pluto, signifying the oxidizing of iron as demonstrated by Priestly (IV, 166n, 178n). (65)

not only by virtue of the content that it communicates about that culture (though Müller is in fact very much concerned with excavating that content), but also because its mode of operation provides a special access to ancient Greek culture by embodying a distinctive aspect of the worldview and consciousness of the ancient Greek people. Myth originates not as an arcane code but as its own form of discourse whose meanings are inseparable from its distinctive mode of expression (cf. my discussion of Schelling below). Such theoretical explanations, along with the various historical, syncretic, and allegorizing theories advanced by different mythologists, are ways of ordering myth which spring from an awareness of the fragmented nature of mythology even as they try to resolve it into a coherent system.

Romantic-era scholarship thus demonstrated an awareness of the fact that Greek mythology itself is always already fragmented in a number of ways. In the first place, not all works survive, so scholars' knowledge of Greek myth is limited by the historical contingency of which sources happen to be extant. Furthermore, the lines of transmission do not convey ancient myth in a straightforward, unproblematic chain.¹⁵³ Not only are there issues with the corruption that occurs in the course of the copying of manuscripts (as is the case with nearly all ancient texts, save inscriptions and the like), but in the case of mythology in particular many ancient authors retell stories either from popular oral tradition, from the spoken report(s) of others, or from older written sources which are no longer extant. If the object of study is to be "myth" in itself, how is myth to be defined or separated from reports about myth? How is the scholar to proceed beyond the textual

¹⁵³ Cf. Winckelmann's conclusion to the *History of the Art of Antiquity*, on how increased fascination with ancient Greek art results from the imperfection of the surviving extant materials (see ch. 1 above).

incarnation to the authentic “myth” which supposedly lays behind it? The understanding of myth implied by such methodology may seem naive to most modern literary scholars, but for many mythologists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries they were pressing questions—and some might say crucial questions for any study of “myth” that wants to go beyond being simply a study of the corpus of extant mythological texts.

In fact, not only is the body of extant mythological works fragmented due to imperfect transmission, but mythology was itself fragmented since antiquity, rife with contradictions and competing versions of particular myths. “[W]e are not to expect consistency in the fabulous history of the ancients,” writes Godwin in his *Pantheon* (172). From the conflicting genealogies of the gods provided by Homer and Hesiod, to the oft-called ‘revisionary’ versions of myths told by the Greek dramatists, when there does exist more than a single source for a given myth, the sources almost never agree in every particular, and sometimes differ quite radically. Romantic period scholars’ awareness of the heterogeneity of ancient Greek myth thus points toward Hans Blumenberg’s observation that “[m]yth has always already passed over into the process of reception, and it remains in that process no matter what violence is applied in order to break its bonds and to establish its final form” (270-71). *Pantheons* such as those of Tooke and Godwin attempt to establish order through presenting overviews of Greek mythology organized in sections devoted to particular figures and topics, but in the course of this process inevitably expose the inherent intractability of their materials and their own contingency as particular acts in the reception history of ancient myth. The investigations of Romantic scholars thus pave the way for a complex understanding of myth as a living tradition which exists always in the process of being reread and

rewritten.¹⁵⁴ Romantic Hellenizing mythological poems like Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* and Keats's *Hyperion* poems imply viewpoints similar to Blumenberg's non-hierarchical view of myth: "[i]f it is present to us only in the forms of its reception, there is no privilege of certain versions as more original or more final" (271).

Friedrich Schlegel makes explicit how mythology's aesthetic potentiality consists in its intertwining of system and fragmentation:

the highest beauty, indeed the highest order is yet only that of chaos, namely of such a one that waits only for the touch of love to unfold as a harmonious world, of such a chaos as the ancient mythology and poetry were. ("Talk on Mythology" 82)

For Schlegel, chaos possesses a dynamic energy because it calls out to be ordered by "the touch of love." This eroticization of the systematizing process recalls the operation of the aesthetic of desire I emphasized in the previous chapter, and highlights how the allure of ancient Greek mythology and poetry consists in their quality of never being entirely graspable. The intertwining of order and chaos, fragment and system within the Romantic view of ancient Greek myth is what made it so fascinating an object of study.

My reading of mythology as fragmentation thus differs from that of Nicholas Halmi, who characterizes mythology as a figure of unity and harmony. In *The Genealogy of the Romantic Symbol*, Halmi examines the Romantic concept of the symbol as a response to certain pressing, historically developed social, political, and philosophical issues, such as the relationship between the individual and society, between subject and object. According to Halmi, the theory of the symbol arose as a response to problems

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Priestman, who argues of the Romantic period: "the Roman culture traditionally available to the university-educated male poet now begins to give way to a Grecianism which relies less on inbred scholarship than on a sense of freedom to rework imperfectly recorded myths and legends to suit modern concerns" (226-27).

such as the disintegrative hermeneutic tendencies of Enlightenment skepticism. A number of German Romantics, claims Halmi, associated mythology with symbolism and thus used ancient mythology as evidence of the symbol's past manifestation, while proposing the creation of a "New Mythology" as an aesthetic remedy to philosophical, social, and political ills (133, 145).¹⁵⁵ Both the old and the new mythology, Halmi claims, are supposed to function as "socially cohesive expressions of humanity's moral autonomy and nature's inherent meaningfulness" (155). In Halmi's reading, the Romantic notion of mythology arises like the symbol itself as a concept that compensates for what is lacking; it exists as a testament to the problems it attempts to solve. In contrast, I argue that Romantic representations of Greek mythology express not its promise as an exemplum of the ideal multiteity in unity of the symbol, but rather mythology's unsettled, chaotic, and fragmentary processes—its aesthetic potentiality as something which resists the articulation of a single, unified meaning (toward which syncretic and allegorizing interpretations often aim). If mythology be a symbol it is not the paradoxical, unified symbol Halmi describes but a symbol like uncaptured Proteus, pregnant with significance while constantly shifting and unable to be pinned down into a single interpretation.

At the same time, Romantic-period scholars still viewed Greek mythology as bearing a privileged relationship to an authentic core of ancient Greek culture. Mythology seemed to provide a point of access to the Hellenic ideal. Therefore, the use of mythological material in Romantic Hellenizing poems becomes simultaneously a way of grounding the poem in the realm of the Hellenic ideal, and of providing a space of

¹⁵⁵ Of course, the German Romantics were at the same time aware of the gap between the old and the new mythology and the fact that the new mythology could not be realized (Halmi 152, 155).

potentiality which allows for a degree of free play to take place. We can thus regard the writing of Hellenizing mythological poems as a subset of the broader Romantic project of mythmaking, or ‘mythopoeia’, analyzed by scholars such as Harold Bloom and evident most strikingly in the work of Blake. For example, we can understand the impulse to compose an original narrative using the mythological figures of ancient Greek deities as a sort of rearranging of building blocks (e.g. Prometheus in *Prometheus Unbound* or Saturn in *Hyperion*). When poets deploy figures in this way, clearly the figure’s significance does not remain constant but changes in relation to the narrative and poem in which it is deployed. Shelley’s Prometheus is not the Prometheus of Aeschylus just as Aeschylus’ Prometheus is not the Prometheus of Hesiod. Indeed, the Prometheus of Hesiod’s *Theogony* is not the same as the Prometheus of his *Works and Days*. The figures of Greek myth provide the potential for the mythopoeic restructuring of systems, for the creation of new aesthetic and poetic orders. Nevertheless, there remains a certain unifying idea or aspect in which these different representations participate, which distinguishes the subset of mythopoeia found in Hellenism from individually invented systems such as those of Blake. To return to the analogy between mythology and language suggested by Shelley, we might say that different representations of the same mythological figure are like a word (in an existing language) which takes on different senses depending upon the context in which it is employed. The word remains “one” word even as it fragments into various meanings, and it retains also the potential to take on new meanings by being deployed in novel ways.¹⁵⁶ The composition of Romantic Hellenizing mythological

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Harding: “Another way in which [a mythic pantheon] resembles a language is that it is constantly liable to misunderstandings—or, rather, it constantly generates misreadings, and these misreadings are

poems can thus be seen as a writing with figures of ancient Greek cultural material that taps their traditional significance even as it transforms their meaning: or, in other words, as both a reading and a rewriting of the elements of Hellenic religious consciousness.

As is evident in *The Fall of Hyperion*, these grand aspirations of Hellenizing mythopoeia become complicated by their encounter with the disturbing disorder found in Greek mythology, so Hellenism reconfigures Romantic aesthetics as a site of violent, chaotic struggle. With its cacophony of deities ancient Greek polytheism can be understood as a fragmentation of the religious consciousness within Hellenic culture. Godwin associates the multiplicity of polytheism with the “disorder and confusion” of mythological “manuals,” explaining, “[t]he Gods of the Greeks are reckoned to amount to no fewer than thirty thousand” (vii). This fragmentation consists not only in the fact that different gods represent different attributes or domains, such as Ares for war, Aphrodite for love, and so forth (thus distributing divine powers over various spheres of influence), but also in that mythological narratives such as the *Iliad* frequently portray such gods as opposing one another. Since I am concerned with the manner in which Romantic poets employ narrative to engage with the nature of mythology in relationship to ancient Greek culture vis-à-vis fragmentation, I focus on mythological poems which involve conflict between deities. Such conflict emphasizes the status of the Hellenic pantheon as existing in process rather than as an immutably ordered system. The pantheon was so attractive because it allowed for conflict within the system and thus for the narrativization of the relationship between the real and the ideal within religious consciousness. The production of such narratives forms yet another competing version of myth which further fragments

themselves the source of new myths. This process was well understood in the Romantic period” (21).

its significance, even as it participates in the effort to “know” mythology through the intertwined processes of the reading and rewriting of ancient Greek myth.

