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**“REMORSE WITHOUT THE FEAR OF HELL”:
SKEPTICISM AND AGENCY IN ROMANTIC DRAMA**

by

DANIEL MOZES

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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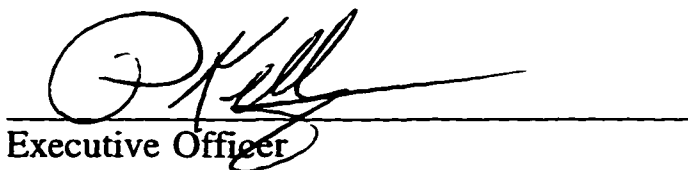
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The new statement will comprise the skepticisms, as well as the faiths of society, and out of unbeliefs a creed shall be formed. For skepticisms are not gratuitous or lawless, but are limitations of the affirmative statement, and the new philosophy must take them in, and make affirmations outside of them, just as much as it must include the oldest beliefs.

Emerson, from Experience¹

The purpose of this study of the drama of William Wordsworth, Samuel Coleridge, Percy Shelley, and Lord Byron is to dispense with a number of myths about these texts and about Romanticism in general. Those myths are, first, that the dramatic works of these writers conventionally termed “Romantic” are not central to their literary projects and, second, that Romantic literature constitutes a retreat into the mind, a celebration of the self that amounts to an admission of despair for any political or social apocalypse. Though many Romantic dramas are of the closet, they engage in public issues, as well as the issue of the public as a mass. The Romantic playwrights dramatize sources of despair that lead to the kind of solipsism of which they are wrongly accused. Their plays seek to counter despair, making repeated calls for the ethical improvement of humankind. Specifically, these playwrights call for a greater and a more *dialogic* understanding of where modern skepticism puts us—“dialogue” referring not just to the spoken interplay between characters representing differing philosophical complexes but also to the dialogue the text stages with itself through self-critical dramatic plots, ironies, as well as characters in conflict. This study will establish an unbroken line of dramatic dialogue and debate among the above writers. Though there never was any school or movement called Romantic by its

¹The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Alfred Ferguson, Jean Ferguson Carr, III (Cambridge, MA, London: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1983) 43.

practitioners, the existence of such a through-line pleads that we link these authors in our minds.²

The dramas to be examined here--Wordsworth's The Borderers, Coleridge's Osorio, Shelley's The Cenci and Prometheus Unbound, Byron's Manfred and Marino Faliero, and Baillie's De Monfort--form a dialogue centered around two skeptical moves and the possibilities for responding to them. First, Romantic drama assumes the Enlightenment's thoroughgoing skepticism of all custom, received thought, and complacency. The seven dramas, written over a span of a quarter century (during which time uncounted other plays were written, staged, printed, and discussed) form a discrete body because, unlike any other coherent body of plays, these are all very specifically about the possibility of freedom in a post-revolutionary world, a world in which human nature itself seems in danger of degenerating and human communication failing. Some of the dramas, notably those of Coleridge, Shelley, and Byron, voice specific critiques of the effects of oppressive human institutions upon individuals. But more generally, each drama attempts to confront an idea of modernity in which such skepticism is the starting point for understanding the world.

²Several studies exist which examine the cross-influences between Byron and Shelley and between Wordsworth and Coleridge. See, for example, Charles E. Robinson, Shelley and Byron: The Snake and Eagle Wreathed in Fight (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1979). As his title suggests, Robinson's study paints an adversarial relationship between the poets. This portrayal has been usefully corrected by William D. Brewer, The Shelley-Byron Conversation (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1994). Where Robinson, according to Brewer, "tends to simplify their literary relationship" into consistent hostility, Brewer feels "that their interchanges were generally more collaborative than oppositional" (3). This study follows Brewer's understanding that "conversation" includes philosophic conflict. Since the literature on Wordsworth and Coleridge is too extensive to cite I mention only Nicolas Roe's Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years (Oxford: Clarendon P; New York: Oxford UP, 1988) as having been particularly useful.

Beginning by questioning dogmas, these dramas investigate the potential for skepticism to dehumanize us as powerfully as it liberates us. The second skeptical move Romantic drama thus confronts is doubt about the humanity of other people. Has the Enlightenment's skepticism, extended by Locke and Hume into the human mind's innate composition, thrown away all bases for acknowledging each other's essential humanness? Drawing upon Stanley Cavell's phrasing, the study seeks Romantic dramas' strategies for acknowledgment of otherness. As Cavell writes:

both skepticism and tragedy conclude with the condition of human separation, with a discovering that I am I; and the fact that the alternative to my acknowledgment of the other is not my ignorance of him but my avoidance of him, call it my denial of him. Acknowledgment is to be studied, is what is studied, in the avoidances that tragedy studies.³

This ringingly optimistic assertion that acknowledgment, finally, is closer to human nature than avoidance is Romantic dramas' abiding hope. The kernel of this study is simply a perception that a pattern exists among all Romantic dramas: they focus upon the ethical consequences of living in a revolutionary age. Readers of individual plays have noticed their ethical contents, but critics seeking generalizations about Romantic drama have nearly always found either the French Revolution or a "mental theatre": either politics or internalized aesthetics. But the politics and aesthetics of Romantic dramas always operate via ethics to ethical ends. This study's political and aesthetic concerns grow out of the primary perception that the Romantics dramatized the ethics of characters, or human subjects.

³The Claim of Reason, Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy (Oxford, New York, Toronto, Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1979) 389.

Critics of Romantic literature have slowly become aware of skepticism's centrality to these writers' political, literary, and ethical projects. At least since C. E. Pulos countered the one-sided readings of Shelley as a neo-Platonist, critics have been aware of a complex and ambiguous interaction between Enlightenment rationalism and Romantic aesthetics and social critique. More recently there have been several surveys of British Romanticism and skepticism, most notably that of Donald Reiman, who finds in the Romantics a common psychological predisposition toward social alienation. Other studies worth noting include those of Lloyd Robert Abbey (of Shelley) and Andrew M. Cooper. Cooper in particular usefully distinguishes between skepticism of objective materiality and skepticism of other minds, rightly leading him to associate both sorts of skepticism in "Our struggle to reacknowledge the body's role in supplying the ground of consciousness."⁴ Stanley Cavell's own study of connections between Romanticism and skepticism, In Quest of the Ordinary, has been less useful to this study than his more general studies of skepticism.⁵ Finally, I could not have dispensed with Terence Hoagwood's work on Shelley's prose and what he calls "Byron's Dialectic," especially while I began to understand the possibilities of an unlimited ideal skepticism.⁶

Useful as these studies have been, they are not duplicated here. None of them mentions The Borderers or Osorio (or Remorse, the revised Osorio), and even the studies of Shelley hardly mention The Cenci. Aside from this difference in texts, or perhaps

⁴Doubt and Identity in Romantic Poetry (New Haven: Yale UP, 1988) 2. See also C. E. Pulos, The Deep Truth: A Study of Shelley's Scepticism (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1962); Donald H. Reiman, Intervals of Inspiration: The Skeptical Tradition and the Psychology of Romanticism (Gainesville, Fla.: Penkeville, 1988); Lloyd R. Abbey, Destroyer and Preserver: Shelley's Poetic Skepticism (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1979).

⁵In Quest Of The Ordinary : Lines Of Skepticism And Romanticism (Chicago : U of Chicago P, 1988).

⁶See Skepticism and Ideology: Shelley's Political Prose and its Philosophical Context from Bacon to Marx (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1988) and Byron's Dialectic: Skepticism and the Critique of Culture (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1993).

because of it, there are various differences of approach between my study's view of skepticism in Romanticism and theirs. Hoagwood's Marxism. Cooper's reader-response criticism (and reliance on Alfred North Whitehead), Reiman's psychology, and Cavell's obsession with Wittgenstein are simply foreign to this investigation. Though Hoagwood's work has been the most pertinent, I must place myself closest to that of C. E. Pulos. Pulos's sweeping study of Shelley does not (unlike Hoagwood) see Shelley adhering to a final, unlimited skepticism. But Pulos tends to shut down some of Shelley's fruitful contraries, deciding what Shelley did, in fact, leave open.

The most important question faced by Romantic skepticism, and one which these plays ask is: could there be a subject, a core self, in some sense at the center of human existence? If so, what are its characteristics? How can it seek others outside of itself? How can it *fail* to see those others? The question of the subject is a specific case, albeit the most important one, of the more general problem of skepticism's role within Romanticism. It is this study's contention that the Romantics recover from the consequences of skepticism by dramatizing its limitations, specifically through the ethical dialogue. Once we see the line connecting Romantic dramas to each other, we can begin to understand how drama and skepticism are in fact the pillars upon which the Romantic critique of Enlightenment stands. For Romanticism cannot do without its inheritance from the Enlightenment, the power to liberate the mind from orthodoxy and dogma. Even Coleridge's affirmation of orthodoxy in Osorio is founded on a much liberal skepticism. But Romanticism also discovers the power of skepticism to destroy more than it can create, and in the desire to correct what ills skepticism makes plain, Romantic drama comes to critique itself by speaking to itself, hoping to goad itself back into the world and action.

My ongoing use of the term "dialogic" and "dialogue" inevitably bring Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of the novel to mind, but his use of these terms is opposed to my own. Bakhtin's dialogics refers to the way social "languages" transcend the intentions of any novel's author. Bakhtin's novel is the locus of interplay between different "languages," or

ways of describing the world specific to social classes and groups. Bakhtin opposes the novel to the epic, which form he sees as excluding all but one official authoritative language, that of the ruling class. This study, however, is not only not concerned with the novel or the epic, but also does not accept Bakhtin's premise in rejecting the importance of authors. If the Romantics thought of themselves as aeolian harps played upon by social forces, so too did they claim to be lamps shining forth with their own light, both creators of and created by their worlds.

Romantic writers chose the dramatic form to open, not close, the skeptical question of agency: if there is a subject, what are its powers? If we are not subjects, are we beings utterly determined by external structures, structures that can come to resemble the plots of plays? There is a subtle dialectic running through each drama, and between the dramas, that tends sometimes to favor subjectivity's powers, and sometimes to determinism and the power of history or Power abstractly conceived to make the characters become what they behold. We might group under the more optimistic dramas Osorio, De Monfort, and Prometheus Unbound, and align the rest with pessimism or fate; but this study will not long indulge in such simplifications, for the dramas hold our interest by resisting categorization, by engaging in internal debates. A more useful (provisional) categorization would group Byron and Shelley's dramas against the others, since these later texts perform the Romantic dialectic within themselves that the earlier, more univocal plays perform only in response to one another. Thus Prometheus Unbound, though comic, only conceives of the agent's powers as reconstructed after the failure of direct physical revolution.

Fostering dialogue and dialectic is a central reason for Romantic writers to employ the dramatic form. As Stuart Curran has argued, choosing *any* traditional form can be seen as an unavoidable acquiescence to custom, for already extant "Conceptual structures haunt the human mind."⁷ But Curran goes on to show that formal constraints are also "an enabling mechanism for the imagination that plays best when it knows the dimensions of

⁷Poetic Form and British Romanticism. (Oxford, New York: Oxford UP, 1986) 3.

the sandbox" (12). Since the dramatic form involves no narrator, no omniscience, there is never a character or statement in any of these plays upon which the audience or reader may mentally rest. Romantic drama, written in the aftermath of a French Revolution it understood to have been a failed experiment in skeptical philosophy, takes particular advantage of this self-critiquing possibility in drama. Romantic narrative art does not generally rely upon a narrator's authority, as narrative ambiguities in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," Frankenstein, or Don Juan would show. Romantic drama is not separate from the rest of the Romantic literary production, but it is a special corner of it.

This approach to the dramas is not the traditional one, nor is it the one prevalent among today's most important critics of Romantic drama. Since its inception Romantic drama has been conceived, starting with its own playwrights and critics, as a failed genre produced during a period hostile to the production of serious literary plays. As Lord Byron wrote in the "Preface" to Marino Faliero, "I have had no view to the stage; in its present state it is, perhaps, not a very exalted object of ambition; besides I have been too much behind the scenes to have thought it so at any time."⁸ Though there have been studies that, because of or despite that prejudice, have shed much light on individual dramatic works, the genre as a whole has suffered under a tradition of hostility and neglect.⁹ Only individual works, such as Byron's Manfred and Shelley's Prometheus Unbound and The Cenci, spared from the drama's neglect by their claims to be extended lyric performances, have belonged to the main lines of Romanticism's criticism. More recent studies of Romantic literature, impelled by Jerome McGann's call to identify and separate criticism

⁸The Complete Poetical Works, ed. Jerome J. McGann, IV (Oxford: Clarendon P. 1986) 305. Whether Byron meant what he wrote here has always been an open question. See David Erdman, "Byron's Stage-fright: The History of his Ambition and Fear of Writing for the Stage," ELH, 6 (1939): 315-31.

⁹See, for example. Allardyce Nicoll's History of Early Nineteenth Century Drama, 1800-1850, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1930).

from Romanticism's own ideologies,¹⁰ have begun to question critical traditions like the one suppressing Romantic drama. Even in Byron's own remark, it is evident that there is something of the disappointed idealist seeking a more "exalted" form of publication than the cooperative and commercial medium afforded. The problem of Romantic denigrations of the drama has accordingly begun to receive a more skeptical critical reception than formerly.¹¹

The first wave of book-length studies of Romantic drama from the late sixties and early seventies were largely written under the auspices of an even earlier set of critical assumptions. These studies, though they make all further study of the genre possible, do not address current critical anxiety over agency in Romantic literature generally. They tend to evaluate the dramas on various aesthetic grounds, usually confirming the previous denigrations, and are more concerned with exploring the types of consciousness in the drama than its ethical or political elements. Much of the present study builds on Joseph Donohue's Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age (1970), which establishes some cogent categories in Romantic characterization. Yet even this magisterial work, since it relies upon a Romantic universe so firmly centered around Coleridge and Wordsworth, virtually ignores Byron, the genre's best playwright and its most prolific.¹²

¹⁰In The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation (Chicago, London: U of Chicago P, 1983).

¹¹See, for example, Terence A. Hoagwood, "Prolegomenon for a Theory of Romantic Drama," The Wordsworth Circle 13:2 (1992): 49-64. This special issue of The Wordsworth Circle, edited by Hoagwood and Daniel P. Watkins, is entitled Romantic Drama: Historical and Critical Essays.