Schelling defines the significance of mythology as consisting in a similar paradox, which, in a manner reminiscent of the characterization of eros in Plato’s *Symposium*, illuminates the operation of the aesthetic of desire in the philosophical study of myth:

there is indeed a truth in mythology, but not one that is placed in it *intentionally* and thus also not one that could be established and be expressed as such. All elements of reality are in it, but in the way in which they also would be in a fairy tale of the type of which Goethe has left behind for us a brilliant example—namely, where the actual lure rests in this, that it mirrors a meaning for us or points to it in the distance, but a meaning that itself perpetually withdraws from us, after which we would be compelled to hasten without ever being able to reach it. And, undoubtedly, he who would hold sway as master of this genre would understand most cleverly to deceive us in this way, to most often hold the spectator breathless and, as it were, make a fool of him. But this would in fact be the most proper description of mythology, which deceives us with the echo of a deeper meaning and entices us further without ever answering our question. (*Historical-critical Introduction* 13)

In this remarkable passage, Schelling develops several points which help to inform my understanding of the Romantic deployment of myth as fragmentation in Hellenizing poems. In the first place, Schelling asserts that mythology contains a truth, a core of meaning—it is not pure delusion or fantasy as skeptical Enlightenment thinkers like Hume claimed. At the same time, the claim that the truth has not been “placed in it *intentionally*” opposes thinkers who viewed myth as the result of purposely-designed allegories (e.g. Erasmus Darwin) which served to communicate a coded underlying truth in mythological narrative dress. The paradox which Schelling discusses is how the truth which is contained in myth exists in a mode of being such that it cannot be ‘decoded’ or conceptualized apart from its manifestation in the myth itself—so the myth embodies a deep meaning even as it remains occult. The myth, like the fragment as I characterized it

in chapter two, holds out the promise of a meaning which the reader pursues but can never attain. Despite Schelling's discussion of this matter in terms of trickery and a sort of smoke-and-mirrors, the actual existence of the truth in myth remains a crucial element of his conceptualization. The underlying meaning is posited as *there* even though it remains ultimately inaccessible. The theoretical potentiality of mythology consists in its injunction of the continual pursuit of the question.

4.2 Keats's Hyperion Poems

The notion of continual pursuit suggests the genre of romance, and thus recalls my argument in the previous chapter, where I considered *Endymion* as a poem in which Keats stages the failure of cultural translation through the medium of the erotic narrative, showing how the errant tendencies of the poem's slim romance plot enact a continual deferral of sexual and aesthetic consummation. In the published preface to *Endymion*, Keats expresses his wish that he has not "dulled [the] brightness" of "the beautiful mythology of Greece" and mentions his desire "to try once more" (103), alluding to his planned composition of *Hyperion* "in a more naked and grecian Manner" (*Letters* 1.207)—a phrasing which suggests the importance of the magisterial decorum of epic in contrast to romance's "sentimental cast" (*Letters* 1.207). Along these lines, I read *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion* as continuing the same project that *Endymion*, at Keats's own admission, failed: the deployment of the aesthetic potentiality of ancient Greek culture in the composition of a modern Hellenizing work. Despite Keats's having considered both *Endymion* and the Hyperion poems as attempts to touch Greece's beautiful mythology, however, when we read the Hyperion poems in the context of Romantic scholarship on mythology, a different picture of the significance of the

Hyperion poems emerges. Whereas in *Endymion* the goal toward which the poem vainly strives is the sexualized aesthetic union of the real and the ideal (in the guise of the mortal and the divine), in the Hyperion poems the goal is the embodiment of the Hellenic ideal through the representation of the historical development of the system of ancient Greek polytheism. In other words, the object the poems strive to portray is, rather than the union of the real and the ideal (the function of ancient Greek art), Greek mythology itself, which, like the Grecian urn as I discussed in my introduction, comes by synecdoche to stand for ancient Greek culture. Rather than unite the multiplicity of deities into a single poetic vision or narrative—or, one might say, rather than portray the *system* of Greek mythology (Schelling's *Götterlehre*) as a sort of harmonious 'multeity in unity,' the Hyperion poems figure the chaotic operation of mythology as one in which various warring forces fail to achieve the "daedal harmony" of an "Orphic song." Through their attempts to write the narrative of the transition of mythological systems, the Hyperion poems embody the continual process of the fragmenting of the Hellenic ideal.

Critical readings of *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion* do not usually approach the poems with a consideration of how they engage with mythology as a topic in its own right. Most treatments of *Hyperion* in the last two decades—many informed by new historicist tendencies—have tended to focus on the poem's politics and/or its relationship to history.¹⁵⁷ Ironically, by neglecting to consider the topic of mythology, historicist

¹⁵⁷ Readings concerned with history include those of Coffey and Fermanis. Tilottama Rajan takes a more theoretical approach to the issue of history in the poem ("Keats, Poetry, and 'The Absence of the Work'"). Another strand of criticism is concerned primarily with literary history and/or influence, particularly the poem's status as an attempt at epic and its uneasy relationship with Milton, e.g., Newy, Plasa, Tomko.

critics have ignored what was, in the poem's historical context, a concern of pressing importance not only for aesthetic theory but also for theories of religion and culture. In considering the Hyperion poems from the perspective of mythology, my reading reveals the theoretical resonances of Keats's representations of Greek deities in the context of Romantic Hellenism and early nineteenth-century scholarship on mythology. We can understand the aporia of the Hyperion poems in terms of the paradoxical elements of Romantic views of mythology, such as the tension between order and chaos, system and fragment.

A number of critics have interpreted the succession of deities in the Hyperion poems in somewhat allegorical ways. The Titans, critics have suggested, represent the first-generation Romantics,¹⁵⁸ or the aristocratic powers of the *ancien régime*. Alternatively, critics have espoused the view that the Hyperion poems are about Keats's own development as a poet.¹⁵⁹ Such readings may indeed reveal some illuminating resonances of the poems, but there is a danger of being too swift in 'translating' or 'decoding' deities such as the Titans as allegorical figures with particular referents in Keats's contemporary world, and thus obfuscating their significance as mythological characters. Nevertheless, such allegorical readings *do* respond legitimately to the poems, for part of the poems' function is to stage the necessity of interpreting mythology and its beings as allegorically representative of underlying meanings—as did mythologists such

¹⁵⁸ E.g., Coffey writes, "[t]he 'Hyperion' fragments present the replacement of one order of poetry—represented by Saturn and the Titans—with another poetic 'order', that of Apollo" (47).

¹⁵⁹ Thus Bush writes, "[i]f *Endymion* was in the philosophic sense Keats's *Prelude*, *Hyperion* was his *Excursion*. Apollo, like Endymion, is John Keats" (119-20). More recent critics are generally more circumspect in the manner in which they phrase such interpretations, but often still exhibit the tendency to read the poem's representations in terms of external referents such as early nineteenth-century political events.

as Erasmus Darwin and Richard Payne Knight, among others. As Paul Wiebe points out,¹⁶⁰ a poem of such a sort

forces one to interpret the supernatural characters by undercoding. To make sense of the supernatural characters . . . the reader must attribute some meaning to the character, even though this meaning does not completely fit the character, so that the character can be assimilated into the reader's world of reference. Inevitably, then, the [poem] creates tension between being and concept, between denotation and connotation. (84)

In other words, the poems serve to seduce the reader with the allure of allegorical interpretations while at the same time exposing their inadequacy. The poems thus stage in a certain manner the operation of mythology itself, for in advancing an array of heterogeneous allegorical interpretations of its divine characters, readers become like the mythologists who similarly variously translated and interpreted ancient tradition in an array of competing theories. In both the *Hyperion* poems and in Romantic period scholarship on mythology, the act(s) of interpretation necessarily fragment(s) the significance into various opposed readings, so one of the functions of the poems is to evoke fragmentation as an element of the reading process, which itself stages the choice between different, mutually exclusive allegorical interpretations. Paradoxically, one of the ways in which the Titans operate as myth is in their inspiring the impulse to take them as other than what they are.

In resisting the hermeneutic impulse to interpret Keats's Titans as signifying other than what they are, I follow Schelling's insistence on the self-sufficiency of myth's meaning:

¹⁶⁰ Note, however, that Wiebe is concerned with what he calls "mythopoems," which he defines as including elements both of the supernatural and of the human worlds—so he actually excludes *Hyperion* from this category, though he includes *Prometheus Unbound*.

Because consciousness chooses or invents neither the ideas themselves nor their expression, mythology emerges immediately *as such* and in no other sense than in which it articulates itself. In consequence of the necessity with which the *content* of the ideas generates itself, mythology has from the beginning a *real* [*reelle*] and thus also *doctrinal* [*doctrinelle*] meaning. In consequence of the necessity with which also the *form* emerges, mythology is thoroughly actual—that is, everything in it is thus to be understood as mythology expresses it, not as if something else were thought, something else said. Mythology is not *allegorical*; it is *tautegorical*. To mythology the gods are actually existing essences, gods that are not something *else*, do not *mean* something else, but rather *mean* only what they are. (*Historical-critical Introduction* 136)

Unlike allegory, which is fashioned through the process of an individual inventing an outer form to represent an inner meaning, mythology, as an expression of human religious consciousness, exhibits no gap between idea and expression, content and form (cf. O. Müller and Hegel, cited above). In a note Schelling acknowledges his adoption from Coleridge of the term “tautegorical” to express this quality,¹⁶¹ while pointing out that he uses it in a different, more literal sense than does Coleridge.¹⁶² In arguing that mythology ought to be understood in itself, and does not have to be decoded or translated into a discursive formulation of its inner ‘meaning’, Schelling proposes a radical reconfiguration of the way to approach and interpret myth.¹⁶³ Although this approach seems to make myth more immediately comprehensible, insofar as it asserts that readers do not lack a code or a theory to reveal myth’s inner significance (indeed, that the very notion of myth possessing an ‘inner’ significance is erroneous), it at the same time

¹⁶¹ Schelling writes archly, “[f]or the apposite expression mentioned, I happily let him have the borrowings from my writings, the borrowed writings sharply, all too sharply, criticized by his own countrymen, in which my name was not mentioned” (187 n. e).

¹⁶² This difference in meaning is evident in a passage in his essay “On the Prometheus of Aeschylus,” where Coleridge uses the term “tautegory” in a context that suggests a near synonymy with “symbol” (361).

¹⁶³ E.g., Schelling writes, “[i]n order to take on a comprehensible and graspable meaning, the emasculation of Uranus, the regicide of Kronos, and the other countless acts and events of the history of the gods require nothing other than to be understood literally” (137).

renders myth all the more mysterious and enigmatic, by making it very difficult to discuss or conceptualize what myth means. Allegorical interpretations of myth might differ widely and oppose one another, but they at least provide readily conceptualizable explanations. In other words, if in mythology meaning and expression are inseparable, how can one understand or analyze myth accurately other than by reproducing or paraphrasing it? Mythology contains its meaning in itself but on account of that very fact it remains essentially impenetrable, enigmatic and unknowable.

Schelling's notion of mythology, though presented over two decades later, helps to inform my understanding of the *Hyperion* poems—not only in how I resist allegorizing the Titans in my reading, but also in how I conceive of Keats's engagement with the nature of mythology in relation to Romantic Hellenism. Allegorical approaches to the Titans tend to see them as a strategic tool which Keats employs in his attempted production of an epic work which is in large part about history. When one approaches the divine figures of the poem not as allegorical personages representing portions of a premeditated discursive content, but as characters in their own right whose significance operates on a literal level, one can better understand the representation of Greek deities as a *problem* that participates in Keats's engagement with ancient Greek culture and the issue of mythology. The content of the Titans is bound up with their expression as Titans, just as mythology itself is ultimately inseparable from the sources in which it is manifested and through which it is known. A tautegorical view of Keats's Titans thus emphasizes the entanglement of reading and writing within Hellenism's project, for it is only through the process of their emergence in the realm of the poem, in Keats's

rewriting of ancient Greek myth in the course of his engagement with various sources, that the Titans take on their full significance.

My interpretation of the significance of the Titans as Greek deities in an earlier stage of the system of polytheism contrasts with those of a number of critics who have associated them with Egyptian art and culture. Alan Bewell, for example, claims that Keats's representation of the Titans "as Egyptian, rather than Greek sculptures" renders his war "less a theogony [sic] within a single culture than . . . a confrontation between the gods of Europe and those of the Orient" (223; 224). In contrast, while I agree that Keats deploys oriental motifs in his representation of the Titans, I argue that such motifs do not serve to distinguish the Titans as deities of another culture against which Greek culture is opposed. On the contrary, these motifs serve to mark the Titans as the very 'other' element within ancient Greek mythology itself. This oriental otherness of the Titans puts paid to the notion of a harmonious, homologous Greek pantheon by fracturing the body of deities into violently opposed factions. The opposition between the Titans and the Olympians in the poems is just one instance of the poems' evocation of the fragmentation of mythology.

Hyperion thus portrays the fragmentation of Greek mythology through its concern with the period of the transition between old and new systems of gods, recalling Schelling's understanding of mythology as containing the history of its own development (137-38). Authors who tell of such revolutions in the ancient sources, such as Hesiod (*Theogony* 453-506), are rather brief in their discussion of the change of regimes as events which took place in the distant past. For Hesiod the tale of the Titans is the proverbial history as written by the victors: it is a tale which underpins the current divine

order of Zeus's rule. Yet such narratives of changes in divine regime can also be understood as fault lines which reveal the historical contingency of the mythological system, for they show that the divine order of successive polytheism is necessarily temporal rather than eternal. Just as ancient Greek mythology contains not one god but a heterogeneous cacophony, so too does it document not just one system but many. By focusing his poem's narrative on a time of conflict, in which the change between regimes has begun but has not yet fully been completed (the other Titans have fallen but Hyperion has yet to fall), Keats evokes the fragmentation of mythology through the warring systems of successive polytheism, which Schelling understands as the very stuff of the development of human religious consciousness (150-51). By focusing on the succession of one group of deities to another, the *Hyperion* poems represent mythology as bound up with historical development rather than consisting in a static set of relationships. Mythology becomes dynamic and is energized by its own processes of wreck and ruin which seem to hold forth the promise of beautiful reconfigurations but can never achieve them.

In addition to portraying the fragmentation of mythology through the change in divine regimes, *Hyperion* also suggests through its descriptions the fragmentation of individual deities. Near the opening of book one Keats figures the fragmentation of divinity through the descriptive dismemberment of Saturn's body:

Upon the sodden ground
 His old right hand lay nerveless, listless, dead,
 Unseptred; and his realmless eyes were closed;
 While his bow'd head seem'd list'ning to the Earth. (17-20)

The enumeration of the characteristics of the individual body parts (hand, eyes, head), with each body part forming the subject of its own clause, produces a piecemeal effect,

representing such parts as separate entities rather than harmoniously arranged elements of a unified and functioning organic body.¹⁶⁴ The dense cluster of privative adjectives (“nerveless,” “listless,” “[u]nsceptred,” “realmless”) emphasizes the sense of loss and ruin, lack of coherence. In this description Saturn’s body does not unify the external form with the inner spiritual content in the manner of Hegel’s Classical ideal. On the contrary, his body becomes less an example of the individual body than an assemblage of disparate parts which the narrator and the reader attempt to arrange into the form of Saturn through the reading and writing of the poem itself.¹⁶⁵

Critics have often characterized the Titans as statues. But if statues they be, they are radically different from what Greek statues are supposed to be according to the tradition of Winckelmann. For example, the narrator describes Thea as follows:

But oh! how unlike marble was that face:
How beautiful, if sorrow had not made
Sorrow more beautiful than Beauty’s self. (1.34-36)

The privative simile, in which Thea’s face is described as “unlike marble,” seems somewhat ironic, given that numerous critics have characterized Keats’s representation of the Titans as evoking a statuesque tableau.¹⁶⁶ The Titans, critics argue, emerge in the poem like ruggedly hewn, sublime statues, frozen in a sort of narrative stasis by their

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Saturn’s speech later: “I am gone / Away from my own bosom: I have left / My strong identity, my real self” (1.112-14).

¹⁶⁵ Bakhtin discusses the emergence of notions of bodily integrity in the seventeenth century:
The new bodily canon . . . presents an entirely finished, completed, strictly limited body, which is shown from the outside as something individual. That which protrudes, bulges, sprouts, or branches off (when a body transgresses its limits and a new one begins) is eliminated, hidden, or moderated. All orifices of the body are closed. The basis of the image is the individual, strictly limited mass, the impenetrable façade. The opaque surface and the body’s “valleys” acquire an essential meaning as the boarder of a closed individuality that does not merge with other bodies and with the world. (320)

¹⁶⁶ E.g., Taylor writes of the Titans in the first two books, “[t]he sculpted figures are frozen in postures as visible as a frieze” (673); Bewell writes, “the Titans . . . never fully escape being seen as sculptures” (220).

inability to take action in response to their situation—or perhaps by Keats’s inability to write their action. According to such a reading, the phrase “unlike marble” would denote not the fact that Thea is unlike a statue, but that her face is more rough-hewn rather than achieving a beautifully smooth regularity—perhaps that we are to envision the (Egyptian) Titans as hewn out of granite rather than marble, such critics might propose. Yet I would suggest an alternative reading, in which we are to associate marble with classical statuary in general, and particularly classical statuary as inflected by Winckelmann’s notion of the ideal beauty of Greek art as embodying the perfect manifestation of nature in a carefully crafted form. The aesthetic ideal, “Beauty’s self,” suggests a perfect harmony manifested in the fixed state of a finished sculpture. The beauty of Thea’s “sorrow,” which in a logical paradox acts upon itself to make itself “more beautiful” than actual beauty, is thus opposed to the statuary beauty of Winckelmann’s Greek ideal: it is the beauty involved in the processes of the fragmentation of divinity, the beauty of loss and ruin. The description of Thea in this passage can be taken as a microcosm of the link between the fragmentation of divinity and *Hyperion*’s sublime aesthetic of suffering. Some earlier poems by Keats, such as “Sleep and Poetry” and “I stood tip-toe,” valorize Greece and the Greek gods by associating them with a lovely pastoral realm of sensuous natural beauty—beauty in the conventional sense which evokes Winckelmann’s description of Greece’s ideal climate and lovely sky. *Hyperion* opposes the aesthetic of statuary, which is spatial, static, smooth, and harmonious, with an aesthetic of dynamic and sublime fragmentary processes: ruin, suffering, struggle, dying into life. The manner in which *Hyperion* portrays the figures of the gods evokes this dynamic fragmentation of ancient Greek religious consciousness.