¹²Donohue was published by Princeton UP, Princeton, NJ. See also Terry Otten, The Deserted Stage: the Search for Dramatic Form in Nineteenth Century England (Athens: Ohio UP, 1972); Richard M. Fletcher, English Romantic Drama, 1795-1843: A Critical History (New York: Exposition P, 1966); Joan Mandell Baum, The Theatrical Compositions of the Major English Romantic Poets (Salzburg, Austria: Institut Fur Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1980) (written as a dissertation, Columbia U, 1966). See

More recent criticism of Romantic drama falls into two camps: continuations of the previous generations' work, and political re-evaluations of the genre by Marxist and feminist critics. Those continuing to mine the vein of consciousness and the Wordsworth-centered model have produced striking readings and insights, often attempting to shift the fundamental reading of the genre from one that inevitably denigrates it in favor of treasured lyrics and the more revered epics. Alan Richardson, for example, has argued in A Mental Theater (1988) that Romantic drama is not static, as is almost universally assumed: "The Romantic revival of Shakespearean psychological drama relied, then, on a renewed emphasis on consciousness, but equally on a dynamic conception of character as inherently unstable, changing, formed and reformed, through dramatic confrontation."¹³

One reason that the politically attuned readers of Romantic drama have been more useful for this study is that each of its philosophical steps is based on politics: skepticism of institutions, skepticism of the other and agency are all political problems arising in the drama from reactions to political events in France and, later, in Europe.¹⁴ As Terence

also Bertrand Evans, Gothic Drama from Walpole to Shelley (Berkeley: U California P, 1947).

¹³Alan Richardson, Mental Theater: Poetic Drama and Consciousness in the Romantic Age (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1988) 5. Among the best of these newer studies is Erika Gottlieb's Lost Angels of a Ruined Paradise: Themes of Cosmic Strife in Romantic Tragedy (Victoria, B.C.: Sono Nis P, 1981). See also The Romantic Theater: An International Symposium, ed. Richard Allen Cave (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble, 1986); Jeffrey N. Cox, In the Shadows of Romance: Romantic Tragic Drama in Germany, England, and France (Athens, Ohio; London: Ohio UP, 1987); Frederick Burwick, Illusion and the Drama: Critical Theory of the Enlightenment and Romantic Era (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1991); Richard Lansdown, Byron's Historical Dramas (Oxford: Clarendon P, New York: Oxford UP, 1992).

¹⁴In addition to the special edition of the Wordsworth Circle cited above, see esp. Daniel P. Watkins, A Materialist Critique of English Romantic Drama (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1993). See also Julie Carlson, In the Theatre of Romanticism: Coleridge, Nationalism, Women (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge UP, 1994); Marjean Purinton, Romantic Ideology Unmasked: The Mentally Constructed Tyrannies in Dramas of William

Hoagwood has theorized: “displacement of revolutionary sociopolitical content is the central fact about Romantic drama.”¹⁵ Hoagwood and others have pointed out that “mental theatre,” a widely used phrase, “was misappropriated in terms of the privatizing psychology of consumerism,” with the result that “‘individualism’ became for many academic critics the drama’s only recognizable source of meaning.”¹⁶

The phrase comes from a letter Byron wrote to his publisher Murray from August 23, 1821: “I want to make a regular English drama—no matter whether for the stage or not—which is not my object—but a *mental theatre*.”¹⁷ Marjean Purinton glosses the sentence thus: “Byron’s reference suggests a mental process, but his reference is national rather than personal.”¹⁸ Actually the reference seems to be both national *and* personal, a mixture typical for Byron to make. This study’s procedures and conclusions differ sharply from those of Romantic drama’s political critics, partly because the branches of research are disparate, but partly because they tend to exclude the mental in favor of the political, reversing rather than correcting the old prejudices. Those prejudices were so pernicious that Purinton (rightly) feels the need to say that “Closet drama is not escapist literature” (21). Daniel P. Watkins’s important study, like Purinton’s, explores ideology in the dramas. Watkins’s persuasive thesis is that Romantic drama exhibits a “clash *between* ideologies—that is, aristocratic and bourgeois.”¹⁹ This valid, powerful, and well-

Wordsworth, Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, and Joanna Baillie (Newark: U of Delaware P, London: Associates Presses, 1994). Much closer to my study is the work of William Jewett, mainly in an unpublished dissertation “Romanticism, Tragedy, and the Politics of Agency,” diss., Yale U, 1991. See also “Action in The Borderers,” Studies in Romanticism 27:3 (1988).

¹⁵“Prolegomenon,” 51.

¹⁶From the “Foreword” to Marjean Purinton, Romantic Ideology Unmasked, 11.

¹⁷Byron’s Letters and Journals, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, VIII (Cambridge, MA: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1973-82) 186-7.

¹⁸Purinton, 21.

¹⁹A Materialist Critique, 9. his emphasis.

documented thesis is but tangentially related to a philosophical investigation of the play of agency in these works.

However, the political critics' inquiries into ideology in Romantic drama do tend to assume what this study questions by asserting the primacy of ideology over the individual authors' efforts. Whether, as in Watkins's case, the critic searches for a political unconscious, or, as in Catherine Burrough's, the dramas' own feminist strategies are foregrounded, the critic's purpose is to reveal the relationships between social contexts and the plays' literary contents.²⁰ This study attempts to map the philosophical bases for the work that the political critics have done, in order to bring the Romantics' own complex ideas and expression of agency to critical consciousness.

Closer in spirit to the epistemological bent of this study are some of Romanticism's critics working within a postmodern theoretical frame. Though a discussion of postmodern Romantic criticism is mainly confined to the chapter on Shelley, a few words are in order here. The postmodern critics' key philosophical move, as I see it, is the hypothesis that all subjectivity is always already formed in culture.²¹ The death of the innate subject as a theme of Romantic texts may be broken down into two separate issues. First, is there a

²⁰See, for example, Catherine Burroughs, "English Romantic Women Writers and Theatre History: Joanna Baillie's Preface to the Plays on the Passions," in Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776-1837, eds. Carol Shiner Wilson, Joel Haefner (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1994) 274-96.

²¹As Stanley Corngold writes, postmodern criticism of Romanticism is not to underestimated: "Recent literary theory has profoundly altered the way in which English and German Romantic writers are read. The thrust of the new criticism has been to discredit the self or subject as an origin of meaning and value." See "Hölderlin's Poetry and the Persistence of the Self," Literature as Philosophy: Philosophy as Literature, ed. Donald G. Marshall (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1987), 205. Corngold bemoans these trends, and briefly suggests that the hypothesis of the death of the subject upon which they are based is spurious: "The deconstruction of the subject is a project that therefore lies always ahead of us. It has not been done; and on the evidence of those who are attempting to do it, it cannot be done, either factually or by right" (225-26).

core self, soul, or transcendental subject with provable ontological status? Skepticism teaches us to answer no, but it also refuses to deny the possibility, not provability, of such a phenomenon. The status of possible-but-not-provable is almost indistinguishable from the status of a useful or not useful fiction. A self is there if we choose to have faith, if such faith serves us. For the postmodern sensibility, such faith in the self is lacking, whether or not the political consequences of abandoning ontological identity are as often (or potentially) fascistic as they are liberatory. This dual valence of non-identity seems clear in current identity politics; Judith Butler, following Michel Foucault, implores feminism to claim that sex does not exist and further that genders should be bent. Feminism should not lean upon sexual identity for purposes of political identification. Leo Bersani, speaking from a gay political perspective, counters Butler, not on the grounds that there is ontological subjectivity, but by saying that identity is too politically useful to abandon. Bersani writes: "what's troubling is that, in rejecting the essentializing identities derived from sexual preference, [Butler and others] mount a resistance to homophobia in which the agent of resistance has been erased: there is no longer any homosexual subject to oppose the homophobic subject."²² The political consequences of abandoning the subject depend upon the identity, then, of the beholder. Romantic plays dramatize this very realization of identity's ambivalent (not worthless) political value.

Aside from the uncertainty of identity-less politics, there is the issue of where the Romantics stood in relation to our postmodern problems. The obvious anachronism of the way that question is framed is deliberate, since it mirrors the way postmodern critics of Romantic writers so often frame it. And yet, as passages from Hume quoted in the section of this study on Wordsworth's The Borderers will show, skepticism of ontological identity predates Romanticism. Further, this study will argue that Romantic drama is a defensive

²²Leo Bersani, Homos (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1995) 56. See Butler's Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1989), to which Bersani is responding here.

response to skepticism of the self (which is not the same as glorification of the self). Romantic plays dramatize the consequences of insufficient selfhood. It is certainly not the case that the Romantics simply lived in a happier time, free from the terrible dislocations that a postmodern consciousness faces, for the skeptical position contains as much fullness in the ancient Greek Academic skeptics as it does today. Hume's and Shelley's skeptical awarenesses doubt as powerfully as any postmodern writer. Terence Hoagwood's important study of skepticism in Shelley's prose, in fact, argues that Shelley's skepticism recalls the force of the original Greek Academic skeptics, and transcends what Hoagwood sees as a weaker postmodern variation.²³ Finally, insofar as postmodern skepticism *is* politically motivated, it shares goals with the critics I termed political. But, as Linda Hutcheon has observed in her study of the politics of postmodernism, these politics are submerged, leading to no action: "While the postmodern has no effective theory of agency that enables a move into political action, it does work to turn its inevitable ideological grounding into a site of de-naturalizing critique."²⁴ That which postmodernism has excluded in despair, Romantic drama locates at the very center of its inquiry.

Hope and despair, then, form the contraries that lead, in Romantic drama, to true progression, which is action. The first chapter of the study, on Wordsworth's The Borderers (1797), establishes Romantic drama's association between intellectual skepticism and abandonment. This chapter shows how Wordsworth, though he ends the play within despairing modern alienation, suggests along the way that our innate sense of physiognomic interrelations possesses the power to save us. The second chapter delineates how Coleridge's play Osorio (also of 1797) is an optimistic response to Wordsworth's drama of despair. Coleridge sacrifices Wordsworth's radical metaphysical critique of modernity even within his more politically radical plot. I stand open to accusations of anachronism in my conclusion that, despite Coleridge's engagement with radical politics.

²³See Skepticism and Ideology, 1-5. 68-69.

²⁴The Politics of Postmodernism (London, New York: Routledge. 1989) 3.

his idealism must be rejected as rosy-picture making. Despite my condemnation of Coleridgean optimism, I note here that similar condemnations made in the name of politics forget that Coleridge's central optimistic belief was in a democracy of souls. Each of us can become good by reconciling our conscious selves with our core selves, no matter what we may have done in the past, Coleridge asserts. That (perhaps dogmatic) belief is part of what enabled Coleridge, almost alone among Romantic playwrights, to acknowledge racial divisions in his drama.²⁵

The third chapter investigates the interplay of agency, skepticism, and idealism in Shelley's two dramas The Cenci and Prometheus Unbound (both written in 1819). These dramas, the former written for the crowd, the latter for the few, nevertheless mirror one another in a dialectical search for a basis in hope. Unlike Coleridge's hope, Shelley's is never separate from pressures of institutional or human skepticism, or from the gnawing doubt of others' humanity. The chapter listens to Shelley's postmodern critics to see when they reduce him to a mechanism and when they bring out his own elusive reflexive critiques. The chapter shows how Shelley meant the two dramas to acknowledge and resist skepticism by showing just how far skepticism must go and what apocalyptic generosity its overcoming would require.

The fourth chapter shows how Byron's Manfred (1816), following the model of Shelley's Alastor, also contains its own ironic self-criticism. Not only is Manfred's self

²⁵See Lectures 1795 On Politics and Religion in Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Collected Works I, eds. Lewis Patton, Peter Mann, Bollingen Ser. 75 (Princeton: Princeton UP, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969) 240, 249. As an abolitionist lecturer, Coleridge based his arguments on an orthodox Christianity, a condescending vision of Africans as happy noble savages, and an appeal to British nationalism in his claim that true patriotism lies in benevolence. However, Coleridge's call to boycott West Indian luxury products of slavery challenges an article of faith among radicals: that we cannot achieve any increase in liberty until the structures of thought and power have already been liberated. Coleridge's assumes the universality of the soul, challenging us to justify the *uses* of our skepticism.

divided, so is the drama with respect to Manfred, finally privileging embodiment over Manfred's own claims of spiritual transcendence. Using Bernard Williams's understanding of shame in classical drama, the chapter explores the way in which Manfred's shame is an implicit acknowledgment of his body. The theme of psychological self-enmity is pushed further in Joanna Baillie's De Monfort (1798), a key influence on Byron's dramatic style. As with Coleridge, Baillie's idealism is dogmatic, but her drama's metaphysical radicalism seems to subvert its own religious orthodoxy. Taking as its cue Jerome McGann's move from consciousness-based Byron criticism to a social reading of Byron's "historical ventriloquism," this chapter seeks to understand history as a figure in the historical drama Marino Faliero. Byron incorporates the radical, modern self-division that Baillie recorded and, in Marino Faliero, seeks to replace her orthodox transcendence with a prophetic yet still skeptical and *historical* apocalypse. The chapter shows how Byron's dramatic apocalypse, also written in response to Shelley's dramatic idealism, insists upon grounding any idealism in physicality, history, and specific calls to action.

Abandonment and Skepticism in The Borderers

Wordsworth's sole play, The Borderers, was written in 1797 in England, during the long English reaction to the Terror of the French Revolution. Wordsworth had seen some of the excesses of the Revolution first hand during his walking tour of France earlier in the decade. The Borderers is part of Wordsworth's ongoing personal reaction to what he had seen there, but unlike Coleridge and Southey's Fall of Robespierre, the relation between Wordsworth's play and politics or history is a problematic starting point for understanding the text. This study will seek to explain the view that Wordsworth's play is primarily an ethical text that includes political theory and historiography within its moral inquiry. It will seek to draw out some of the deeper implications of The Borderers for philosophy and for the understanding of the Romantic dramatic genre. In this chapter The Borderers will be treated primarily as a philosophical drama, a move partly authorized by the growing association in the eighteenth century between tragedy and generality.¹ Its centrally compelling figure, Rivers, is a self-styled philosopher, and The Borderers acts as a complex weave of philosophical examples, experiments, discourses on method,

¹Wordsworth, like Byron but in different ways, was openly hostile to "philosophy" as an institution, but calling his drama philosophic does not contradict his stance in an age when, increasingly, the philosopher begins by attacking philosophy as such. So too, for example, did Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and others in the nineteenth century. As Arthur C. Danto generalizes, "Each moment of philosophical advance seems to regard itself as a completely new beginning, which appear to require a correspondingly complete repudiation of everything that came before, including all the previous new beginnings...The present is like awakening from a dream, and the dream is not part of waking experience but an aberration from it...Or, more dramatically yet, the history of philosophy is a long nightmare from which philosophy longs to waken..." Connections to the World: The Basic Concepts of Philosophy (New York: Harper & Row, 1989) 3, 5. Awakening from a dream is a good phrase to describe the process of coming-to-consciousness that is an important part of the action of Wordsworth's play.

theorizations about the conditions of reason, and, in sum, thematizations of the problems it addresses. The thesis of my study is that Romantic drama, a genre of ethical dialogue in the absence of any narrative resting place, is skeptical not only of Enlightenment conclusions and human institutions of power but also of the possibility of ever arriving at universal solutions for the problems of humanity.

The method of this chapter will be to place the scenes and statements of the characters of The Borderers into their ethical contexts. The description of what problems The Borderers does include will require the aid of a range of philosophers both that Wordsworth knew, such as Locke, Hume and especially William Godwin, and those of our time, such as Stanley Cavell and Bernard Williams. I take Cavell in particular both as a theorist of abandonment—the moral issue of The Borderers—and as an authority whose work in theorizing the use of literary texts as philosophic examples stands as the inspiration for my own.²

The plot of The Borderers involves a series of abandonments, each with its own set of meanings for how human beings treat each other and whether our moral condition can be improved. The play, as a self-critical dialectic, offers, if any answers, only the most pessimistic ones to this question. Certainly any attempt to reduce the play to a set of political categories, or to suggest that it is itself merely a product of ideologies, is to close off questions that Wordsworth leaves open.³ The play reaches back behind these acts of

²See In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988) first chapter, for Cavell's discussion of why literature may be treated so. Cavell seeks to save philosophy in America from a deadly disconnection from the literary, especially in its inability to understand Emerson as a philosopher. Coming from the opposite disciplinary end, I hope to use Cavell and the others to respond to Romantic drama on its own expressive level and, finally, to lay to rest the accusations of the past two hundred years that the drama is a failed genre. It is only failed according to one set of criteria.

³Marjorie Levinson makes a similar case for Wordsworth's ability to digest political content; see Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays (Cambridge, New York:

abandonment to ask us about who is doing the abandoning-- what is the cost and what are the conditions for understanding individuals as agents in charge of and responsible for acts of commission and omission for or against other people. If the modern world is increasingly characterized by overwhelming forces that toss us about--forces like those that seem to be in control of both France and England in 1797--then is there still a vital connection that exists between individuals? Is there, further, a core self or subject that might form the basis of such connections? Assuming that there is, what happens when we exalt that self too much? Can that also cause us to abandon other selves on the grounds of mental and physical self-preservation, as if power were all that exists between those selves? Does the world of nature and of man (are these separate?) finally make sense, or at least enough sense that we can count upon either a common ground for communication, or a sense that justice will prevail at some end-point?

Cambridge UP, 1986), 4ff. Attempts to show how The Borderers is primarily an ideological tract inevitably make that "ideology" so general that it is hard to distinguish from a philosophy. See, for example, Marjean Purinton, who claims that "While the details of social and political history differ in the 1840's from the 1790's, the ideology of the latter play remains consistent with what it had been in 1796." In "Wordsworth's The Borderers and the Ideology of Revolution," The Wordsworth Circle 13:2 (1992): 106.

The basic fact of the play's sublimation of politics into ethics does not necessarily preclude a Marxist reading of it. But any reading that insists upon the primacy of collective action in the play can only do so out of some prior agenda. The agenda of the play is ethics and of this study, to historicize its ethics, but not to "unmask" these ethics.

Some other approaches to The Borderers include Geoffrey Hartman, Wordsworth's Poetry 1797-1815 (New Haven: Yale UP, 1971) esp. 125-135, for the definitive allegorization of the play as a documentation of modern consciousness. Hartman's more recent book, The Unremarkable Wordsworth (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987) shifts focus on the play toward historical matters. Thomas McFarland gives voice to the traditional position that the play, not a neglected masterpiece, is rather only interesting as a biographical and historical document. It is, for McFarland, "buried in cultural debris made up of what Wordsworth rejected" such as his potential scorn of all other persons. William Wordsworth: Intensity and Achievement (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

Again, The Borderers seems more interested in debating these issues than in solving them, and also takes the despairing stand that many of them are unresolvable in the climate of thought and feeling that Wordsworth felt to exist. In that sense, the play abandons us to its despair, betraying our sense that in raising the issues it ought to offer us some more solid hope. But, as in The Cenci, hope is something The Borderers most wants to undermine. The central act of abandonment that occurs in the play happens at the end of the third act, when Mortimer leaves an old blind man, Herbert, out on the heath to live or to die. Before the fourth Act of The Borderers begins, there is a stage direction consisting of chopped phrases describing "*a desolate prospect--a ridge of rocks rises at the bottom of the stage, an old chapel on the summit of one of them.*"⁴ We are told that the moon is visible on the heath despite a storm that rains down on Herbert. Herbert hears a chapel bell tolling irregularly and at some unknown distance, and expresses his hope to reach it just as his consciousness fades. In the next Act Robert, a peasant who lives on the heath, narrates the story of the bell:

On a ridge of rocks

A lonesome Chapel stands, deserted now.
 The bell remains, which no one dare remove,
 And when the stormy wind blows oe'r the peak
 It rings as if a human hand were there
 To pull the cord.—I fancy he had heard it,
 And it had led him toward the precipice
 To climb up to the spot whence the sound came,
 Poor man! (V.ii)

⁴All references to the text are taken from William Wordsworth, The Borderers, ed. Robert Osborne, The Cornell Wordsworth (Ithaca, London: Cornell UP, 1982).

The aeolian harp has long stood as the image of Romantic art, as nature made into art by the correspondent breeze within the human spirit, rising to the external inspiration as if it breathes through the mind. In The Borderers, the aeolian harp is this Chapel bell, rung by the wind meaninglessly, Godlessly, or rather with a specifically *dramatic* irony born of the misplaced hopes of an abandoned helpless, blind old man. Here nature conspires with a ruin of civilization to produce a false message of hope.⁵ Wordsworth's scene devolves from the mental drama that has led to it; Herbert has been abandoned by Mortimer, and nature complies with human intention, mingling the two into an indivisible whole, as if to suggest that this abandonment is the way of human nature and the universe, that nature abandons us just when we seem to be making sense of the world. Another side to the same problem is the issue of physiognomy, or the relation between our inner states and how we appear to others. Modern liberal thought likes to denigrate physiognomy, especially given its association with just the sort of pseudo-scientism that The Borderers was written to destroy. But how, then, do we judge the content of another's character as a practical matter, if not through aesthetic perception? And are there laws or principles to these aesthetics?

⁵One exceptional example of the aeolian "lyre" is in the second paragraph of Percy Shelley's Defense of Poetry. Others have made the comparison between the bell and the aeolian harp. For example, Frank McConnell calls it "a cruel parody" in The Confessional Imagination: A Reading of Wordsworth's *Prelude* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974) 101.

The irony of this moment in the play is very like the irony that Angus Fletcher finds in Kafka's parable of Prometheus, born of Kafka's decision to shift the center of the action to the rock: "The rock center is totally unlike a man center; unfeeling, unmoving, unthinking, unchanging, the rock is meaningless, purposeless, timeless, and totally beyond the fragile confines of human history and human progress..." Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode (Ithaca, London: Cornell UP, 1964) 231.

But irony has many uses in The Borderers, not the least of which is as the model of the improper relation between people. To be ironic is to be sophisticated, to *understand* Kafka's type of irony and to employ it instead of sincerity in dealing with others.

The setting of The Borderers is the border between England and Scotland during the reign of Henry III, a border which, because of disputes over sovereignty, is uncontrolled and lawless, a lawlessness that seems to have seeped down into every spiritual aspect of human society there.⁶ The two lead protagonists⁷ are Rivers and Mortimer, meant to be roughly analogous to Iago and Othello. Rivers is an at-large philosophical tempter and trickster, and Mortimer is a leader of a Band of outlaws who manufacture their own form of rough summary justice in this barren place. Mortimer is in love with Matilda, Herbert's daughter. Rivers spends the first three acts convincing Mortimer that Herbert has prostituted Matilda to Clifford, the nominal lord of the region, and to Clifford's henchmen. Rivers tells Mortimer this lie to incite Mortimer to murder Herbert.

Like Iago's, Rivers's motives are at first unfathomable, but there is a tremendous prehistory to the play that unfolds in a rather undramatic narrative in the fourth act and in various hints dropped along the way. Before the play opens Mortimer saved Rivers's life, an act for which Rivers hates Mortimer, since it compromises Rivers's sense of complete autonomy. Rivers also seems to respect Mortimer's charismatic control of the outlaw Band and potential to become like himself, a moral outlaw, as if Mortimer were unconsciously waiting for Rivers to unlock his potential. Herbert, as Rivers knows, is not only innocent of prostituting his daughter, but also old and blind, and fought in the crusades only to

⁶The setting is meant to evoke a memory of Robin-Hood, especially as Schiller transfigured it in his play The Robbers, and as it might point toward the class warfare of the French Revolution. See the "Introduction" to Robert Osborne's Cornell Edition. Mortimer, for example, is derived from Karl Moor, the nobly born leader of a band of outlaws.

⁷Wordsworth changed the names of the characters in his late version of 1842. Most older criticism uses later names, just as most criticism of The Prelude had used the 1850 edition as the standard text.

return to find Clifford had stolen his Barony.⁸ Matilda returns Mortimer's love to her father's displeasure; though Herbert is a fallen aristocrat, he still disdains Mortimer's outlaw status.

Also crucial to the play's prehistory is the terrible trauma Rivers suffered in his youth. It consisted of being tricked by a mutinous crew into leaving Rivers's sea-captain on a barren island, and then being told by the crew that the captain was innocent and that Rivers had unwittingly become a complicit murderer in their mob-like mutiny. Rivers's ultimate motive, of which we learn in his detailed confession of the fourth act, is to get Mortimer to undergo an alienation from humanity similar to the one Rivers himself experienced after his own trauma, not only out of revenge for Mortimer's presumption to save him but also, it turns out, to gain a paradoxical companion-in-alienation.

Mortimer does kill Herbert, but Mortimer's natural benevolence prevents him from actually striking a blow. Instead, in the third act, as we have seen, he chooses to abandon Herbert on a heath and let the old man suffer a medieval trial by ordeal. Since Mortimer cannot have known of Rivers's history, there is an uncanny coincidence between both of their abandonments, suggesting that this is a tragic pattern for modern man: separation, abandonment, the ignorant assertion of mental autonomy in a world that requires collaboration.

In his long narrative of the third and fourth Acts, Rivers concentrates on his recovery's mental significance to himself and to Mortimer in order to provide Mortimer with a ready interpretation for what Rivers has done to him—to pre-empt, as it were, any "natural" move to remorse on Mortimer's part. Once Mortimer learns the truth he rushes

⁸Herbert's downward mobility is an example of the complexity of the play's political allegory: he wanders like a displaced French nobleman whose wealth was redistributed, but Herbert's land was not taken by peasants. In Herbert's wandering condition, then, Wordsworth includes the upper classes within his general spiritual statement about humankind. But Herbert, as we shall see, is far more important as the Job of the play, counseling mental acquiescence.

out to find Herbert but discovers that he had mistakenly forgotten to leave Herbert with any food, thus dooming Herbert to a trial he could not survive. The play ends when Herbert is found by a poor, starving peasant couple who themselves bicker over their degree of responsibility to a helpless stranger and fear that they, being on the bottom of society, will be blamed for his death. Mortimer faces Matilda over Herbert's body in the peasant cottage. Matilda, until she understands who is responsible for her father's death, is consoled by Mortimer's presence, an emotional irony that only pains Mortimer the more. Finally, after at first acceding to it, Mortimer refuses Rivers's offers of philosophic friendship (in any case Rivers is killed by the Band) and Mortimer decides his own punishment to be exile. He makes himself into a hermit, deeming himself unfit for discourse with all of humanity, sending the protagonist into the wilderness never to be heard from again, the image of the solitary prisoner of consciousness.

The Borderers grapples with some of the key terms of debate in the whole European Enlightenment project, of which the French Revolution is only one manifestation. The play maintains an extraordinary tension between its distance from the (ongoing) Revolution, and the extent to which it subsumes the Revolution into its mental and philosophical debate. The Revolution is represented in the play's prehistory by the crew that originally tricked Rivers into unjustly murdering his authority. During the play's action, the Revolution's elements are split between Mortimer and his Band, by Rivers as a kind of Robespierre, and by the various peasants in whose name the Band struggles. Rather than see the play merely in terms of a Revolutionary allegory, it is more fruitful to include and subsume that allegory within a view of what it says about modernity as such.

From the sketch of what happens in The Borderers it is not hard to come to Geoffrey Hartman's conclusion that what underlies the play is betrayal:

Genuine consciousness of self, according to The Borderers, is born of betrayal, is linked to the unwitting commission of a crime, a crime essentially against nature;

and is a stage (however dangerous) in the growth of the mind...This brings us to the central issue of the play: can the intellect yield true moral judgments?⁹

Hartman's thesis gains support from Wordsworth's own "Preface" to the play, in which he records its germinal idea:

Let us suppose a young Man of great intellectual powers, yet without any solid principles of genuine benevolence. His master passions are pride and a love of distinction. He has deeply imbibed a spirit of enterprise in a tumultuous age. He goes into the world and is betrayed into a great crime.(62)

Hartman reads this passage in terms of its importance for Wordsworth's allegory of the modern man:

This is in the nature of the world, and a story Wordsworth will hint at again; 'going into the world' and 'being betrayed into a great crime' are almost coterminous in the poetry of 1793-97...Wordsworth, at the time of The Borderers, fears that the mind and life of man are necessarily built on murder, or based on a crime against nature.¹⁰

Without disagreeing with Hartman's observations, we may notice, however, that to focus on betrayal, especially upon *being betrayed*, is to accept an individuated view of what occurs in the play. Yes, Rivers is betrayed and betrays Mortimer; Herbert has been

⁹Wordsworth's Poetry, 128-129. What Hartman presupposes, and what we have to presuppose in order to find the play interesting at all, is that The Borderers aspires to be an allegory of the condition of modern man: "What seems for Marmaduke [Mortimer] the exceptional, is really the generic situation." Wordsworth's Poetry, 130.

¹⁰Wordsworth's Poetry, 134.

betrayed by Clifford and then again finally by Mortimer. As we have seen, even nature seems to betray its children as if in conspiracy against the individual self. Each character comes to feel individually betrayed.

It restores what has been lost in these betrayals, however, to see the drama as essentially about abandonment (which, again, does not preclude or contradict betrayal, but merely shifts the emphasis). The feeling of being betrayed in this drama is curiously disconnected from the betrayer. Rivers, in inventing his perverse philosophy of autonomy, decides that the crew members did him a favor. Mortimer does not blame Rivers so much as himself for listening to Rivers and not to his natural bond with Herbert. Even Herbert does not blame Mortimer for abandoning him on the heath, but trusts in an outmoded idea of providence to care for him. Betrayal, something that ostensibly occurs between individuals, is in The Borderers an event that seems to happen to individuals alone. Further, betrayal by itself is not what is important about the wrongs these characters do to one another.

We ought to reject their isolated and isolating assessments and to decide that abandonment is the central crime of the drama. There are several reasons for this shift. Abandonment is what the characters do to one another and is a better way of describing the acts of mental dehumanization that precede and coincide with each physical act of harm between them. We abandon each other, Wordsworth seems to be saying in dramatic form, because we are skeptical about the existence of humanity in others or even in ourselves: "of what analytical philosophy calls other minds."¹¹ But, as Hartman suggests, our doubts are rational constructs that go against the natural ties existing within each of us, and that we ought to listen to our human nature rather than to the "intellect," otherwise called philosophy.

¹¹ Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge UP, 1987) 203. Cavell, who writes about this problem often, mentions it here in relation to The Winter's Tale.