In addition to ruin, *Hyperion* associates the fragmentation of mythology with the teasing obscurity reminiscent of Schelling's characterization of mythic truth. The syntactical complexity of the description of Hyperion's orb adds to this effect:

The planet orb of fire, whereon he rode
 Each day from east to west the heavens through,
 Spun round in sable curtaining of clouds;
 Not therefore veiled quite, blindfold, and hid,
 But ever and anon the glancing spheres,
 Circles, and arcs, and broad-belting colure,
 Glow'd through, and wrought upon the muffling dark
 Sweet-shaped lightnings from the nadir deep
 Up to the zenith,—hieroglyphics old,
 Which sages and keen-eyed astrologers
 Then living on the earth, with labouring thought
 Won from the gaze of many centuries:
 Now lost, save what we find on remnants huge
 Of stone, or marble swart; their import gone,
 Their wisdom long since fled. (1.269-83)

First, it is important to note that Hyperion's orb, a figure of his divinity, is obscured by clouds and thus not fully visible, even as part of it continues to shine through the clouds. Were the orb visible directly, it would be blinding and painful to look at rather than beautiful. The orb's aesthetic appeal, like that of the figures of ancient Greek myth, is rooted in its status as in between visible and hidden, perceptible and obscured. The clouds operate in a manner similar to Shelley's veil (see ch. 3 above), in that they shroud the orb even as they reveal a portion of its beauty by virtue of their (partial) opacity. The aesthetic spectacle produced by the orb's light casts "sweet-shaped lightnings," which literally means "sweet-shaped" illuminations, but also evokes meteorological lightning, which is a figure (like mythology itself) for dynamic energy of great power and potential

which cannot be fully harnessed or controlled.¹⁶⁷ The narrator then elaborates an analogy between natural mythological forces and symbolic language by comparing the lightnings in an extended simile to “hieroglyphics.” At the time when Keats wrote the *Hyperion* poems, Egyptian hieroglyphs had not yet been deciphered,¹⁶⁸ and in the simile he compares the lightnings to hieroglyphs which were deciphered in the past but whose meaning was subsequently forgotten. The hermeneutic potential of the (now) undeciphered hieroglyphs, their inability to be pinned down into a fixed interpretation, is paralleled by the dynamically shifting form of the “lightnings” which exist in process rather than in a fixed state. The hieroglyphs in the simile retain their form and offer a meaning which remains inaccessible: their allure lies in their mysterious nature, for they are understood as meaningful pictorially as they are visually experienced, even as the nature of their form as hieroglyphs renders them incomprehensible to the observer. It is important to note in this respect that the hieroglyphs are not just an unknown language and writing system, but also an ostensibly *iconic* writing system with recognizable images such as those of birds, people, and animals. The tension in observing hieroglyphs consists in the viewer’s recognition of the iconic function of many of the symbols as images along with his or her inability to understand them linguistically. There is clearly a signifying system to the hieroglyphs but it is one that eludes the observer of Keats’s time. This passage shows how the aesthetic potentiality of mythology—like that of the

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Shelley in the *Defence*: “Poetry is a sword of lightning, ever unsheathed, which consumes the scabbard that would contain it” (520); Dante’s words “lie . . . pregnant with a lightning which has yet found no conductor” (528). See also the preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, where Shelley opposes the form of the works of contemporary poets with the spirit, which is “the uncommunicated lightning of their own mind” (474).

¹⁶⁸ Egyptian hieroglyphs were first deciphered in 1822 (Halmi 20 n. 44).

fragment—consists in the combination of its obscurity with the awareness of an inner meaning toward which the interpreter strives.

Whereas *Hyperion* shows fragmentation in terms of the pantheon (not) proceeding through a historical process (i.e., it stages the inability to arrange the fragments of the gods into a proper theogony), *The Fall of Hyperion* internalizes the fragmentation of the Hellenic ideal within consciousness itself (i.e., it stages the inability to arrange the conceptual fragments into a systematic understanding of myth). The psychological internalization of the hermeneutics of mythology is bound up with the poem's nested series of frames: after the proem, in which the speaker refers to the rest of the poem as "the dream now purposed to rehearse" (1.16), the speaker begins the narration of a dream (as indicated by "Methought I stood" [1.19]),¹⁶⁹ in which he finds in a natural scene the remains of a banquet where he drinks a "potion" (1.54), which causes him to fall asleep and wake up by an ancient temple (second dream), where after ascending the steps he meets the goddess Moneta, who ensconces him in a vision, transporting him to a different scene (ostensibly in the past) where he observes "'the scenes / [s]till swooning vivid through [her] globed brain'" (1.244-45). Keats thus presents the poem's narration of the events of the fall of the Titans as a vision within a dream within a dream, demonstrating that the investigation of mythology involves a deeper penetration into the shadowy depths of human consciousness, and can only be achieved through such distancing techniques. The very mediating processes of consciousness (dreams, visions) which allow access to

¹⁶⁹ "Methought" is traditionally used in English poetry to introduce dream sequences. Cook thinks that this usage is a poetic convention which comes to Keats through Shakespeare and Milton (38), but the usage is also apparent in Middle English (e.g. Langland, *Piers Plowman* 2.53; Gower, *Confessio Amantis* prologue 603, 617).

interpretive acts of the writer and the reader in (de)configuring it. Keats thus aligns the process of writing poetry with the working through of the dynamic chaos within the fractured mythological system. The alignment of the aesthetic potentiality of fragmented mythology with the very process of *The Fall*'s composition results in an aporia: to write the narrative of the fragmentary processes of mythology is to fix those processes into the 'events' of a teleological theogony, a shining Apollonian order which disavows the aesthetic potentiality of mythology's dark Dionysian origin.

The speaker of *The Fall* accordingly encounters psychological difficulties that impede even his progression into a vision of the struggle involved in mythology's fracture. Even the narrative of the fragmentation of the Greek mythological system becomes inaccessible—the narrator and the reader can only attempt through distancing mediations to reflect upon its traumatic aftermath, in which they confront an abyss of meaning. Within the Nietzschean abyss revealed by the writing of *The Fall*, there is not even a traumatic *sparagmos*,¹⁷¹ but simply blank emptiness. *The Fall* pushes the encounter with mythology to the breaking point, forcing the writing process to confront its own nothingness. The failure in *The Fall of Hyperion* to arrange the fragments of Hellenic ideality into a coherent system becomes not a failure of the (representation of the) historical process but a failure of the poet-speaker's psychomachia, which is bound up with a paralyzing hermeneutic crisis.

While Keats's Hyperion poems figure the fragmentation of Greek mythology, and tap this fragmentation as the source of their vital aesthetic energy, the poems are at the

¹⁷¹ Ritual tearing apart or dismemberment, usually associated with frenzied maenads. See my reading of the ending of *Hyperion* below.

same time the staging of their own unsuccessful attempts at abolishing such fragmentation through the establishment of a harmonious system. The poems' ostensible subject, the successful rise of the Olympians as a whole and in particular of Apollo—the god not just of the sun but of music, art, and poetry—embodies a narrative movement toward apotheosis as unity. The triumph of the Olympians and of Apollo would presumably, if the poems were to represent it, be as final a triumph as the rule of Zeus in Hesiod's *Theogony*. Apollo and other Olympians would form a unified, harmonious system which would evoke the beauty of ancient Greek art and culture, the entanglement of the real and the ideal. The poems' epic aspirations dovetail with this project of the establishment of pantheon-as-culture-as-poetry—an antifragmentary narrative movement toward wholeness and unity. As is the case with the attempts at cultural translation through erotic fulfillment in the works I discussed in chapter three, both poems earnestly strive toward this goal. Yet for the very reason that the aim is an ordered unity, Keats remains incapable of developing the poems' narratives toward their resolutions.

Hyperion's jagged ending, itself the border of a fragment, breaks off with a scene not of the attainment of divine unified subjectivity but with the fragmentation of Apollo's body:

Soon wild commotions shook him, and made flush
 All the immortal fairness of his limbs;
 Most like the struggle at the gate of death;
 Or liker still to one who should take leave
 Of pale immortal death, and with a pang
 As hot as death's is chill, with fierce convulse
 Die into life: so young Apollo anguish'd:
 His very hair, his golden tresses famed,
 Kept undulation round his eager neck.
 During the pain Mnemosyne upheld
 Her arms as one who prophesied.—At length
 Apollo shriek'd;—and lo! from all his limbs

Celestial * * * * *
 * * * * * (3.124-37)

As scholars such as Ellen Brinks have noted, Apollo's deification, his ascent to cultural knowledge, is entangled with the torturous violence inflicted upon his suffering and eroticized body (429). The traumatic suffering in the poem is not confined to the fall of the defeated Titans but rather extends into the rise of the Olympian hierarchy. The enumeration of the various parts of Apollo's body (limbs, hair, neck), like the passage listing Saturn's body parts which I discussed above, emphasizes the materiality of Apollo's body and serves to dismember it, such that the aesthetic power mobilized in his deification derives from the fragmentary potentiality of his corpus. The repeated reference to Apollo's "limbs" (125, 136) also serves to pluralize his body as an assemblage of different parts (rather than an individual organic whole), and evokes the idea of dismemberment as a visceral analogue to fragmentation. The adjective "[c]elestial" as the passage stands modifies "limbs" in a "Miltonic inversion[]" (*Letters* 2.167), but it is important to note that were the poem to continue it could easily modify instead a noun following it in the rest of the line.¹⁷² The grammatical impulse to attribute "[c]elestial" to "limbs" is itself symptomatic of our desire in reading the poem to fix the fragmented text into a comprehensible syntactic whole—much like how the Romantic-era mythologists desired to fix mythology into an ordered system in their interpretations. The referent of "[c]elestial," like the meaning of mythology itself, is intimated but cannot be

¹⁷² Indeed, Keats's editor Stillinger notes, "[a]pparently the last two lines in Taylor's version were to read 'Apollo shriek'd—And lo from all his limbs / Celestial glory dawn'd. He was a god!' but then the original 'from all his limbs / Celestial' was separately marked off in pencil, and this is what the printer set in type" (643). The asterisks were also added in the printing (643), ostensibly to mark the end of the fragment maugre the grammatical incompleteness of the sentence.

pinned down: it hovers suspended in an indeterminate space produced by our reading of the poem.