Wordsworth does not so much propose his own philosophies as attack philosophies which describe the world too simply for his taste, especially when those philosophies betray his own observations (Wordsworth is always, in a sense, a skeptical empiricist).¹² The Borderers inhabits the world of peasant life from "An Evening Walk," "Guilt and Sorrow," "The Convict," and the Fragment of a 'Gothic' Tale, but is configured as a moral allegory more complex than Wordsworth had yet attempted. "Guilt and Sorrow," for example, begins with the story of a "seaman" who superficially resembles Rivers. The seaman "to an armed fleet was forced away" (51). He loses all of his money because of betrayal; "fraud took all that he had earned," (64) and is led to commit a crime:

He met a traveler, robbed him, shed his blood;
 And when the miserable work was done
 He fled, a vagrant since, the murderer's fate to shun. (70-72)

The images of the traveler, the vagrant and the murderer, and the themes of eternal wandering and misery fill Wordsworth's poetry from this time, as do the ambiguities of social and personal causes for human acts evil. The difference between the seaman and Rivers is instructive, since it shows how much more Rivers is a literary and philosophical example than a political category of person. Rivers commits his original crime, not out of

¹²Alan Bewell, analyzing the rejection of Hazlitt's book-learning in "Expostulation and Reply" and "The Tables Turned," nicely summarizes Wordsworth's relation to philosophy: "The intimate link between philosophy and the dialogue form in these two poems should alert us, however, not to dismiss moral philosophy too quickly...they are not so much distanced from moral inquiry as set against a certain kind of stay-at-home, non-interactive philosophizing, which retreats from nature and social dialogue." Wordsworth and the Enlightenment: Nature, Man, and Society in the Experimental Poetry (New Haven, London: Yale UP, 1989) 10.

the desperation of the poor, but unknowingly, unwarned.¹³ Further, Rivers's crime is not fraud committed against a stranger, but the murder by abandonment of a man to whom Rivers owed, if not obedience, then at least decency.

In seeking to understand the nature of dehumanization, Stanley Cavell locates it in the seeing subject's skepticism of the humanity of others, and concludes that the subject must become skeptical of his own humanity too. Here, for example, Cavell ponders what it takes to define people as slaves: "He is rather missing something about himself, or rather something about his connection with these people, his *internal relation* to them."¹⁴ Tragedy arises, in Cavell's terms, from any avoidance of the link between people that rational doubt creates:

...both skepticism and tragedy conclude with the condition of human separation, with a discovering that I am I; and the fact that the alternative to my acknowledgment of the other is not my ignorance of him but my avoidance of him, call it my denial of him.¹⁵

¹³Their unwarned condition is unlike that of the first parents in Paradise Lost, suggesting that The Borderers updates the social ethics of that poem by casting a skeptical light on its image of God. For Wordsworth, there is no revelation that can save us, except perhaps for The Borderers itself.

¹⁴Claim of Reason, 376, my emphasis.

¹⁵The Claim of Reason, 389. If Stanley Cavell's exploration of skepticism seems tailored to romantic texts, it is partly because of his roots in romanticism's critique of reason. For example, in The Claim of Reason, he writes that Wordsworth discovered "the loss of childhood," and that "romanticism generally may be said to have discovered the fact of adolescence, the task of wanting and choosing adulthood, along with the impossibility of this task." Though this description of romanticism is dangerously close to a New Critical misinterpretation of romanticism, especially that of F.R. Leavis's attacks on Shelley for being an adolescent poet, it does not condescend to romantic writing as the effusions of youth: "The necessity of the task is the choice of finitude, which for us (even

In the last three acts, after Mortimer's fall, the play does turn toward the general discovery or acknowledgment of the self. Rivers's narrative reveals both who he thinks he is and, to Mortimer and the audience, the double person he has truly become. Against Rivers's involuntary duplicity we get Mortimer, who came close to denying himself permanently like Rivers, but who returned from the edge of the abyss. The differences between them are many, but they may reduce to a difference in moral "taste." That debate in The Borderers is part of a broad attack against the aestheticization of moral judgments that Hume brought into the mainstream of philosophical discussion:

So that when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it. Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compar'd to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which, according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind: And this discovery in morals, like that other in physics, is to be regarded as a considerable advancement of the speculative sciences; tho', like that too, it has little or no influence on practice.¹⁶

The difficulty in rejecting Hume's view is that the readiest option is to declare that there are some objects or actions which are objectively good or evil *in themselves*, and do not rely upon the subject for their ethical content. Wordsworth rejects that end of the debate in his "Preface" to the play and might seem to be suggesting that we should follow a more

after God) means the acknowledgment of the existence of finite others..." (464). The Borderers is a set of embedded tales of that choice and its potentially destructive force.

¹⁶David Hume, A Treatise on Human Nature; Being An Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, rev. P.H. Nidditch, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon P; New York: Oxford UP, 1978) 469.

relativist approach which understands that "necessity" is relative to the subject who feels it. Hume arrived at his system in order to remove any absolute assignments of value to specific actions, values which he saw as inherently attached to religious feeling and superstition:

Take any action allow'd to be vicious: Willful murder, for instance... The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object [i.e., the act of murder]. You can never find it [the vice], till you turn your reflexion into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, toward this action. Here is a matter of fact; but 'tis of feeling, not of reason. (468-69)

As we shall see, this is close to what Rivers claims in order to assert his moral autonomy from social rules. Wordsworth does not stand with Rivers, who respects no one else's aesthetic moral ability--no one else's moral taste. Rivers gets caught, however, when he tries to alter Mortimer's own aesthetic moral evaluations. His purpose is to get Mortimer to accept such statements as "Heavens--where's the harm of ridding an old wretch?" (IV.ii. 193).

Rivers cannot logically admit that some specific acts are inherently evil, for his own act against the captain would then force him to feel remorse. But neither can he let morality subsist in the feelings of *other* people. His logic drives him into a morality that only makes sense to himself, and further, only makes sense if he is alone in the universe, if there is no one else who *can* feel as he can. His villainy, unlike Iago's, is not rooted in medieval archetypes, but in modern paradoxes.

Wordsworth's position with respect to the location of morality (in the subject or in the object, or both) is therefore equivocal, and its indecisiveness is a root source of the play's irreducible obscurity. He certainly believes in some aestheticization of morality. The force that prevents Mortimer from murdering Herbert outright is essentially an aesthetic

one: Herbert's appearance.¹⁷ The horror, as we shall see, of Rivers's account of leaving the captain to die upon the island is an aesthetic horror, since it is the idea of the sight and the sounds of him that shock Mortimer. Aesthetics necessarily plays a part in morality, since the aesthetic is another word for perception. But Wordsworth must also have believed, *contra* Hume, that certain acts were inherently evil in themselves, that the aesthetic horror plays upon something innate in how our identities depend upon our understanding of other people's similarity to ourselves.

The other key aspect of Hume's thought that Wordsworth questions in The Borderers is close to the first: Hume's skepticism of the idea of self. "I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never observe anything but the perception" (252).¹⁸ The assault on the subject is one of the most far-reaching skepticisms in Hume's writing, and is something that continues to inspire or plague philosophy today, as we shall see better in the third chapter, on Shelley's drama and thought. Here, however, the problem of whether there is a core self is important for Wordsworth's accusation against the Enlightenment for eviscerating the basis for moral bonds. The Borderers, however, is more muddy than that statement implies, not the least because it is not certain that we do have that innate human bond or that, if we do have a nature, it is so precarious that it just might not be strong enough to save us from ourselves. As Wordsworth's sketch of Rivers from the "Preface" shows, what is our human nature if it does not include strong principles of benevolence? Clearly Wordsworth himself is too skeptical a philosopher to accept the

¹⁷Their interactions are written as if they come out of that single line in Shakespeare's play when Lady Macbeth laments, "Had he not resembl'd/ My father as he slept, I had done't" (II.ii.12-13).

¹⁸Alan Grob describes Hume's evacuation of the self as part of a tradition that begins with Locke and is continued by Joseph Priestley. Grob quotes Priestley comparing the problem of the self to the idea that the Thames which is "continually and visibly changing" is "the same river that it was a thousand years ago" The Philosophic Mind: A Study of Wordsworth's Poetry and Thought 1797-1805 (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1973) 51.

sentimental views of The Earl of Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, or Adam Smith that we are endowed by the creator with an innate moral sense that guides how we treat each other.¹⁹ Wordsworth's experience in France denies that such a phenomenon lies at the heart of humanness, but he is not ready to become, like David Hume, skeptical of the bare existence of the core self and some ability or propensity toward communal feeling that does not make us into automatic communarians.

It is Godwin's view of human beings as automata that is also an important target for The Borderers. One of Godwin's most radical and most reductive principles, and one which too often traps thinkers on the Left today, is that "all the actions of men are necessary" (336). That is, Godwin attempts to show that the behavior of mankind could be altered because it is entirely a product of its environments, as if we were billiard balls among other billiard balls: "Mind...is an agent, in no other sense than matter is an agent" (632).²⁰ Politically this view may be used to support a system of national education, but in Godwin's expression of it, mankind becomes robotic:

19Here I follow Grob, who describes Wordsworth's growth as having occurred in discrete stages. The stage of The Borderers he calls "the empirical phase": "Not only are Wordsworth's views on identity between 1797 and 1800 empirical, they are radically empirical...[there are] divisions that no attempt at retrospective scrutiny can ever bridge" (46-71).

Wordsworth received his idea of development from the mainstream of eighteenth-century philosophic opinion, grounded in Locke's fundamental argument against the existence of innate ideas. Of common maxims, for example, Locke wrote "that all children and idiots have not the least apprehension or thought of them" (40). Children, then, are blanks, *tabulae rasae* awaiting experience and not endowed with any spiritual capability of imagination. Wordsworth was not so sure.

20Marjean Purinton writes that "The Borderers neither confirms nor refutes Godwinian philosophy; instead, it presents similar concerns about the mental structures silently dictating human actions...[it] locates its issues in ideological formations" (104). As will become clear, my view is that Wordsworth is on the border between Godwinian necessitarianism and conservative individualism, and he is horrified by aspects of both. However, Purinton, in translating Wordsworth into the jargon of the academic left,

The idea correspondent to the term character inevitably includes in it the assumption of necessity and system. The character of any man is the result of a long series of impressions, communicated to his mind and modifying it in a certain manner, so as to enable us, a number of these modifications and impressions being given, to predict his conduct. (341)

The theory of education that this view implies, The Borderers argues, is shown in Rivers's plot to influence Mortimer. Rivers is at his most Godwinian in a soliloquy in which he proposes to himself

A scale and table of belief—as thus—

Two columns, one for passion, one for proof,

Each rising as the other falls...

We dissect

The senseless body, and why not the mind? (III.ii.6-26).

These lines present a chilling parody of Godwin's predictable man, and instantly recall, for the reader of Wordsworth, the line from the "The Tables Turned" in which Wordsworth objects to critics who "murder to dissect" beauty in poetry. The connection between critical dissection and murder is literal in The Borderers, since the one makes mental room for the other.

obscured the ways in which Wordsworth insists upon the fallacy of thinking in terms of ideology at all. It is Rivers who is the ideological thinker in The Borderers. His ideology of transcendence allows him to rationalize murder. Mortimer, on the other hand, is not held fast by the ideology of a whole class of persons (the way we speak of so-and-so reifying the Marxian "false ideology" of the capitalist) but of a singular madman.

By showing Rivers to be wrong, Wordsworth argues for a self with abstract existence beyond the collection of the person's experiences, a true subject not formed by the social or the historical, and one which is limited in its malleability. This self, objectively real and inviolable, except in moments of traumatic, volcanic change, is analogous to Wordsworth's similar belief in the innate ethical value of certain actions, like killing an old blind man. The self will reassert itself despite repression. Wordsworth's refutation of Godwin's mechanistic model and of Hume's skepticism is not merely a step backward in philosophical terms. Wordsworth's sense of the self in The Borderers and especially in The Prelude is not sentimental but mythic, not conservative but transcendent in its power to create and shape an existence more fitted to human kindness than that which we now possess.

Rivers's idea of the self, at least with respect to *other* selves, might be more like the one Hume gives in order to dismantle religious assertions about the soul. In this most skeptical of passages, Hume describes the self as a mere convention, just like any other custom made up and adhered to for the sake of convenience. Of the members of mankind, including Hume himself,

...they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement. Our eyes cannot turn in their sockets without varying our perceptions. Our thought is still more variable than our sight...nor is there any single power of the soul, which remains unalterably the same, perhaps for one moment. (252-53)

As a skeptic of the humanity of other people, of their value, their similarity to himself, and to the possibility that they exist as independent intellects, Rivers might well believe in this model for their non-existence. Hume mollifies the cold roughness of this passage with his standard appeal to the necessity of the convention. Hume took refuge in a

conservatism that seems at odds with the newness of his thought, as David Miller remarks on his politics:

The fascination of Hume's political thought lies in seeing how a revolutionary philosophy is combined with an establishment ideology to yield what is probably the best example we have of a secular and sceptical conservative political theory.²¹

Hume's doubt of the existence of the subject is both a lever that could be used to deconstruct his entire project, and the peak of that project. Who, in that case, wrote Hume's Treatise? Hume's answer to his stickiest problems is that ordinary life dictates a practical end to skeptical inquiry:

...whether I be really one of those sceptics, who hold that all is uncertain, and that our judgment is not in *any* thing possest of *any* measures of truth and falsehood; I should reply, that the question is entirely superfluous, and the neither I, nor any other person was ever sincerely and constantly of that opinion. Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel...(183)

But with the necessity for any adherence to convention gone with the fall of the Bastille for Wordsworth, this "bundle of perceptions" becomes, in Rivers, more like an abyss than a harmless intellectual observation. Godwin's mechanistic necessitarianism seems almost a comfort compared to Hume's atomized, dissected person. Godwin's view is founded on Hume's; the person is the person's impressions. Here is Rivers's sublime yet greedy version,

²¹Philosophy and Ideology in Hume's Political Thought (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1981) 2.

In these my lonely wanderings I perceived
 What might objects to impress their forms
 To build up this our intellectual being,
 And felt if aught on earth deserved a curse,
 'Twas that worst principle of ill that dooms
 A thing so great to perish self-consumed.
 -- So much for my remorse. (IV.ii.133-139)

For Hume, it is in commonality that we find salvation from the abyss of skepticism. But what if our common bonds, our *shared* concept of “nature” so confidently stated here as an external phenomenon, comes under attack? The genie is out of the bottle. From the left, and for the postmodern critics we shall confront in the third chapter, the answer to any Who? question is, totalizing social forces. But Hume preceded the conversion of philosophy into social history that Hegel and Marx sought to accomplish, so that Hume’s decentering of the subject is a dead end for him. He just has to go on as if there were a subject, as if his speculations were idle. He must go on observing his own mind and generalizing from it as if it formed a coherent whole, especially since his skepticism of other minds prevents him from relying upon anyone else.