Another part of the function of this passage, as Brinks notes, is to evoke Apollo's orgasmic ecstasy (443), and such pleasure entails the dissolution of individual rationalist subjectivity—the unified point of reference which is supposed to govern the body and our understanding of it as a person—such that the body becomes a grotesque, quivering mass of sweaty and tangled limbs.¹⁷³ The oft-quoted phrase “Die into life” evokes not only the agony of the process but also the notion of Apollo's orgasm, in the context of which his hair's “undulation round his eager neck” suggests (auto)erotic asphyxiation. The violent elements of eroticism associated with the struggle toward the realization of a divine ideal which Apollo cannot reach in the poem recall the frustrating deferral of consummation involved in cultural translation as I showed in chapter three. Apollo, like Lamia, needs to undergo a violent (dis)figuring rape as transformation in order to attain a manifestation of his mythical power. The poem's conclusion does not represent (the character) Apollo as (the god) Apollo, but rather (the character) Apollo cut off in the dismembering process of his *becoming* (the god) Apollo—a process which the poem naturally cannot complete. *Hyperion* ends not with the representation of the triumph of the Olympian order and the full manifestation of Apollo in his divine majesty, but rather with the truncated description of his fragmentary dismemberment, reminiscent of a maenadic *sparagmos*. Keats's poem which has been so often linked to his notion of “a grand march of intellect” (*Letters* 1.282) in relation to the rise of Apollo terminates not with the realization of the

¹⁷³ I make a similar argument elsewhere, discussing how, in the obscene Restoration closet drama *Sodom*, the representation of orgasm evokes “the dissolution . . . of corporeal integrity and individual subjectivity” (33-34), presenting human sexuality as a critique of Hobbes's rationalist political subject.

harmony of Apollonian order but rather by pointing toward the unbridled ecstasy of the Dionysian which remains ever beyond comprehension.

I have resisted the critical impulse to allegorize Keats's divine figures and thus to read the Hyperion poems as ultimately about something other than what they depict (e.g. history, politics), instead focusing on how the Hyperion poems engage with mythology itself. This critical approach is justified by the surge of interest in mythology in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and gains an even greater significance in the context of Romantic Hellenism when mythology was thought to offer an entry point into the ancient Greek cultural worldview. In focusing on the period of transition between the old hierarchy of the Titans and the new regime of the Olympians, Keats emphasizes the fissure within ancient Greek polytheism, showing that polytheism is not a static system but rather a dynamic space in which the idealized Hellenic powers often oppose and contradict one another rather than performing in perfect harmony. As the poems' descriptions show, the appeal of mythology consists in the combination of fragmentation and obscurity with the promise of an underlying, deeper meaning—just as the scholarship on mythology focuses on the tension and the reciprocal relationship between order and chaos. In deploying the figures of mythology, Keats's Hyperion poems can be understood as attempting to work with the fragmented building blocks of the material of ancient Greek religious consciousness. The ostensible narrative movement of both poems is the effort to arrange these fragments into a coherent system: to instantiate the rule of Apollo and the Olympians as a harmonic system which would unify the real and the ideal, actualize the potential. Ultimately, the poems end up staging the failure of their own poetic project. To arrange the fragmented materials of mythology into an ordered system

would be to rob them of their aesthetic potentiality. The poems appropriately remain as fragmented as the mythological systems they portray, leaving the processes of the reading and the rewriting of ancient Greek culture yet to be completed.

4.3 Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*

Like Keats's Hyperion poems, Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* is a mythological poem which scholars do not usually read as a poem about mythology. Critics have focused on topics such as the poem's expression of Shelley's mature social and political philosophy,¹⁷⁴ its expression of Shelley's metaphysical and aesthetic theory,¹⁷⁵ its relationship to source texts such as Aeschylus and the Bible,¹⁷⁶ and its deployment of various elements of the scientific thought of Shelley's contemporaries.¹⁷⁷ In their pursuit of coded theoretical meanings and various intertexts, critics have mostly neglected how *Prometheus Unbound* self-consciously presents itself as myth and thus engages in a sustained manner with the nature and operation of mythology in relation to Romantic Hellenism. In the following reading, I focus on how *Prometheus Unbound* emphasizes the multiplicity of meanings inherent in myth. The poem shows how the aesthetic potentiality of mythology consists in large part in its malleability—its fragmentation into multiple versions and divergent meanings. At the same time, the poem's narrative project is one which attempts to order its materials into a unified dramatic work complete with appropriate closure—closure which is antithetical to the very defining qualities which

¹⁷⁴ E.g., Cameron 475-564.

¹⁷⁵ E.g., Wasserman 255-305.

¹⁷⁶ E.g., Wallace 162-77, Wasserman 272-305.

¹⁷⁷ Early influential treatments include those of Grabo and Matthews.

impart to myth its aesthetic power. Like mythology itself, the poem embodies a tension between system and fragmentation, order and chaos. Though *Prometheus Unbound* ostensibly achieves the narrative closure which Keats's Hyperion poems do not, it does so only through a process of disavowal which abjures the constitutive elements of fragmentation which are operative in its status as myth.

In his reading of myth in *Prometheus Unbound*, Earl Wasserman argues that Shelley uses mythological motifs not as direct allusions to particular texts or passages but rather as the actualization of certain archetypal patterns to deploy the latent resonances for his own creative purposes (279).¹⁷⁸ *Prometheus Unbound* exhibits syncretic tendencies, reminiscent of the work of mythologists such as Bryant, which support Wasserman's line of argument. For example, when the Furies torment Prometheus in the first act, they show him a vision of the crucified Christ (546-77), resulting in an odd intersection of Greek and Christian mythic traditions, wherein Christ's suffering for mankind parallels that of Prometheus. Further elements of syncretism appear in the references to Zoroastrianism, for example in the Earth's speech in act one (191-218).¹⁷⁹ Wasserman correctly perceives that part of the project of *Prometheus Unbound* is "to embody that archetypal order, while the traditional ancient myths and rituals are but *disarrayed and distorted fragments* of it" (282, my emphasis). My interpretation of

¹⁷⁸ Wasserman's focus on "myth" involves rather broader considerations than my investigation of "mythology." For example, Wasserman's analysis includes a consideration of source texts such as the Bible and *Paradise Lost*, whereas my focus on "mythology" reflects my concern with pagan—and particularly ancient Greek—mythological systems in the context of Hellenism.

¹⁷⁹ For a discussion of these references, see Curran 67-91. Curran notes that linking Zoroastrianism to the Prometheus myth makes sense for several reasons. Most obviously, the theft of fire in the Prometheus myth suggests an affinity with Zoroastrian fire-worship (69), and furthermore "Caucasus was also thought to be Mount Albordj, the mountain of life in Zoroastrian traditions" (67).

mythology differs from Wasserman's in the respect that I read Shelley as engaging with the positive and productive aspects of the fragmentation inherent to mythology. In other words, whereas Wasserman seems to understand Shelley's project as an attempt to dispel once and for all the lamentable disorder of ancient fragments through the successful creation of a "beautiful harmony" (285), I understand his project as bearing its condition of possibility in mythology's fragmentation, and thus achieving its aesthetic effect not through the successful imposition of a new, fixed harmony, but rather from the staging of the failure of that very attempt, such that the poem's *modus operandi* consists in its participation—somewhat unwillingly—in the ongoing processes of fragmentation which have their being in the reading and rewriting of the mythological tradition. In other words, *Prometheus Unbound*, like mythology itself as it emerges in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century scholarship, exhibits a tension between a drive toward ordered interpretation and a valorization of chaotic hermeneutic multiplicity. This tension between the desire for harmony and the celebration of heterogeneous fragmentation parallels the dynamic of the aesthetic of desire which I discussed in the preceding chapter. Just as the erotic Romantic Hellenizing poems are torn between, on the one hand, their ardent desire for sexual consummation and cultural translation, and, on the other hand, their awareness of the impossibility and indeed undesirability of that goal toward which they strive, so too does *Prometheus Unbound* ardently strive toward the syncretic harmony and hermeneutic mastery of mythology through its dramatic and narrative form, while retaining an awareness of the necessary intractability of its fragmented sources and its own status as merely one more competing version in a

mythological tradition which lies “[a]ll in a mingled heap confus’d” (*The Fall of Hyperion* 1.78).

Like the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century scholars I mentioned above, Shelley understood that mythology often contained conflicting versions of particular myths. In his preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley defends the creative license he has employed upon the Prometheus myth by characterizing mythology as a living tradition with which authors engage in a dynamic relationship. “The Greek tragic writers,” Shelley explains, “employed in their treatment of [mythology] a certain arbitrary discretion. They by no means conceived themselves bound to adhere to the common interpretation” (472). Shelley suggests that for the Greeks, mythology was more a collection of cultural material that could be reshaped as subject matter, rather than a prescriptive set of cut-and-dried narratives. Shelley advances an agonistic view of mythology by citing the context of Athenian drama, in which plays were performed at calendar religious festivals in honour of gods, and were judged in competition for prizes. If the Athenian dramatists had been content to “imitate [earlier works] in story,” Shelley argues, their “system would have amounted to a resignation of those claims to preference over their competitors which incited the composition” (472). In other words, Shelley points out that because the Greek dramatists composed using mythological subject matter in a competitive arena, they were constantly striving to outdo one another rather than merely to reproduce existing mythological narratives. The mythological plays of the Greek dramatists, therefore, emerged from and existed within an agonistic system in which different versions of the plays opposed one another not only in narrative consistency, but also in overall artistic vision. Mythology in the context of Greek drama thus involves the

fragmentation of myth through rival dramas, and this fragmentation is intertwined with the creative actions of individual authors as the ‘work of myth’ takes place in the ongoing processes of reading and rewriting myth in the pursuit of artistic excellence and (for Shelley) truth.