For Wordsworth, however, Hume’s speculations were being made manifest in the Terror. The socio-historical totality is represented in The Borderers by the crew that originally imposes upon Rivers, and it is part of Wordsworth’s dramatic point to order the events of the play such that Rivers’s Humean and Godwinian justifications are themselves products of the social upheaval in Rivers’s individual life. For Rivers to claim, then, that he is autonomous is the play’s ultimate irony, as we shall examine in more detail later. Self-examination as a means to arriving at a philosophy of action holds an ambiguous role in The Borderers. On the one hand when it becomes too abstract, as in Rivers, it is a

dangerous separation from humanity. On the other, true self-inquiry is obviously a good, but in Mortimer it leads again to separation and abandonment.

How do we judge of, or feel about, someone who commits a great wrong inadvertently? The question applies to both Mortimer and Rivers, but especially to Mortimer, since his moral standing is not colored by any other intentional or unintentional acts. In Hume, "moral good and evil belong only to actions of the mind, and are deriv'd from our situation with regard to external objects," and that there is therefore no "abstract rational difference betwixt moral good and evil, and a natural fitness and unfitness of things..." (464-65). To Hume, therefore, Rivers is wrong to feel as he did when he killed his captain, and Mortimer similarly deserves a full reinstatement into human society after it is shown that his mind acted on "external objects" which, unfortunately, turned out to be lies. Hume's position (or rather the position Hume's statements require) is unsatisfying, for it does not allow for associations that occur to someone bound up with a terrible result that make them feel guilty. These feelings would be "superstition" in Hume's view, because the associations that cause regret depend upon the subject doing the associating, and not upon an abstract universal logic.

Again, the alternative Hume is avoiding at first sounds worse than his solution. The sentimental philosophers, such as Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, to whom Hume was to a limited degree indebted, founded their morality upon a circle; they would begin with "common sense" conclusions about what morality ought to look like based on an intuitive sense of what actions are good. But the assumed ethical acts are always debatable; Hume once wrote to Hutcheson telling him that his ideas about what is "natural" in ethics were "uncertain and unphilosophical."²² One of the doctrines Hutcheson takes as an axiom, for example, is *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*. Hume might have agreed with this one for his own reasons (he had a way of arriving at patriarchal results via universal reason),

²²In David Norton, David Hume, Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1982) 46-47.

but this hideous doctrine certainly didn't survive the eighteenth century unscathed.

Wordsworth, by refuting Hume's path of locating morality exclusively in the aestheticized moral sense, must face the possibility of dogmas and "superstitions" with which he could not agree reasserting themselves as ethical touchstones. Merely to replace absolutes with new ones lets the hierarchical, dogmatic system remain, a problem that forms the germ of the dramatic dialogue between Prometheus Unbound, The Cenci, and Marino Faliero.

The intractable question that faces the audience or reader is, what is the justice of the events that we see in The Borderers? How much of an agent is Mortimer in his act of murder? When Mortimer confronts Herbert for the last time at the play's center (III, iii), the scene opens with a spiraling down of love, which is also the demise of Mortimer's ability to think clearly: "And I have *loved* this man? and she hath loved him./ And I loved her, and she loved the Lord Clifford./ And there it ends..." (12-14), repeating to himself Rivers's line about Herbert prostituting Matilda. Repetition, in The Borderers, is always a nervous assertion of a reality one suspects is not there, such as in Rivers's compulsion to repeat his crime through Mortimer. It is inspired by Coleridge's repetitious anti-hero, the Ancient Mariner, who repeats without ever hoping of purging himself. Mortimer repeats because he is steeling himself to do what all of his senses, and his soul, tell him not to do.

Next Mortimer evokes the barren scenery, telling Herbert that there is "Not a soul" (36) around. Landscapes in The Borderers are mental projections that reveal the state of the narrator's moral soul. Mortimer's failure to mention his own soul or Herbert's is perhaps a detail, a figure of speech. But it is also a clue that tells us he has begun to deny both of those souls in order to do what he thinks he need to do. The conversation turns to Matilda, which provokes Herbert to weep with blind eyes, and Mortimer to consider the aesthetic part of Herbert that calls out for sympathy, the evidence that he is human:

I do believe he weeps—I could weep too—

There is a vein of her voice that runs through his.

Even such a man my fancy bodied forth
 From the first moment I loved the maid
 And he was the brother in my love--
 These tears--I did not think that aught was left in me
 Of what I have been...
 It may not be--I am cut off from man,
 No more shall I be man, no more shall I
 Have human feelings!--Now, for a little more
 About your daughter. (62-73)

Here we see, according to Cavell's formula, that in order to avoid Herbert's humanity Mortimer must shut down his own. The evidence that threatens to overwhelm Mortimer's feelings is aesthetic; it consists of Herbert's physiognomic appearance and voice. Logically, why should the appearance of a person have anything to do with what the person thinks or feels? We all know that a man may smile, and smile, and be a villain, but what Wordsworth reminds us is the effort it takes to become that skeptical of this man in this place. As Cavell writes,

I have to read the physiognomy, and see the creature according to my reading, and treat it according to my seeing. The human body is the best picture of the human soul--not, I feel like adding, primarily because it represents the soul but because it expresses it. The body is the field of expression of the soul.²³

No one needs to accept this aesthetic connection as an *a priori* truth, but the price of not doing so is, for Wordsworth, the loss of the last reason, after the death of religious dogmas, for us to pay any attention to each other's souls. Once Mortimer has overcome

²³Claim of Reason, 356.

his sight of Herbert's soul, the next step is for him to begin not hearing what Herbert says. Both Mortimer and Herbert begin not to hear one another, as if even their languages have begun to become separate or private. Whatever praise Herbert makes of his daughter, Mortimer interprets ironically²⁴ as a venal attempt to use her to wring pity for himself. Herbert hears Mortimer's hostility, but like Desdemona cannot understand such a thing as directed at his own complete innocence. The more they talk about his daughter, the more each is pitched toward his visceral emotion of sorrow or of hate. The difference between their misunderstandings, however, is that Mortimer has more information (he knows that he suspects Herbert, which Herbert does not know), though he believes that Herbert is the one who does. Mortimer asks Herbert,

Do you believe

In ghosts?--the spirit of a murder'd man
Might have room to ramble about here,
A grand domain to squeak and gibber in. (44-47)

Herbert understands him to be speaking of his own (Mortimer's) feelings, to be referring to some action in the past that Mortimer might have committed:

Poor wretch! if thou hast any close-pent guilt
Pressing upon thy heart, and this the hour
Of visitation-- (48-50)

²⁴The irony of Mortimer's interpretation of Herbert's words and acts exists on a number of levels. Mortimer thinks Herbert is lying with ironic sincerity. But we know the further irony that Mortimer is wrong, and Herbert is simply sincere. Thus Mortimer's irony is ironic, or folded onto itself. The ironic layers indicate the degree of destructive avoidance that occurs in the scene.

Herbert is so utterly innocent that he feels benevolent pity toward Mortimer, but the irony is, of course, that Mortimer does have a secret guilt only about a future action.

Comparison and contrast with Hamlet and Polonius are instructive. Hamlet's act of speaking circles around Polonius is not an example of Hamlet's strength as a person. On the contrary, Hamlet shows off to himself at Polonius's expense rather than face his awful dilemma. Eventually Hamlet kills Polonius by mistake, having already diminished Polonius's humanness for himself in the earlier scene. Mortimer's dialogue with Herbert reveals mutual ignorance as the basis of murder; Mortimer asks questions that Herbert cannot understand, and Herbert answers them without knowing that he plays into Rivers's lies against him. Herbert worries about Mortimer's dark tone, and he asks Mortimer about it. Mortimer never tells Herbert of Rivers's version of him, never lets Herbert face his accusations openly, and so, like Othello, Mortimer shuts down all chance at justice. What Mortimer does, in effect, is to avoid even the possibility that Herbert is innocent. What would be the cost of confronting Herbert out on the heath with Rivers's accusation? Nothing, since Herbert could not escape, except that Mortimer would have to face Herbert's defense, which might include requests for mercy. As Cavell notes in relation to Othello,

the failure to acknowledge a best case of the other is a denial of that other, presaging the death of the other...and the death of our capacity to acknowledge as such, the turning of our hearts to stone.²⁵

By Cavell's standard Mortimer is guilty of dehumanizing the old man, whether or not he comes to the point of possessing a clear intent to kill. Wordsworth seems to be getting at a similar standard in which it does not matter whether Mortimer was confused, a subject making an autonomous choice, or a bundle of perceptions and social influences

²⁵Disowning Knowledge, 138.

shifting in the winds. Mortimer is culpable because he does not positively reach out to Herbert. He can only do so by repressing his own humanity. His punishment at the end of the play is to repeat the distortion that results from this repression.

It would be a mistake to say that Mortimer is not at all an agent in Herbert's death, just as it would be an error to blame him completely. The issue of agency in The Borderers is in part a question of how to understand suffering, or necessity. In Lyrical Ballads (for example in Resolution and Independence) Wordsworth would exalt the sufferer to holy status, something like what Herbert expresses to Mortimer in their conversation on the heath: "Learn, young man,/ To fear the virtuous, and reverence misery" (III.iii.80-81). Mortimer misinterprets the warning as if it applied, not to himself, but to Herbert, whom he wants to suffer: "Now this is as it should be!" (III.iii. 82). Herbert's counsel is to accept "fate," but Mortimer only hears a man accusing himself guiltily:

Merciful God! thou hast poured out the phial of thy wrath upon my head—but I will not murmur—blasted as I am thou hast left me both ears to hear the voice of my daughter and arms to fold her to my heart—I will adore thee and tremble!

(II.iii.130-133)

Like Byron's Adam in Cain and Noah in Heaven and Earth, Herbert praises the God of circumstances in Jobean tones: he preaches passive resignation before misery, not (Satanic) resistance to the order of things.²⁶ Herbert is not naive; he warns Matilda that "wolves/ are not the enemies that move my fears" (I.ii.27-28), which shows that he acknowledges the existence of evil in the world. Herbert is no saint, but rather a patriarch with an outworn, dogmatic way of explaining how we ought to live. Unlike Byron's clear lack of

²⁶Hodgson writes that Herbert's is "not natural but Christian piety" (5), but Herbert's God is more of a cross between the Hebrew God of wrath and an eighteenth-century style "prime mover," disengaged from temporal affairs.

sympathy for Adam/ Noah's patriarchal self-absolving dogmas, Wordsworth's expression of cultivated acceptance of suffering is one of the strands of philosophy not yet worked through. In The Borderers, Herbert's complaisance would have saved the world from Rivers's vicious revolutionism. But Herbert's complaisance is superstition to the modern ear that hears the church bell ringing in the wind and knows that the ringing is random. When Mortimer abandons Herbert to a trial by ordeal, Wordsworth is careful to emphasize that it is not an abandonment to pure nature but a human use of nature. Acceptance of the necessity of suffering is a retreat from our duty to recognize our role in creating the nature we see.

The equivalent complaisance about *human* nature is to assert that it holds some simple innate benevolence, despite Locke's "proof" a century earlier that we possess no innate ideas. Wordsworth's position is *not* the sentimental one of Francis Hutcheson or Adam Smith in which all humans are benevolent by nature. The play's view of benevolence is of something much more interactive with the conscious mind, since the motive for morals is aesthetic perception of other humans. Benevolence, or the feeling of sympathy for others, is natural, which is why Mortimer cannot escape his guilt over Herbert. Benevolence can be killed by an intellect degraded by sharp traumatic suffering. And some individuals, though they possess benevolence in the full amount, do not possess it "solidly," and so may become lost. Rivers, in soliloquy, says that Herbert's suffering is meaningless:

A whipping to the moralists who preach
That misery is a sacred thing! For me,
I know no cheaper engine to degrade a man,
Nor any half so sure.

(III.ii.17-20)

Rivers has no consciousness here of the ironic implication of his statement for himself. That is, Rivers, like every other character in the play, has been molded by suffering, even if one accepts his own version of himself as having been liberated by it. Of course, it is the play's view that, ironically, Rivers is the most degraded by suffering, so that his statement, through a double-reverse, is correct. Since Herbert reacts oppositely to his suffering, we must suppose that man did not always need to undergo the play's tragic sequence of "going out into the world," committing a crime unwittingly, then rationally detaching oneself from human feelings. Wordsworth, unlike Byron, locates this pattern in the modern man's move to rationalize. Byron's drama Cain, situating the fatal act born of skepticism in the first human to be born into this fallen world, suggests that it is an innately human problem, a symptom of human nature. The Borderers is not so certain about human nature, neither asserting what the benevolence philosophers asserted for it, nor accepting what Byron would say against it, but neither, finally, accepting the self's non-existence entirely. If "nature" is reality as it is perceived, and also a word that stands for an ideal of moral behavior, then these two definitions are reconciled only through active willing; we must choose to be natural, to live up to ourselves. Again we come to the most actively questioning position: the *half*-creation.

In the second act we specifically learn that Mortimer has prevented Herbert from falling off a cliff, showing that in the emergency, Mortimer's instincts are for positive acts of kindness, which is why Mortimer has been unable to kill Herbert outright. It is as if Wordsworth were eliminating these "trivial" or easy cases of agency, contrasting them with the more difficult one of abandonment. Here Mortimer, like Othello, is ignorant of reality, and crucially *knows* that he ought to have doubts about Herbert's (Desdemona's) guilt. But Mortimer turns his doubts into destruction, just as surely as Othello does.

Herbert says of his daughter, "When I think of man/ I bless her with a sad spirit; when of God,/ I bless her in the fullness of my joy!" (113-115). With an eye to Hamlet,

III.iii., Wordsworth makes Mortimer-Hamlet confront what he would consider another Claudius, praying abominably:

Look there! He prays!
The name of daughter in his mouth, he prays!...
If he were innocent he would tremble
And be disturbed, as I am. (115-120)

Mortimer clings to external signs, refusing to believe the easier interpretation of the evidence, which is that Herbert is simply praying. In order to restore his belief in his soul, Mortimer pretends that some kind of a soul runs the universe, and devises a plan that assumes such order:

It dawns on me—I see the end for which
An arm invisible hath fed me hither. —
He heard a voice—a shepherd'd lad came
And was his guide—if once—why not again?...
Here I will leave him
Here where no foot of man is found, no ear
Can hear his cries... (122-29)

But if the universe asserts its own justice, why pretend that we play no role in determining the outcome? Wordsworth demolishes the sentimental, complacent view of the powerful (which is also the Puritan position) that a God dispenses his just desserts on this earth, just as Shelley would do in The Cenci. As the narrator notes with reference to Satan in Paradise Lost, “So spake the Fiend, and with necessity/ The Tyrant’s plea, excus’d his

devilish deeds" (IV.393-4).²⁷ Mortimer is pushing Herbert's luck, with the connotation that phrase implies of tyrannical arrogance and irrationality. Mortimer's decision to abandon Herbert is a parody of Herbert's and Wordsworth's sense of internalized nature and the holiness of suffering:

...it is a fearful ordeal!

But God is everywhere.