In claiming in his preface “a similar license” to the Greek dramatists, Shelley situates himself in this revisionary mythological tradition which his reading of ancient Greek drama has elaborated, and he goes on to provide a rationale for his creative choices in his revision of the Prometheus myth (472). Although this remarkable lyrical drama might be called Shelley’s masterpiece, the framing device of the preface renders *Prometheus Unbound* merely another fragment, a new version within the varied assemblage that is the Prometheus ‘myth’. At the same time, however, *Prometheus Unbound* strives for a certain unity of narrative and argument. The play in its formal conception as a unified whole, in both its poetic virtuosity and dramatic action, attempts to establish Wasserman’s “beautiful harmony” which consists in the alignment of the end of the play with a sense of closure—even as its arrangement “in disconnected segments” renders it “an assemblage that finally disassembles itself” (Tilottama Rajan, *Romantic Narrative* 49). *Prometheus Unbound* throughout thus exhibits a tension between unity and fragmentation, which is the very tension characteristic of the Romantic understanding of myth.

Shelley’s own reworking of the Prometheus story advances an alternative order or systematization of the divine powers of Greek myth. The play might therefore be described as Shelley’s own attempt at the construction of what Friedrich Schlegel called the “New Mythology.” Shelley furthers Aeschylus’ critique of Hesiod’s version of the

myth.¹⁸⁰ *Prometheus Bound* represents the defiant rebel Prometheus as an admirable and sympathetic character, even though the trilogy presumably portrayed his eventual reconciliation with Zeus. Shelley valorizes Prometheus' rebellion even further: his Prometheus will never reconcile with the tyrannical rule of Jupiter. Shelley's Jupiter becomes pregnant with significance, evoking the various forces of institutional, ideological, and political tyranny. In this context, Prometheus, Earth, Asia, Ione, and Panthea form an unconventional revolutionary band of Titans who, through their invocation of Demogorgon, work to overthrow Jupiter's tyrannical reign and usher in a new age of positive transformation over the world. The order of *Prometheus Unbound* as a mythmaking project thus hinges on the revision of the Prometheus myth from one which, in the tradition of Hesiod, told merely of a temporary insurrection resolved by the restoration of Zeus's rule, into a myth which portrays the utopian overthrow of the oppressive divine hierarchy. The band of Titans represents a harmonious divine order—exemplified by the love quadrangle between Prometheus, Asia, Panthea, and Ione—in which the deities relate to one another through bonds of mutual affection rather than through an oppressive hierarchical power structure rooted in fear. Shelley thus employs the aesthetic potentiality of ancient Greek myth to engage in a mythopoeic project which rewrites that myth's significance to inspire the kind of ideological revolution which he saw as necessarily intertwined with the hope for positive political and social change. The order of the play's plot, which can be said to invert the narrative of the traditional

¹⁸⁰ The only extant play of the trilogy, *Prometheus Bound*, portrays a suffering and defiant Prometheus. Little is known of the other plays, which survive only in fragments, but the final play apparently portrayed the reconciliation between Prometheus and Zeus. Modern classical scholars have cast doubt on the authenticity of the Aeschylean attribution (see Griffith, West).

Prometheus myth even as it embodies Shelley's unique vision, sets out its mythopoeic project and the utopian union of the aesthetic and the political.

In contrast to this attempt to erect a new mythology through the rewriting of the Prometheus myth, the play's plot works to resist the form of an ordered narrative. In the first place, the four acts do not present a logical sequence of events proceeding according to recognizable principles of cause and effect. For example, the relation between the events of the first act and those of the second act is rather cryptic. The first act describes Prometheus' suffering and his renunciation of his curse against Jupiter, while the second act focuses on dialogue between Asia and Panthea and their journey to Demogorgon's cave. As a result, there is a certain sense that the events of the first act (chiefly, Prometheus' change in viewpoint) somehow form a necessary prerequisite for the events of the second, but the nature of what we presume is a causal relationship remains unclear. We get the sense of causality only through Humean inference—because the second act follows the first. The lack of continuity evident in the obscurity of the causal relationships between the events of the plot finds a counterpart in the roles of the various characters, which fail to conform to traditional conventions of dramatic action. Most strikingly, Prometheus, despite being ostensibly the eponymous hero and protagonist of the drama, plays nearly no role in dialogue or action after the end of the first act.¹⁸¹ Similarly, the cast of the play is rife with *dramatis personae* who act not primarily as characters in the traditional dramatic sense, but rather as part of an imaginary machinery: phantasms, dreams, echoes, spirits, voices, which resist the ascription of dialogue to

¹⁸¹ The only significant exception is in act three, scene three, after he is unbound by Hercules (4-68; 76-84). He speaks also a single line at 3.4.97.

distinct personalities and social agents. The examples could be multiplied. While the play does indeed express a certain logic, traced by commentators such as Wasserman and Cameron, the lack of continuity between events and characters unsettles the kind of systematic order which underpins dramatic narrative form. The play advances a mythopoeic project even as its plot resists the narrative systematization necessary to institute a coherent vision.

Prometheus Unbound operates like mythology itself, in consisting of representations which, pregnant with deeper significance, cry out for interpretation even as they resist being subsumed tidily into readers' analytical frameworks.¹⁸² Shelley's mythological characters are similar to Keats's Titans in this respect, making *Prometheus Unbound* an example of what Wiebe, as I mentioned above, calls a "mythopoeic," which prompts the reader to understand the action by ascribing to the mythological figures allegorical meanings which do not precisely suit them. For example, the character Asia, according to Mary Shelley and many critics who have followed her, represents Love,¹⁸³ and her union with Prometheus and the changes produced can be understood as the positive effects of Love upon the world. But there are aspects of Asia which exceed this allegorization: her long stretches of dialogue with complex imagery render her a dramatic character which the identification with "Love" does not fully explain. The symbolic resonances and the dramatic dimensions of Asia cannot be fully subsumed under the

¹⁸² Cameron observes, "[n]o work by Shelley has been more 'guessed at' than *Prometheus Unbound*" (485), though he considers this a fault of the criticism rather than an integral element of the poem: "No doubt Shelley thought that the hints of meaning given in the Preface and scattered throughout the play would enable his readers to interpret the symbolism" (485).

¹⁸³ Shelley's editors Everest and Matthews write, "it is clear that Asia represents a transcendent form of Love" (466).

allegory of “Love”; there are elements of the figure which resist this classification.

Another example is Prometheus himself. While Prometheus clearly seems to be a positive figure of defiance, of hope in the face of tyranny—Shelley in the preface calls him “the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends” (473)—, critics have expressed widely divergent views on what exactly he is supposed to represent.¹⁸⁴ Because the mythological figures cannot be easily understood allegorically, the significance of much of the dramatic action remains rather cryptic.

Furthermore, Shelley not only figures mythological characters that resist tidy interpretation, but also shifts the significance of such characters in different parts of the play—with the result that some critics have even argued that the play portrays multiple characters with the same names. For example, in their notes to *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley’s editors Kelvin Everest and Geoffrey Matthews write that the Spirit of the Earth of act four “does not seem identical with the Spirit of the Earth” of act three, for the two are described as being different colours, and that of act three is aligned with Eros whereas that of act four seems more “quasi-scientific” (628 n.). Everest and Matthews also distinguish the “character” of the Earth of act one, “mother to all life,” from the Earth of act four, “primarily a planetary body, and brother to the Moon” (634 n.).¹⁸⁵ But it is not clear that the reader necessarily ought to make such distinctions. Shelley’s dramatic personae in Bodleian MS e. might inform our reading of the play (f. 18R, *The*

¹⁸⁴ Everest and Matthews write, “the symbolic meanings of S.’s Prometheus are complex and elusive” (466).

¹⁸⁵ See also Tilottama Rajan, who argues that there are “two Demogorgons: one who has existed since all eternity, and another . . . who is suddenly born for the purpose of destroying Jupiter” (*Dark Interpreter* 95).

Prometheus Unbound Notebooks 74), in spite of its omission from modern editions such as that of Everest and Matthews and that of Donald Reiman and Neil Fraistat.¹⁸⁶ The *dramatis personae* functions as a key to which all instances of a character with a single name refer. To distinguish separate characters on the basis of changes of description in the play—that is, to say that one or the other is a different “Earth” or “Spirit of the Earth”—is to ignore the use of dramatic conventions by which a name denotes a single character. I dwell on this point because it has important implications for the way in which Shelley’s mythological characters engage with the element of fragmentation in a divine pantheon. The heterogeneity which critics have noted in the representation of characters such as the Earth and the Spirit of the Earth reflects not multiple characters to be distinguished from one another, but rather the fragmentation of each figure itself, by which a single mythological character manifests in divergent aspects and cannot be pinned down into a single, fixed significance. The divergence in characters between different acts and scenes stems not only from the changes which take place in the narrative action of the drama, but also from the actualization of divergent potentialities within those mythological figures themselves. The critical impulse to ‘split’ these figures into different characters reflects the original fragmentation within the mythological character itself, which is crucial to the manner in which Shelley represents that divine character’s aesthetic potentiality as capable of being variously actualized dependent upon the particular circumstances.

Perhaps the most explicit example of the link between obscurity and potentiality is the figure of Demogorgon—a character who seems central to the play’s plot but whose

¹⁸⁶ Hughes includes the *dramatis personae* in his edition of Shelley’s 1820 poems (12).

significance remains rather cryptic. Critics have proposed multiple allegorical understandings of Demogorgon,¹⁸⁷ frequently glossing it as a figure for “Time” or “Necessity” in an effort to conceptualize the nature of its function in bringing Jupiter’s reign to an end.¹⁸⁸ Others have turned to the historical origins of the name in an attempt to explain Demogorgon’s meaning. Demogorgon provides a good example of the way in which mythology is continually in reception and does not descend from a pure ancient origin, for the name originated not from ancient Greek mythology but rather from “a pseudo-classical medieval commentary by Lactantius Placidus” on Statius’ *Thebaid*: “[t]he name appears to originate here as a scribe’s error for the Platonic *δημιουργός*,” and subsequently evolved into a mysterious and powerful figure during the Renaissance, in part on the basis of the entry in Boccaccio’s *Genealogia Deorum* (Everest and Matthews 467). That the corruption of a word resulted in the creation of a new figure in the mythological tradition reflects the inherent mutability of mythology as a system of meaning, and shows how authors can even create their own figures in a transformation of the existing system, much like Shelley does with the characters Panthea and Ione, who function as divine figures in the text (they are identified as Oceanids, daughters of the Titan Oceanus) for whom classical precedents do not exist. Like the interpretations of deities by a number of Romantic-era scholars of mythology, the meaning of Demogorgon was also inflected by various speculative etymologies.¹⁸⁹ Everest and Matthews note that

¹⁸⁷ I refer to Demogorgon using the neuter pronoun because the character does not seem to be clearly gendered.

¹⁸⁸ Wasserman calls Demogorgon “the timeless potentiality of time” (291 n. 74). Everest and Matthews identify Demogorgon with “Necessity” (468).

¹⁸⁹ E.g., Bryant writes, “the only way of obtaining an insight must be by an etymological process, and by recurring to the primitive language of the people, concerning whom we are treating” (1.xiv).

“Boccaccio derives the name from δαίμων and γεωργός, ‘daemon of the earth,’” while also suggesting it likely that for Shelley “the name is to be understood as punning on the Gk δῆμος, ‘people’, and γοργός, ‘grim, terrible’” (467; 469). The etymological speculations on the name thus suggest both physico-mythological and socio-political resonances. The figure of Demogorgon holds a rich allure for interpretation due to this convergence of multiple sources: various interpretations attempt to conceptualize the character in order to understand the role it plays in the poem, yet the interpretative process naturally involves the attempt to fix Demogorgon into a single significance, to translate it into another name and thus dispel its obscurity. But the figure of Demogorgon, perhaps more obviously than any other figure in the poem, insistently resists any such straightforward allegorization. Demogorgon in fact derives its power as a mythological figure, its aesthetic and political force, from its very obscurity, as the poem’s descriptions make clear. Jupiter describes Demogorgon as “that awful spirit unbeheld” (3.1.23) while Panthea upon descent to the cave of Demogorgon says,

I see a mighty Darkness
 Filling the seat of power; and rays of gloom
 Dart round, as light from the meridian sun,
 Ungazed upon and shapeless—neither limb,
 Nor form, nor outline; yet we feel it is
 A living Spirit. (2.4.2-7)

Demogorgon is paradoxically described as both darkness and light, midnight and noon, seen and unseen, present and absent. The poem’s refusal to delineate Demogorgon pictorially through the use of a series of paradoxes and deliberate visual vagueness recalls

Milton's famous description of Death in book two of *Paradise Lost*.¹⁹⁰ The combination of obscurity with a multiplicity of meanings endows Demogorgon with mythological aesthetic potentiality.

For example, as scholars have noted, Shelley frequently associates Demogorgon with images of volcanic activity. *Prometheus Unbound* thus also engages with the fragmented nature of mythology in relation to the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century scholarship through its representation of scientific and material aspects of mythological characters. G. M. Matthews argues in an influential article that the descriptions of Asia and Panthea's journey to Demogorgon's cave evoke the location of a volcano (211-13). Demogorgon's association with volcanoes suggests both an unpredictable element in the time of when he will erupt into action, while also placing him in the realm of natural, physical laws governed by necessity. Carl Grabo notes that Shelley's description of the Spirit of the Earth portrays the character using many of the elements attributed to the nature of electricity by scientists such as Erasmus Darwin (121-33). And of course there are also many scientific elements in the duet of the Earth and the Moon in act four. Such parallels suggest that Shelley draws on some arguments from scholarship on mythology, such as those of Erasmus Darwin, who characterized myths as symbolic expressions of physical properties in the natural world. By deploying both physical and abstract qualities in the same figures, Shelley draws on the multiplicity of

¹⁹⁰

The other shape,
 If shape it might be called that shape had none
 Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb,
 Or substance might be called that shadow seemed,
 For each seemed either; black it stood as night,
 Fierce as ten Furies, terrible as hell,
 And shook a dreadful dart; what seemed his head
 The likeness of a kingly crown had on. (666-673)

interpretations of mythological scholarship during his time, and thus demonstrates the heterogeneous, fragmented hermeneutic impulse at the heart of the attempt to read mythology. At the same time—or, perhaps, alternatively—the combination of the physical and the abstract could demonstrate a sort of entanglement of the real and the ideal, as argued for by Otfried Müller and others—or it could indicate an originary rift already existing within the nature of the deities or of the human conceptualization of them. Since Shelley's characters are clearly not entirely scientific in their attributes, this additional register evokes another level of discourse that produces a split, or a sort of double vision, in the interpretation of the significance of the mythological figures, and thus establishes the fragmentation of mythology on both the representational and hermeneutic levels.

Prometheus Unbound also evokes the fragmented nature of mythology through the richness and obscurity of its poetic language. The play's notoriously challenging syntax and lush, dense imagery render it difficult for the reader to interpret—especially when combined with the problem of the undercoding of the mythological characters and the multiple levels of discourse operative within the poem's narrative action. For example, at the end of act two, scene three, the Song of Spirits address Asia and Panthea while guiding them in a descent toward Demogorgon's cave, terminating with a rather cryptic stanza:

We have bound thee, we guide thee
 Down, down!
 With the bright form beside thee—
 Resist not the weakness:
 Such strength is in meekness
 That the Eternal, the Immortal,
 Must unloose through life's portal
 The snake-like Doom coiled underneath his throne

By that alone! (90-98)

While the syntax of this passage is relatively straightforward, its meaning appears obscure. It is not clear what “the bright form” refers to (the Chariot? the Spirit of the Hour?), nor how or why the strength of meekness causes the Eternal to “unloose” “[t]he snake-like Doom” (nor what exactly that doom may be). The grammatical ambiguity of this passage further complicates efforts to comprehend its sense, for it is not at all clear what noun is the referent of “that” in the final line. Is it “meekness,” “weakness,” or “the bright form”? Nor is it clear what “his” refers to. The most straightforward grammatical interpretation would apply “his” to the preceding “the Eternal, the Immortal,” but it seems more logical in terms of the sense to understand “his” as referring to Jupiter (is it? is the doom stored in reserve under the throne of the immortal, or is it menacingly lurking beneath Jupiter’s throne?), though the latter is nowhere mentioned in the sentence. The sweeping lyricism of this passage seems at odds with our stumbling attempts to make sense of it, and this parallels how mythology seems to embody an evocative richness of meaning which calls out to us even as it exceeds the rational understanding we attempt to impose upon it. The play’s language acts like mythology in that both evoke a multiplicity of fragmented meanings while remaining ultimately obscure and unable to be fully fixed by interpretation.

The passage I discussed above is merely one example of the numerous interpretative cruxes involved with Shelley’s evocative language throughout the poem, as the long tradition of critical paraphrase suggests.¹⁹¹ The evocative poetic effect of many

¹⁹¹ E.g., Everest and Matthews refer to the “tradition of paraphrase” for the difficult passage 3.4.164-204 (607 n.), among others.

of Shelley's passages is bound up with their terse, lyric obscurity. Such difficulties in the interpretation of certain passages are compounded by the form in which the poem has been received as a result of historical contingency. Shelley was unable to correct the proofs for the 1820 edition—the only edition published in his lifetime—and was displeased with the large number of errors in the printing (see Everest and Matthews 456-65). Evidence from numerous stages of the composition and the printing, as well as a list of errata prepared by Shelley for 1820, have all been lost (456-65). As a result, modern editors have often been left floundering in a sea of irresolvable textual cruxes, not to mention the difficulties involved in the minutiae of capitalization and punctuation—frequently only addressable by means of idiosyncratic editorial decisions, and which often affect the sense of passages a great deal. This grammatically and textually challenging form of the poem—which forces modern readers to make numerous decisions and choices in the reading of the text in order to come to a particular understanding while eliminating others—reflects the difficulty of interpreting mythological systems and figures whose fragmented heterogeneity offers a multiplicity of interpretations.

The textual fragmentation of the play is also evident in the arrangement of scenes in the Bodleian library notebooks. Rajan argues that the unusual placement of scenes in notebooks E1 and E2, in which different parts of the play are written on facing pages, forms a deliberate part of Shelley's design. "By re-citing the text in fragments," Rajan argues, "the manuscript reduces the play to the phrases from which it is assembled, thus putting its emplotment under erasure" and the "'followability' of the story . . . in question by making the plot of the play the very process of the plot's construal and production"

(*Romantic Narrative* 77). I would like to suggest that the effect of this formal arrangement is related to Shelley's conceptualization of the play as mythology. The juxtapositions that Rajan notes contribute to the play's operation in a mythological mode, by establishing formally the tension between system and fragment. The form of the play in the notebooks exhibits its status as mythology because it portrays the text as something which can be (re)ordered and (dis)ordered rather than remaining fixed, as a work which gains its significance in the processes of reading and rewriting.