Here (*looking round*) cold and hunger! Pain is of the *heart*,

And what are a few throes of bodily suffering

If they can waken one pang of remorse? (129-133)

Mortimer has become the experimenter, but not out of Rivers's conscious desire to be a controlling power. He experiments with his own desire to be certain that justice exists in the universe. He is even more naive than Godwin, who at least conceded, often, that the world at present was not ideal. Wordsworth shows the two stages of naïveté: belief in a simply just universe, and belief that the world could be improved by steps that are simple to describe. The more naive character endangers others in his attempts to salvage his belief system. The less naive character, though at first more persuasive, is a dogmatic rationalist who will spare no one in his quest for a "beautifully" rational existence. That is, he has devised a trial which assumes its hypothesis. Herbert's apparent innocence has made Mortimer mad because it contradicts his desire to remain naive, to think he can participate in the ordering of things, to avoid becoming a modern man.

Mortimer denies the necessity of becoming modern according to this definition of modernity when Rivers reveals his plot to him. Despite Mortimer's ironic attempt to remain like Herbert, he reaches Rivers's level of consciousness about the world of the

²⁷All references to Milton's verse are from Complete Poems and Major Prose, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey P, 1957).

play, but still rejects Rivers's conclusions. When Rivers reveals what he has done, Mortimer's choices are four: 1) to go with Rivers; 2) to decide that he (Mortimer) is guilty of nothing, since he knew nothing; 3) to submit himself to the "legitimate" authorities that he has always flouted as an outlaw; or 4) to impose his own punishment of exile and estrangement upon himself, which is what he does. The first two choices deny Mortimer's guilt, or at least put off his remorse according to what we call a Kantian rule of intention and what Wordsworth attacks in Godwin's absolutist system of justice. By forcing us to witness the details of Mortimer's act of abandonment, Wordsworth wraps Mortimer in the thinnest veil of non-responsibility for Herbert's death, so that when he is exposed to Rivers's plot the veil lifts away from Mortimer's conscience. At the end of the play Mortimer does ask to be taken before a local Baron for judgment and to be delivered to "the executioner" (V.iii.188), but the peasant who found Herbert's body objects that Mortimer's act of abandonment can never be proved:

The old man died of cold --
 You are not master of the elements.
 It was a bitter night--I was half frozen...
 Good master! There was not a wound about him
 That would have killed a mouse. (189-195)

The peasant's attribution of Herbert's death to nature's indifference condemns Mortimer to his life of remorse, since he cannot achieve absolution in a punishment he would welcome. The first three choices, then, all tempt Mortimer with self-absolution, something he cannot accept.

One reason Mortimer not only feels remorse but becomes dominated by it is addressed by Bernard Williams, discussing the general case of a man who accidentally kills another:

What degree of such feeling is appropriate, and what attempts at reparative action or substitutes for it, are questions for particular cases, and that there is room in the area for irrational and self-punitive excess, no one is likely to deny. But equally it would be a kind of insanity never to experience sentiments of this kind toward anyone, and it would be an insane kind of rationality which insisted that a rational person never would. To insist on such a conception of rationality, moreover, would, apart from other kinds of absurdity, suggest a large falsehood: that we might, if we conducted ourselves clearheadedly enough, entirely detach ourselves from the unintentional aspects of our actions, relegating their costs to, so to speak, the insurance fund, and yet still retain our identity and character as agents...[But agency] cannot ultimately be purified.(29)

In other words, within the concept of the agent there is room for incorporating the external event. It is not necessary to think in terms of Power or History or The World to understand Mortimer's remorse. For Williams, the modern philosopher centrally responsible for the mistakenly purified view of agency is Kant, in the creation of the categorical imperative. Wordsworth is not responding to Kant, and for him Williams's "insane" rationality is Godwin's. According to Wordsworth's parodic view of Godwinianism, Mortimer's "right" to put Herbert to the ordeal came from his physical might over Herbert, his ability to trick Herbert onto the heath, and Mortimer's sense of himself as rationally competent judge. The Godwinian utilitarian ideal that Mortimer's act exemplifies (and parodies, associating it with a medieval superstition and with medieval Catholicism), would give him the right to exercise his power over Herbert as long as the ends were justifiable and sufficient. This is perhaps what Rivers has in mind when he advises Mortimer that "Remorse,/ It cannot live with thought, think on, think on,/ And it will die" (III.v.81-83). To attempt to act categorically is to assume that one can access a

universal subject within oneself, certainly a problematic assumption for Wordsworth. Further, Williams is discussing the case of a truck driver who runs down a child without seeing the child. The case that Wordsworth gives us of Mortimer's mixed motives for abandonment is an easier one in which to assign blame to Mortimer, or to see how Mortimer must blame himself.

In the end, Rivers enters just as Mortimer begins to understand that he will not be given external punishment for Herbert's death, and tries again to convince Mortimer to follow him. Mortimer seems to accept, but only toys with Rivers now. He bitterly declines Rivers's companionship but forgives Rivers's betrayal, taking the blame for Herbert's death upon himself. Mortimer's Band rushes in, seizes Rivers, and kills him. As in Othello's final moment, Mortimer calls for "a monument/ That may record my story for a warning" (V.iii.261-2). Instead of Othello's suicide, however, he dooms himself to modern consciousness:

I will go forth a wanderer on the earth,
 A shadowy thing, and as I wander on
 No human ear shall hear my voice,
 No human dwelling ever give me food
 Or sleep or rest, and all the uncertain way
 Shall be as darkness to me, as a waste
 Unnamed by man! and I will wander on
 Living by the mere intensity of thought,
 A thing by pain and thought compelled to live,
 Yet loathing life, still heaven in mercy strike me
 With blank forgetfulness--that I may die. (V.iii.265-75)

The parallels to Byron's Manfred are all the more striking given that, though Byron could not have read Wordsworth's play, it is as if Manfred's desperate quest for the end of consciousness begins just at this point at the end of The Borderers. As in Manfred, the blasted soul's autonomy is a curse, not an individual's supremacy over his environment. Like Byron's Cain, a character as much influenced by Coleridge's Ancient Mariner as Mortimer, Mortimer's assertion of internal life is a symptom of an irrecoverable reconciliation with nature. Internalization, for Romanticism, means alienation, not power. Mortimer's defeat, forcing him to turn in upon himself because, in his shame, he is unfit for social contact, is a repudiation of the kind of internalization that Rivers tries to advocate throughout the drama, as in the lines, "Great souls/ Look to the world within" (II.iii.76-77), a form of internalization-as-power that is too often associated with Romanticism itself.

Rivers and False Self-Consciousness

As we have seen, Rivers, styled after Iago, claims to be motiveless or to have transcended mere desire in his grand philosophical purposes. Wordsworth examines this claim of self-possession in order to show that, despite Rivers's idea of himself as motiveless (at least with respect to feeling), he has an ironic similarity to the sentimental view of which Rivers thinks he has rid himself. Rivers's position is like Godwin's in Political Justice, as for example in the section "Of the Rights of Private Judgement:" "To a rational being there can be but one rule of conduct, justice, and one mode of ascertaining that rule, the exercise of understanding."²⁸ Godwin denigrates the intrusion of any "positive institutions" in our decisions to act, say, to do charitable work. If we are rewarded for good work, then the work is less good, less charitable. The assumption that we must all become "rational beings," or in other words, motiveless, is harsh and absolute.

²⁸Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Modern Morals and Happiness (London, 1793; rpt. New York: Penguin, 1985) 200.

Godwin ends the chapter regretting "the present mixed characters of mankind" -- "mixed" meaning not all "capable of listening with sobriety to the dictates of reason." This condition of humanity interferes with what Godwin calls his "unspeakably beautiful"(208) doctrine of private judgment.

A weakness in Godwin's call to reform comes from his absolute faith in objectivity in epistemology; he had a simple notion of "truth" which sounds a lot like a Kantian category:

If a just and impartial character were awarded to all human actions, vice would be universally deserted, therefore, once introduced into the manners of mankind, would necessarily bring every other virtue in its train.(314)

The notion of "impartiality" that supposedly lies within the grasp of each rational individual separately is under attack in The Borderers. As we have seen, different characters learn of different facts at different times. Characters fail to communicate with each other. On a psychological level, what, after all, is the sincere truth when Rivers is able to lie massively to himself and to others? In The Borderers there is an opposition between sincerity and sophistication, which comes from skepticism, cynicism, abandonment, and avoidance of others and oneself. Rivers (as if Lady Macbeth) threatens to kill Herbert himself if Mortimer will not:

I must deal plainly with you; had I not
Esteemed you worthy to conduct this business
To its most just conclusion, do you think
I would so long have struggled with my nature
And smothered all that's man in me? (II.iii.176-180)

The literal meaning which Mortimer understands is that Rivers claims to have suppressed his "natural" ire against Herbert, his "natural" desire to kill for "justice," meaning revenge. But Wordsworth would also have us see that Rivers is admitting his deepest secret, though not to himself (or Mortimer). Rivers has "smothered all that's man" in himself in order to tell his Iago-like lies to Mortimer. Rivers has destroyed his inner self in order to avoid his "natural" remorse, to the point of becoming an unfeeling monster. Wordsworth is not simply saying that "philosophy is empty." Consider in this context an entry in the "Summary of Principles" that begins Godwin's Political Justice: "Justice requires that I should put myself in the place of an impartial spectator of human concerns, and divest myself of retrospect to my own predilections" (76). Not philosophy but the inhuman abstract is empty because of its distance from the natural reality, and from psychological complexities such as the existence of people who lie to themselves.

The "impartial spectator" can be found in a wide variety of post-Lockean ethical texts, but in Godwin its result is the extreme and famous conclusion that a man, when faced with the choice of saving from a raging fire either his sister or someone more important to society, must choose the important person. As David Bromwich asks,

Can we characterize the result by saying that the Godwinian moral judge is an agent without an identity? Perhaps it is fairer to say that the judge is an instrument by which an action occurs without agency.²⁹

Even without Godwin's obtuseness, the "impartial spectator" *placed within oneself* is automatically a kind of emptying of the self. In The Borderers no action occurs without a clear association with some identity, but characters desperately want to remove themselves from themselves in order to pretend that this abstraction is possible.

²⁹"Revolutionary Justice and Wordsworth's *Borderers*," Raritan 13:3 (1994): 18.

At those times when Rivers suffers the dramatic irony of making the wrong assumption, his vulnerability is thrown into relief. For example, Rivers tells Mortimer, whom he mistakenly thinks has just killed Herbert, that the purpose of thought is to invent the universe one desires. Rivers, not Herbert, is ultimately the naïf:

To day you have thrown off a tyranny
 That lives but by the torpid acquiescence
 Of our emasculated souls, the tyranny
 Of moralists and saints and lawgivers.
 You have obeyed the only law that wisdom
 Can ever recognize: the immediate law
 Flashed from the light of circumstances
 Upon an independent intellect. (III.v.26-34)

Rivers is ostensibly using the power of the story of his mental travels to persuade Mortimer to follow the same path. The paradoxical nature of Rivers's plot comes home here: there can be no mental independence for Mortimer if Mortimer follows Rivers. Mortimer's tragedy is that he does follow Rivers's call to independence, but he does not become Rivers's co-philosopher. Further, Rivers is in fact mistaken here about Mortimer's actions, since Mortimer did not actively kill Herbert (Mortimer does not yet remember that he left Herbert without any food). The dramatic irony of Rivers's presumptuous error also undermines Rivers's claims to transcendence, and underscores the ways in which he leaps to conclusions, showing him to be just another partially informed subject of the random distribution of information. Crucially, what Rivers has missed is the knowledge that is most readily available to him: the knowledge of self, and Wordsworth shows us that a symptom of missing the self is the failure to acknowledge the way we subjectively perceive the world and half-create our own truths.

What is at stake in the issue of Rivers's ignorance of himself is more than an allegory of Freudian, *personal*, individuated repression, because it goes to the heart of our relations to one another. Rivers, in his vicious rationalization of murder, appeals to the beauty and sublimity of his own reasoned creations. The story of the murder shows how Rivers now perceives abandonment and separation to be the ruling force in the universe, not an aberration. His account, for example, of the barren island on which he left the captain to die is a description of natural abandonment:

‘Twas a spot--
 Methinks I see it now--how the sun
 In its stony surface glittered like a shield:
 It swarmed with shapes of life scarce visible;
 And in that miserable place we left him--
 A giant body mid a world of beings
 Not one of which could give him any aid,
 Living or dead. (IV.ii.37-44)

Mortimer summarizes the act thus:

A man by men deserted,
 Not buried in the sand--not dead nor dying,
 But standing, walking--stretching forth his arms:
 In all things like yourselves, but in the agony
 With which he called for mercy--and even so
 He was forsaken. (IV.ii.44-49)

Among people there is nothing either, even though, as Mortimer points out, he is “in all things like” his abandoners. The island, barren of aid for the captain, is not barren of life, but the forms of life there are not like him, not helps for him. The men know that there ought to be a difference between themselves and those indifferent natural forms. Acting oppositely to the “nature” they knew to be within themselves, they hear their own thoughts echoed back to them:

Some scoffed at him with hellish mockery,
 And laugh'd so loud it seem'd that the smooth sea
 Did from some distant region echo us. (IV.ii.53-55)

This echo is the emblem of what happens to Rivers after the murder: he begins to justify, and to reify, his action by re-ordering his understanding of how the world works such that it works according to his act. His act was therefore “natural.” His description of the act, therefore, is marked by this shift in his thinking. At the end of his tale he tells Mortimer that the captain’s daughter, who had “conjured me/ At parting never to forsake her father,/ To stand by him in all extremities—,” “lived—cut off from the society/ Of every rational thing—her father’s skeleton” (IV.ii.82-84, 88-89). The story of the daughter, told in full here, is a tale of the moral duty not to abandon, followed by the creation of another blasted and separated self. It is a sketch of what happens to practically every character in the play. The world of The Borderers really is full of these abandonments and separations, and it is hard to sort out what is only in Rivers’s mind and what is “real” or truth. Whatever the reality, all that Rivers touches seems to turn into a story of abandonment in fact. The truth and his character are inseparably mixed.

The history of Rivers’s recovery from the realization that he was betrayed into killing his innocent captain begins with an act of thinking. Shutting himself in a convent, he castigates himself, wallowing in guilt:

A fresh tide of crusaders
 Drove past the place of my retreat –three nights
 Did constant meditation dry my blood,
 Three sleepless nights I passed in sounding on
 Through words and things, a dim and perilous way;
 And whereso'er I turned me, I beheld
 A slavery, compared to which the dungeon
 And clanking chain are perfect liberty.
 You understand me, with an awful comfort
 I saw that every possible shape of action
 Might lead to good—I saw it and burst forth
 Thirsting for some exploit of power and terror. (IV.ii.99-110)

Like Mortimer's play-ending speech about wandering and the torture of consciousness, Rivers expresses a version of negative autonomy like Manfred's rebuke to the abbot at the end of Byron's first drama, where Manfred says there is nothing worse than

The innate torture of that deep despair,
 Which is remorse without the fear of hell,
 But all in all sufficient to itself
 Would make a hell of heaven ...
 there is no future pang
 Can deal that justice on the self-condemn'd
 He deals on his own soul. (Manfred, III.i.66-78)

Rivers's self-condemnation aligns him with many other characters of Romantic drama (and Romanticism in general), such as Baillie's De Monfort, Shelley's Beatrice and Prometheus, Byron's Marino Faliero, and Coleridge's Osorio, who, we shall see, is a response to Wordsworth's Rivers. For Coleridge makes Osorio merely a hypocrite, not a philosopher in the business of elaborately justifying his selfish actions.