The play explicitly represents such fragmentation through the image of the wilderness, which evokes the reader's hermeneutic experience of the poem as fragmented by figuring such experience as wandering lost through a landscape which is both wild and wildering. Some lines from a speech by the Fourth Spirit in act one are often cited by critics as descriptive of the idealism of Shelley's poetic process—the way in which mind is said to operate upon experience to transform it into beautiful reflections of human truth.¹⁹² But it is important to note that underpinning this creative process is the kind of labyrinthine wandering associated with fragmentation. The Fourth Spirit's speech begins as follows:

On a Poet's lips I slept
 Dreaming like a love-adept
 In the sound his breathing kept;
 Nor seeks nor finds he mortal blisses,
 But feeds on the aërial kisses
 Of shapes that haunt thought's wildernesses. (1.737-42)

This passage evokes an aesthetic of desire through the sexualization of the creative process, showing how the erotic and the aesthetic are intertwined, as I demonstrated in

¹⁹² “But from these create he can / Forms more real than living man, / Nurslings of immortality!—” (1.747-49).

chapter three. The Fourth Spirit makes clear that the poet's desire is not directed toward physical realization but rather toward the fleeting experience of fragmentary forms—the “shapes that haunt thought's wildernesses” which the poet cannot experience directly but only through the insubstantial communion of “aërial kisses.” The contrast of this ethereal sensuality with “mortal blisses” shows how the poet's creative vision is rooted in a fragmentary (mis)encounter with mythological material. The space of the wilderness is aligned in the poem with the space of mythology itself. Both wilderness and mythology are incredibly vast areas rife with confusion and the possibility of becoming lost; both gain their meaning through the process of wandering through them rather than through the attainment of systematic mastery (a map, a full interpretation). Shelley emphasizes the importance of the wilderness as a figure for mythology later on in the poem, as well. After her encounter with Demogorgon in its cave in scene five of act two, in her lyrical speech of exultation Asia describes her soul as passing through “A paradise of wildernesses” (81) and goes on to describe her and Panthea undergoing a passage through “Wildernesses calm and green, / Peopled by shapes too bright to see” (107-08). The poem's imagery insistently aligns creative potentiality and the triumph of beauty and the imagination with “wildernesses,” the plural form underscoring the heterogeneity and multiplicity which informs the aesthetic potentiality of labyrinthine mythological space.

The multiplicity of meanings applicable to the play's divine figures endows them with aesthetic potentiality in both the writing and reading processes. In the first scene of act two, when describing the after-effects of her second dream to Asia, Panthea recounts hearing Prometheus' voice, and says to Asia,

thy name
Among the many sounds alone I heard

Of what might be articulate. (89-91)

Prometheus' communication of Asia's name to Panthea serves as both a direction and a prophecy of sorts—one that provides future possibility but remains yet to be accomplished, because the culminating function of Asia has yet to be realized within the play's action—which is bound up with its composition and its reading, as the state of the manuscripts and the numerous cruxes make clear.¹⁹³ Prior to her apotheosis at the end of the act, Asia remains a promise and a possibility, a sound “[o]f what might be articulate,” to exploit the grammatical ambiguity of this passage. The play thus sets up within itself the issue of the actualization of the potentiality of its divine figures through the course of its own action. The interrelationships and transformations which take place among and upon the characters, particularly Prometheus and Asia, form the driving force of the revolution the drama depicts. At the same time, however, the play, despite its repeated references to inevitability and necessity, marks such revolution and transformation as potential rather than as certain. The revolutionary potential of mythology, like poetry, remains “a lightning which has yet found no conductor” (*Defence* 528).

The image of lightning is appropriate, for *Prometheus Unbound* demonstrates that the aesthetic potentiality of mythology consists in fragmentation by intertwining images of violence and destruction with images of ordered creation. Early in act four the Voice of Unseen Spirits refers to the positive transformations taking place in the natural world, which are caused “By the storm of delight, by the panic of glee!” (44), linking chaotic material processes with unconstrained celebratory emotion. Along similar lines, the

¹⁹³ For Romantic prophecy see Bundock, who shows how “while prophecy might aim to ameliorate disorder, in fact it draws attention to and exacerbates this same disorder” (“Composing Darkness” iii).

Chorus of Spirits says a bit later, “We join the throng / Of the dance and the song, / By the whirlwind of gladness borne along” (83-85), linking musical imagery of order and harmony with the jumble of a throng and the undirected violence of the whirlwind—a system with its own kind of order and shape (as a rotating funnel) but which is uncontrolled and unpredictable. Later in act four Panthea delivers what is perhaps the most sustained description intertwining mythology’s fragmentation with its creative potentiality. This dense passage is worth quoting at length:

And from the other opening in the wood
Rushes, with loud and *whirlwind harmony*,
A sphere, which is as many thousand spheres,
Solid as crystal, yet through all its mass
Flow, as through empty space, music and light:
Ten thousand orbs involving and involved,
Purple and azure, white and green and golden,
Sphere within sphere; and every space between
Peopled with *unimaginable shapes*,
Such as ghosts dream dwell in the lampless deep,
Yet each inter-transparent; and they whirl
Over each other with a thousand motions,
Upon a thousand sightless axles spinning,
And with the force of *self-destroying swiftness*,
Intensely, slowly, solemnly roll on,
Kindling with mingled sounds, and many tones,
Intelligible words and music wild. (4.236-52, my emphasis)

The image of the sphere, I suggest, can be read as a meta-poetic image of mythology itself. The paradoxical phrase “whirlwind harmony” echoes the earlier occurrence of “whirlwind” in the speech delivered by the Chorus of Spirits, and conveys a connection between chaotic destructiveness and the harmonic creation of beauty. The tension in the sphere between multiplicity and unity, solidity and transparency, reflects the tension in mythology between its existence as a coherent system of thought considered like a language, and its mode of operation as a jumbled assemblage of competing narratives and

traditions open to divergent interpretations. In the context of the passage one gets the sense that the repeated ‘thousand’s (“many thousand,” “[t]en thousand” “a thousand” “a thousand”) are meant to suggest a countless quantity of objects and activities undergone by the sphere which is both one and many. The sphere, read as a symbol of mythology, thus exhibits fragmentation in its nature and mode of operation not merely through a finite multiplicity of interpretations, but rather through a boundless set of potential meanings.

Critics have often understood *Prometheus Unbound* as a poem of triumphant affirmation, even if it does bracket itself as operating “only in the subjunctive mood of desire” rather than in the historical reality of the indicative (Rajan, *Dark Interpreter* 24). There is indeed a drive toward unification in the poem, toward the conversion of mythological forces in a utopian revolution. This unifacatory drive derives from syncretic thinking about the role and power of mythology as a language-like system of meaning which embodies the deepest aspects of the nature of human beings and of human culture. At the same time, however, the poem’s movement has its being only through the processes of fragmentation that I have been highlighting throughout. The mythological war between the Olympians and the Titans which forms the background for the poem’s dramatic action is itself the original fracture within the mythological system (its narrative about its own creation) that provides the space in which the poem can be written. The obscurity of the meanings of the characters and the nature of the actions which take place renders the narrative movement and the conclusion cryptic—it is not exactly clear how or why the revolution takes place, or how we are to understand the significance of the positive changes which occur. *Prometheus Unbound* operates like mythology and

portrays mythology by means of the aesthetic potentiality of fragmentation in its drive toward its conclusion, even as the multiplicity of interpretations renders its own narrative conclusion open to the same kind of fragmentary incompleteness. In the arranging of fragments that forms the writing of the poem and in which the poem's progress consists, there is internalized a counter-impulse which continually threatens to rend the poem's "daedal harmony" (4.416). *Prometheus Unbound* cannot escape, and indeed does not wish to escape, the fragmentation of mythology which lies at its origin but which it must, to some extent, disavow in the presentation of its conclusion. The poem portrays its own writing and reading processes as the arrangement of the various fragments of mythology (sources, characters, stories) only to end up staging the failure of the poetic and hermeneutic efforts to systematize the potentiality of myth.

4.4 Conclusion

It is an irony in Romanticism's critical reception that scholars have rarely examined *Prometheus Unbound* and Keats's Hyperion poems as works concerned with mythology as an issue in its own right. Given the context provided by Romantic Hellenism and late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century scholarship, mythology provided particularly apt subject matter for poetry's self-reflexive exploration of the intertextual nature of literature, and the relationship between present-day and ancient Greek culture. Indeed, it is no coincidence that major works which have become central to the critical understanding of each poet's achievement quite explicitly situate themselves in a mythological mode. Rather than an antiquated relic of a superseded religion, or an entirely idealized emblem of symbolic unity, mythology in the Romantic period became a space of aesthetic potentiality energized by its fragmentary processes, its

tension between chaos and system, throng and harmony. Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century scholarship on ancient Greek mythology not only fragmented mythology through the creation of various opposed interpretations by different authorities, but also through the understanding of multiple competing systems—even multiple levels of signification—within the core of mythology itself. Ancient Greek mythology became thus both a language to be decoded embodying its own worldview (a representation of the harmonic ideal of Hellenic culture), and a chaotic mass of hieroglyphic images which could not be understood. The *Hyperion* poems and *Prometheus Unbound* exploit the potentiality of mythology's fragmentation, both in writing about the narrative fracture in the mythological system's account of itself which occurs with the transition between the Titans and the Olympians, and in their own representations of the multifaceted and tautegorical nature of mythological characters, who can never be tidily allegorized. These poems attempt, through the writing about the change in regime of the ancient Greek pantheon, to accomplish the height of the work of the Romantic poet's career, through the composition of a modern poetic work which is at once a reading and a rewriting of ancient Greek culture. The works' engagement with the reading and rewriting processes deploys the potentiality of mythology's fragmentation, even as each work itself aspires toward a harmony of composition that would consist in the successful embodiment of the fully-realized Hellenic ideal. Through their self-acknowledged inability to fix the ancient Greek mythological ideal into a single unified vision, these poems stage their own failures at arranging the fragments of the Hellenic ideal into a unified system within the modern poetic work. Each work becomes part of the ongoing process of mythology's rewriting of itself, for the manner in which

mythology exists is nothing other than the process by which it is continually coming into being: the intertwined processes of the reading and the rewriting of the Hellenic ideal.

Friedrich Schlegel explains:

For this is the beginning of all poetry, to cancel the progression and laws of rationally thinking reason, and to transplant us once again into the beautiful confusion of imagination, into the original chaos of human nature, for which I know as yet no more beautiful symbol than the motley throng of the ancient gods. (“Talk on Mythology” 86)

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