Rivers is closer than Mortimer to Manfred, however, in the need to see himself as greater than the common folk. In Manfred that sublimity is axiomatic of the protagonist, but becomes his great fall into shame rather than his exultation within human society. For Rivers, the most important effect of his act of murder is not really the guilt it causes him, but the lost hope he held in his own chance to become a leader of society. After the murder, Rivers relates that:

Well—we pursued our voyage—and when we landed
 The tale was spread abroad—my powers shrunk from me,
 My plans of heroism, my lofty hopes,
 All vanished—I could not support the change;
 I sunk into despair. Do you attend? (IV.ii.74-78)

It is Rivers's pride, his reputation, that like Marino Faliero he most feels the loss of, and pride is what he seeks to win back. Formerly he placed his hope for greatness in leading society. Now that the plan is dashed, he decides to abandon society. Wordsworth's implication is that the two projects are radically similar; the Enlightenment's hopes for reform as embodied in the bloody struggles of the leaders of the French Revolution are essentially no different from power moves by men cynically seeking their own power and exultation at the expense of others, even as they do so in the name of the people. That is Wordsworth's conservative political skepticism, though it is complicated by the fact that he makes Rivers so obviously vulnerable, not a simple embodiment of abstract, dehumanized

evil. The pride Rivers seeks to recover is a laudable pride, his wrongs horrible. His error is to turn to "philosophy."

The way Wordsworth links Rivers's search for pride to philosophy is in the way Rivers alters his perception of the universe to fit his crime. The passing crusaders that Rivers notes, for example, are a small detail that reminds us, ironically, of other dogmatically violent mobs who create history. They set the tone for Rivers's "recovery." He concludes that power is all, and the sources of his shame—morality, human bonds, and society—are chimeras. Rivers comes to hate society instead of the crew that betrayed him. Hating them might lead Rivers to identify with them and to hate himself, to hate the criminal act he committed and feel remorse for it. Instead, Rivers hates what he conceives as the social texture of morality, an unarticulated and ubiquitous ethical system which he, like everyone else, had internalized before his trauma simply by living in society. It is that unexamined unphilosophical system which causes his pain, not his act or its results, he concludes.

In the "Preface" Wordsworth attributes to Rivers "pride which borders even upon madness," "superstition," "irresistible propensities to embody in practical experiments his worst and most extravagant speculations," and a "perverted reason justifying his perverted instincts." Summing up these features, "The general moral intended to be impressed by the delineation of such a character is obvious: it is to shew the dangerous use which may be made of reason when a man has committed a great crime" (from the "Preface," 67). When Wordsworth includes "superstition" on the list of Rivers's features gives the reader an insight into how Wordsworth trumps Rivers's skepticism with his own skeptical view of Rivers's objective "reason" and of reason in general.

Fleeing from the weight of his crime upon his conscience, Rivers becomes obsessed with the power of knowledge, such as the knowledge he lacked when he committed his crime, and the knowledge he gained when he discovered that he was a criminal. Rivers begins to exalt rational knowledge and to see in nature only emptiness and

power. For the strong claims are made by the same character who can say of the Band, in soliloquy,

These fools of feeling are mere birds of winter
 That haunt some barren island of the north
 Where if a famishing man stretch forth his hand
 They think it is to feed them. (II.i.5-8)

The definition, then, of Rivers's imaginative fool is one who sees purpose, justice, or benevolence in nature. His is the view taken by the doubter of those dogmas that preach complacency in the face of experience's overwhelming evidence of nature's indifference to man. In our skeptical age it is difficult not to feel some sympathy for Rivers's position here, even for his scorn, for the modern liberal is as likely as he to feel a condescension toward sentimentalists. As Hartman, in Blakean diction, describes Wordsworth's attitude toward his creature as sympathy for the devil: "Wordsworth may have been of Oswald's [Rivers's] party without knowing it."³⁰ Hartman refers here to Rivers's call to Mortimer to become a philosophic solitary, and insofar as that call rests upon Rivers's skepticisms, Hartman has identified a crucial temptation in the play, one of which Wordsworth was aware. In *The Cenci*, Shelley will make Rivers's sort of skepticism into a force for social critique, but Wordsworth, conservatively, but not sentimentally, wants to see Rivers's scornful doubt as a partial *cause* of nature's coldness. The play's description of the uncaring nature of the heath might seem to confirm Rivers's view, but that heath's barrenness partly reflects the human act of abandonment. Rivers, failing to see how nature within *interacts* with ("half creates") nature without, believes in his own creations too much. He is both too skeptical and not skeptical enough.

³⁰Wordsworth's Poetry, 129.

As he explains in Act IV, Rivers is finally able to rationalize murdering his captain with the truly sanguine-sounding doctrine "that every possible shape of action/ Might lead to good" (ii.108-109). As Satan says in soliloquy, he feels

Torment within me, as from the hateful siege
Of contraries; all good to me becomes
Bane...
Nor hope to be myself less miserable
By what I seek, but others to make such
As I, though thereby worse to me redound:
For only in destroying I find ease
To my relentless thoughts (IX.121-130)

Satan is not yet, by this point in Paradise Lost, forced by the plot to acknowledge that good ends must result from his works. Satan is more defiant, not because he is unaware of the hopelessness of his plan, but because he does not yet understand how his work will turn against his purpose. Rivers, however, unconsciously invokes the *felix culpa* as a way out of responsibility for his acts. The irony of such an invocation for an avowed skeptic is typical of the way in which Wordsworth undermines Rivers by making him into a closeted or repressed dogmatist. Again we see an example of how knowledge makes a character more culpable than his bare act, but in this case Rivers's "knowledge" is philosophical knowledge, and it is false because it is not self-knowledge. He thinks that he has figured out a way to become exempt from ethical rules, but Wordsworth is striving to show how, in fact, the rules manipulate him.

One of the most dramatic features of Rivers's performance of his life story in the latter parts of the play is how they involve the extremes of self-consciousness and claims of superior self-consciousness, with radical self-ignorance. Rivers embodies what we might

ordinarily call a stupid philosopher. In this sense Rivers resembles Iago's split between having a crushing superiority of "intelligence" meaning knowledge of others' movements, combined with a tactical lack of self-knowledge. This combination is similar to Victor Frankenstein's lack of ethical self-consciousness, a moral gap that makes his "scientific" advance unethical and disastrous. In the last Act Rivers claims that "I'll have him/ A shadow of myself, made by myself" (V.i.32-33), implying that what he seeks is love, though he cannot acknowledge that that is his desire. Like Frankenstein, who could have had babies with Elizabeth instead of abandoning her to manufacture life out of his own intellect, Rivers is destroyed by his own rational plots of the avoidance of love. Similarly, the moment in Othello that seems to have most directly inspired Rivers's lack of self-consciousness is when Iago admits his own jealousy to himself:

I hate the moor,
And it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets
He's done my office; I know not if't be true...
Yet I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
Will do, as if for surety... (I.iii.384-88)³¹

Iago's soliloquy reveals his helplessness in the face of his own desires, and his compulsion to externalize those controlling passions by repeating them in another, as if he could expel them or somehow legitimize them, or at least *watch* them. This speech is practically the only hint we get, aside from Iago's having been skipped over for Cassio's sake, for Iago's boundless rage. We have already seen the analog to Iago's non-motive: Rivers's rage at Mortimer for saving Rivers's life, if anything an even purer anti-motive for corrupting the outlaw leader. Coleridge, as we shall see in examining his answer to Wordsworth's

³¹ed. M.R. Ridley, Arden Shakespeare (Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard UP, Methuen & Co. 1958).

version of Othello, saw Iago as a “motiveless malignity.”³² Hazlitt’s refutation of Coleridge’s understanding of Iago, in Hazlitt’s Characters of Shakespear’s Plays of 1817, is much closer to Wordsworth’s design for Rivers:

Some persons, more nice than wise, have thought this whole character unnatural, because his villainy is *without a sufficient motive*. Shakespear, who was as good a philosopher as he was a poet, thought otherwise. He knew that the love of power, which is another name for the love of mischief, is natural to man...Iago in fact belongs to a class of character, common to Shakespear and at the time peculiar to him; whose heads are as acute and active as their hearts hard and callous. Iago is to be sure an extreme instance of the kind; that is to say, of diseased intellectual activity, with the most perfect indifference to moral good or evil, or rather with a decided preference of the latter, because it falls more readily in with his favorite propensity, gives greater zest to his thoughts and scope to his actions. He is quite or nearly as indifferent to his own fate as that of others; he runs all risks for a trifling and doubtful advantage; and is himself the dupe and the victim of his ruling passion—an insatiable craving after action of the most difficult and dangerous kind. ‘Our ancient’ is a philosopher, who fancies that a lie that kills has more point in it than an alliteration or an antithesis; who thinks a fatal experiment on the peace of a family a better thing than watching the palpitations in the heart of a flea in a microscope; who plots the ruin of his friends as an exercise for his ingenuity, and stabs men in the dark to prevent *ennui*.³³

³²Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Shakespearean Criticism, I, Everyman 162 (NY: Dutton, London: Dent, 1960) 44.

³³William Hazlitt, The Round Table and Characters of Shakespear’s Plays, ed., intro., Catherine Macdonald Maclean, Everyman 65 (NY: Dutton, London: Dent, 1965) 206-207.

Wordsworth's rewritten Iago resembles this sketch in giving Rivers power as a motive, a propensity for intellectual activity, at the expense of sympathy, and, most especially, in Rivers's vulnerability. What is at stake in the issue of whether Iago was motiveless becomes clearer if we consider Samuel Johnson's comment upon Shakespeare's character: "There is always a danger lest wickedness conjoined with abilities should steal upon esteem, though it misses of approbation; but the character of Iago is so conducted, that he is from the first scene to the last hated and despised."³⁴ Johnson's view is that of the orthodox requirement for all fictions to possess poetic justice. In the Preface to Shakespeare, Johnson writes:

His first defect is that which may be imputed most of the evil in books or in men. He sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose...he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to shew in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked...The fault of the barbarity of his age cannot extenuate; for it is always a writer's duty to make the world better, and justice is a virtue independent of time or place.³⁵

It would be easier to ridicule Johnson for his dogmatic insistence upon more of an overt Christian moral than Shakespeare provided, but in effect Johnson finds fault with Shakespeare for creating art with insufficient idealism to counter the effects of our fallen world. Seeing pure evil in Iago, Johnson and Coleridge let Shakespeare off the hook for creating such a compelling character since his evil is so obvious. Hazlitt's more skeptical

³⁴Johnson on Shakespeare, ed. Arthur Sherbo, The Yale Edition of The Works of Samuel Johnson, gen. eds. E.L. McAdam Jr., Donald Hyde, Mary Hyde, VIII (New Haven & London: Yale UP, 1968) 1047.

³⁵Johnson on Shakespeare, VIII, 71

and more modern view is that Iago is all too human, all too natural. The lack of a more overt poetic justice in Othello that might turn it into an eighteenth-century sentimental comedy pleases Hazlitt all the more. Iago's will to power is a sign that Othello makes a claim upon a moral skeptic's understanding of how the world works.

What both Hazlitt and Johnson leave out, however, is Iago's interiority. Wordsworth exploits Iago's vulnerability to create a Satan-like self-destructive interiority in Rivers. Rivers seems to know about Wordsworth's gift to him, and it is all Wordsworth can do to counter Rivers's claim upon the audience that he is compelling though evil, powerful because autonomous of all mere human motive. Wordsworth uses Rivers to comment ironically upon this claim to mental autonomy, as in Rivers's remark that there is "No law but what each man makes for himself" (II.i.53).

Rivers blames society's blindness to liberate himself from remorse. But even here, the play equivocates somewhat; it is not merely doing counter-revolutionary agit-prop by putting complaints against society in the mouth of the villain. The play tempts us with Rivers's critique of society, a society that after all includes the murderous crusades;

I turned to contemplate
The opinions and the uses of the world,
I seemed a being who had passed alone
Beyond the visible barriers of the world
And traveled into things to come...

Is not shame, I said,
A mean acknowledgment of a tribunal
Blind in its essence, a most base surrender
Of our own knowledge to the world's ignorance?
I had been nourished by the sickly food
Of popular applause. I now perceived

That we are praised by men because they see in us
 The image of themselves; that a great mind
 Outruns its age and is pursued with obloquy
 Because its movements are not understood.
 (IV.ii.141-145, 146-155)

We may compare this speech to the replies Prometheus makes to the Furies in Shelley's drama and find many similarities. There is so much to be acknowledged in the speech that Wordsworth may well be accused of being of Rivers's party in it. In his individualism, Rivers's critique is appealing, but his individualism's Nietzschean turn to Power is merely a return to what is wrong in society; it is a revenge cycle's ultimate acquiescence to society's imbalances, and it is exactly what Prometheus avoids by refusing to accept despair at the hands of the Furies. Rivers, having succumbed to despair, uses these justifications of transcendence to restart a cycle of violence.

What is fascinating about Rivers is the way in which Wordsworth delicately constructs him so that he does not really believe what says. After the recovery, Rivers regains his original ambition: his "brain/ Was light and giddy, and it teemed with projects/ Which seemed to have no limit" (IV.ii.115-17). He imagines his own potential to gain power from the strength of his mind: "a fire/ Of inextinguishable thought...my sleep was linked/ To purposes of reason..." (119-124). Rather than concluding that only by strengthening social bonds may we escape the horror Rivers experienced, Rivers excludes them and focuses upon power. His old dream of exultation, which formerly depended upon society's declaration of his leadership, has returned, now purified (Rivers claims) of the need for approval. But Rivers does not really believe that: "I felt that to be truly the world's friend,/ We must become the object of its hate" (IV.ii.156-57). Here he admits that he is not completely a separatist. He still ultimately seeks the approbation of human society that everywhere else he claims to deplore but that Wordsworth implies is innately

human. Further, he has abstracted the way society misunderstands its heroes to valorize the misunderstanding exclusive of those heroes' actions. Rivers is bothering to explain this philosophy to Mortimer at all because he cannot even wait out his own abstracted sense of exultation through social rejection; he needs companionship in the short run, before he succeeds in becoming notorious. He explains: "I've joined us by a chain of adamant;/ Henceforth we are fellow-labourers—to enlarge/ The intellectual empire of mankind" (IV.ii.187-189). Rivers has a few asides in which he reveals to the audience that his real plot is to make Mortimer a subordinate, not an equal companion: "Henceforth I'll have him/ A Shadow of myself, made by myself" (V.ii.32-33). He could simply be lying to Mortimer, but his unreliability is so complete that there is almost no reason to credit his asides to himself more than what he says to Mortimer about his motives.

Rivers's contradictions make the play muddy, but they are the source of his interest and his depth. Wordsworth's drama is a work in progress, a tissue of equivocations, reversed and doubly reversed ironies, and ambiguously assigned moral valences. Rather than reading the play only in terms of Wordsworth's poetic development (as has traditionally been done), however, we may locate it at the beginning of the genre of a Romantic theater of dialectical skepticism. As such, its uncertainties are themes, not (only) weaknesses. As we shall see in the fourth chapter, Joanna Baillie's *De Monfort*, written within a year of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's, is marked by similar uncertainties. All three plays lie on the fault line of the protagonist who seems to take on moral meanings that run counter to the texts in which they appear, suggesting that the playwrights themselves are merely other characters in the dramas. Though Baillie and Coleridge seem to have tried to close off some of the uncertainties Wordsworth left hanging when he abandoned his drama in 1797, their successes for orthodoxy are limited by their canny expressions of the forces orthodoxy and patriarchy needed to explain and contain in order to survive. In Byron, Shelley, and then Byron again, Romantic drama no longer seeks to contain these uncertainties. Rather, it comes into its own as the genre proper of Romantic literature, a

form best suited to the formation of self-critical dialectics between hope for and despair over human nature.

Chaos, Cosmos, and Comedy: Coleridge's Osorio and Public Ethics

[Hume] believed, against his principles, that he should be read, and that he should retain his personal identity, till he reaped the honour and reputation justly due his metaphysical *acumen*. Indeed he ingeniously acknowledges, that it was only in solitude and retirement that he could yield any assent to his own philosophy; society, like daylight, dispelled the darkness and fogs of skepticism, and made him yield to the dominion of common sense...Surely, if his friends apprehended this, they would have the charity never to leave him alone. Thomas Reid, An Inquiry into the Human Mind¹

Coleridge's Osorio, A Tragedy, written in 1797, belongs to the earlier period of Romantic drama from the late 1790s. The play, like The Borderers, was written during the ongoing French Revolution and the English reaction to stories of violence in France. Like The Borderers, and like Joanna Baillie's De Monfort (see chapter four), Osorio allegorizes the psychological, political, and ethical ramifications of both the Revolution and the intense conservative revulsion to it that formed the public atmosphere in England. For several years before writing Osorio, Coleridge had earned an increasing larger sphere of public recognition through self-published journalism, lectures on political, moral, and literary topics, and holdings forth in various urban public meeting places. Coleridge was by far both better known and more in tune with public opinion than Wordsworth in 1797. For this reason and others, Coleridge's play is far more toned-down than The Borderers.²

¹Ed. Thomas Duggan (rpt. of London, 1813. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1970) 15.

²Wordsworth's play is not the only source for Coleridge. Both plays draw heavily upon Shakespeare, especially Othello. Among the other sources there is Godwin's Caleb Williams, Schiller's The Ghost-Seer (a novel) and The Robbers (a gothic drama); Otway's The Orphan; Robert Watson's history of Philip the Second of Spain; Edward Young's The

Osorio sets for itself a far less imposing challenge from skepticism, and though Coleridge gave it the subtitle A Tragedy, the play holds an overall comedic (optimistic) view of human nature and of the possibility of order in the universe. Coleridge's tragedy, like Hamlet, is written to test but confirm order, and to show the evil consequences of the test. As does Wordsworth, Coleridge frames the challenge of modernity in terms of the dangers of philosophical skepticism, but shifts the focus much more toward issues of the agent's social responsibility to other people. Again, like The Borderers, Osorio holds debates with itself over the degree of agency possible to the individual in a world so full of wrongs, but, being a more optimistic drama, it emphasizes what the honorable agent ought to do rather than, like The Borderers, why the betrayed victim abandons others.

One of the ways in which the plays differ is on the issue of communication. In The Borderers, Wordsworth conceives communication physiognomically, as a problem of reading the soul in the face and body, but not in terms of race, gender, or radical otherness. Wordsworth was more interested in the purely philosophical case of communication between people who, coming from the same place, hold the same customs and speak the same language (though they may differ in class origins). The pessimism of The Borderers can be gauged from its finding that even among people with so much in common, communication in modern circumstances is often impossible. Osorio, set in Spain of the Inquisition, also dramatizes breakdowns in communication, but since these occur between peoples, Osorio's test case is less rigorous, and its findings less adverse. That is not to say that Osorio paints a rosy picture of society; the play does acknowledge a large measure of evil in the world. Within its social setting, Osorio presents an utterly corrupt state religion, state sponsored racial hierarchy and oppression, and harsh patriarchal control over women. But Osorio is meant to counter Wordsworth's picture of inescapability; and by

Revenge, a popular tragedy often performed; and Matthew ("Monk") Lewis's The Castle Spectre, arguably the smash hit whose success seduced Wordsworth and Coleridge to write plays.

concentrating upon presumably fixable social conflicts, rather than more fundamental philosophical rifts, Coleridge attempts to refute the despair at the end of Wordsworth's play.

Further, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to draw a line between the two dramas and say that one is the conservative, one the more liberal or radical text. Osorio, like all Romantic drama, condemns the French Revolution's violence while identifying and idealizing some of its deeper potential forces of reform. Osorio, in particular, tries to explain how the French Revolution was necessary yet tragic by explaining its causes while claiming that its outcomes were not the only way for a revolution to proceed. Osorio, unlike The Borderers, is not as skeptical of the salutary benefits of action, even of revolution from below, though Coleridge's play does suggest that in the present state of inequality and oppression, collective action might always turn violent. On the score of action, The Borderers must be considered the more conservative play, while on the level of critiquing complacent belief systems, Osorio cannot stand up to Wordsworth's withering tragedy. Then again, The Borderers fails to address social issues, such as the oppression of women, that Osorio foregrounds. Finally, however, Coleridge's "feminism," especially when compared to a contemporary feminist like Mary Wollstonecraft, prompts one to ask, with friends like him...? The chapter will investigate ways in which Coleridge's philosophical conservatism often conflicts with his ostensible social activism to create a drama full of tension.³

³The critics of Osorio and Coleridge to whom I am most in debt for my understanding of this tension are: Daniel P. Watkins, A Materialist Critique for his exploration of the historical and social issues in the text, and for his idea of action in the play, with which I do not always agree; Julie Carlson, In the Theatre of Romanticism: Coleridge, Nationalism, Women for her strong theorization of the implications of Coleridge's female characters; and Patrick J. Keane, Coleridge's Submerged Politics: The Ancient Mariner and Robinson Crusoe (Columbia, MO, London: U of Missouri P, 1994). Other critics important for any study of Coleridge include Owen Barfield, What Coleridge Thought (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1971); Laurence Lockridge, Coleridge the

My compass, so to speak, is a circle of dramatic and philosophical texts, as well as Coleridge's journalism, letters, and notebook entries, both from the period leading up to 1797 and in some cases well afterwards. In particular, Coleridge's "Lecture on the Slave Trade," the "Moral and Political Lecture" of 1795, the notes to Shakespeare's plays, and part of the Biographia Literaria will form the basis for understanding Coleridge's dramatic characterizations. Shakespeare, and Coleridge's idea of him, forms the beginning for any search for meaning in Osorio; but Shakespeare's idea of tragedy, which Coleridge called "romantic," is not, ultimately, the model for the play. In addition, as in the previous (and subsequent) chapters, the theoretical analyses lean heavily upon Stanley Cavell's and Bernard Williams's philosophical models. Williams's view of the circularity in Aristotle's idea of slavery helps develop a more complicated map of Coleridge's drama, for oppression of women and slavery are the historical phenomena on which Osorio turns. The problems with race and gender that Coleridge confronted was one of body and soul; as Stanley Cavell asks,⁴ how can that physiognomy I see, which is so like my own, not also be human like me? One answer is that we see each other through categories in ourselves. We cannot see contents of others' characters.

Coleridge's practice, which he was later to ascribe to Shakespeare, was to re-examine categorizations by exploiting them outright. As he would say (in 1819) of Lady Macbeth, Shakespeare's characters were to Coleridge a "class individualized,"⁵ a

Moralist (Ithaca, London: Cornell UP, 1977); and especially Thomas McFarland, Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1969), still the most useful explanation of the difference between Coleridge's Spinozism and his process of rejecting it. For the history and importance of the idea of slavery in Coleridge I am indebted to Joan Baum, Mind Forg'd Manacles: Slavery and the English Romantic Poets (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1994). Finally, Joseph Donohue's chapter on Remorse, in Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age, still sets the standard for interpretation of Coleridge's play.

⁴In Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy.

⁵See Coleridge: Shakespearean Criticism, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor, Everyman, I (London: Dent, 1960) 64.

paradoxical combination of generic yet humanized persons. Though each of Coleridge's characters is representative of a "class," a social or a psychological category (and thus a product of circumstance), Coleridge also insists upon the moral agency of each individual. Coleridge's categories can be from a social text, like the French Revolution, or from a literary one, such as the character of Othello according to Coleridge's understanding of him. One initial task of interpretation of Osorio is merely to identify the categories to which the characters belong.

For example, Osorio is an anti-revenge tragedy, a story of two brothers (Osorio and Albert) in a conflict that avoids an ending in which one kills the other. The conflict between the brothers, like that between Cain and Abel, represents the nature of brotherhood and stands as a model for all interaction between universal subjects. Less generally, the actions and thoughts of Osorio, Albert, and their adopted sister Maria represent only those of the upper classes, since they are all the children of a Marquis Velez. Set in Spain during the Inquisition, the play uses the character Francesco, an Inquisitor, to elucidate Coleridge's general ideas about the abuse and perversion of religious concepts into their opposites. Alhadra, a Moorish woman and an equivocal heroine, is the individual embodiment of French Revolutionary violence, the necessary result of oppression, and a woman usurping the "natural" role of the male.

The plot of Osorio is as follows. Like The Borderers, Osorio is backloaded with prehistory. Osorio is Albert's brother. Three years earlier, Osorio coerced a Moor named Ferdinand to murder Albert. Ferdinand, unable to overcome his scruples to commit murder in cold blood, allows Albert to flee, but tells Osorio that he killed Albert. Albert exiles himself, and returns at the beginning of the play. Thus before the play begins there is a complex tale of wandering and exile from estrangement, but significantly Osorio inverts the structure of The Borderers's and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by making the end of exile the play's opening. Further, there is embedded in the play's prehistory an example of interracial physiognomic recognition between Ferdinand and Albert. This scene of mercy

is doubled by the fact that Osorio, though a villain, did not even attempt to face his brother himself. Osorio lives with terrible remorse barely repressed for three years, suggesting that for Coleridge the physical wanderer is not necessarily as badly off as the breaker of nature's laws against dehumanization. In comparison to The Borderers, in which murder begets murder, in Osorio the avoidance of murder begets, in the end, absolution, compensation, and possible reconciliation.

There is also a love story in Osorio. In the first act we see Maria, still in love with Albert, being pressured by Velez her guardian to marry Osorio, his son. Albert, still faithful to Maria, returns in disguise and tests Maria's love for him by questioning her, since he does not yet know whether she was complicit in Osorio's plot to kill him. The germ of the play is thus established: Albert is the experimenter, but unlike Rivers, Albert designs plots upon others to give them a chance to prove the existence of their better selves. As an allegory of mysterious forces in the universe that shape the subject in formation, Albert is wholly benevolent. As a hero, Albert disguises himself as a member of the oppressed Moors, and is able generally to reach others' souls and to feel sympathy for others' social positions.

Osorio has not reformed since Albert left. He blackmails Ferdinand with exposure of the murder, though pressure from Alhadra, Ferdinand's wife, makes Osorio retreat from that threat. Osorio lusts in jealousy for Maria, and he coerces Ferdinand to put on a primitive magic show to play upon Maria's sensitivity and make her give up hope that Albert is still alive. Albert learns from Osorio that Maria still loves him, and vows in soliloquy to wake a hell of remorse within Osorio by taking over the magic show and using it for his own ends.

The third act is largely the show that Osorio thinks is meant to persuade Maria that Albert's ghost is in heaven. Albert uses a sublime description of heaven as well as an Ariel-like song of invocation to create the magical mood. Albert produces a painting depicting his own assassination as Osorio intended it to happen three years earlier, turning

the show into a mouse-trap to catch Osorio's conscience. Osorio, deeply shaken by his action's representation and his fear of discovery, is nearly unable to maintain his self-repression. Albert has confirmed his knowledge of Osorio's guilt and has succeeded in moving Osorio closer to contrition.

In the fourth act, Osorio meets Ferdinand near a cave and works himself up to a murderous state in order to kill his erstwhile Moorish helper. Osorio fights dishonorably, killing Ferdinand by playing upon the Moor's faith in honor. In the next scene, Albert is arrested for dressing in traditional Moorish clothes, and the play moves toward an emphasis upon social conflicts rather than individual concerns. We learn that Osorio has denounced Albert to the Inquisition for conducting the magic show Osorio sponsored. Velez then enters, and another scene occurs in which he threatens Maria with the convent if she will not marry Osorio, turning a family quarrel into a Richardsonian emblem for female subjection. She resists, feeling a visceral antipathy for Osorio as well as strong lingering love for Albert. Alhadra, Ferdinand's wife, witnesses Osorio commit the murder, leads the Moors to violent rebellion against Velez, Osorio, Francesco, and the Spanish State. By this time, the various oppressions, corruptions and injustices have set the scene for violent resistance.

The last act begins with Moors discussing the proper degree of vengeance, deciding that vengeance needs temperance and strategy. The play's version of revolution, though violent, is idealized. The conclusion of the play occurs in the gothic prison where Albert is being held. Osorio goes there to kill him because he suspects Albert of being a rival for Maria. They argue, and Albert reveals himself majestically to Osorio and Maria, who now enters. Albert, not knowing of Osorio's recent act of murder, forgives Osorio for his murderous plot. Osorio, dropping his guard, begins to go mad with remorse, and attempts suicide while Maria and Albert rush to prevent him. The Moors enter and seize Osorio, who confirms Alhadra's account of Ferdinand's murder. Alhadra, ordering the Moors to

lead Osorio offstage to his execution, ends the play with a speech about the power of those with nothing left to lose, and the possibility of alternatives to violence.

As its plot line might suggest, Osorio is a carefully constructed dramatization of evil in the world. The title character, a villain, is violent in his unrelenting search for power. Yet his society (represented by Velez and Francesco) credits him as a military hero (for killing many Moors) and as a nobleman, a man to be honored. Osorio puts up an exterior of strength, but the audience comes to know him as mentally the weakest character in the drama, and a manifold hypocrite. On a social level, Osorio represents misplaced because superficial social judgments about other people. The trajectory of Osorio claims that evil exists but that in the end all may be well. The degree to which Osorio cannot maintain Rivers's or Iago's level of detachment from emotion is the degree to which Coleridge disagrees with Wordsworth's philosophical pessimism. Osorio is lauded, but he desperately desires both the physical pleasure of Maria's body and her actual affection. She is the woman who loves the memory of his brother more than she could ever love him; yet he cannot admit this, nor does it ever occur to his conscious mind that he might desire her only out of jealousy as a symptom of his remorse. He spends the play ever fearful of being discovered as Albert's killer and ever needing to quell the guilt that rises within him, a quivering tissue of guilt, dread, and especially repression of all of these, a repression that becomes a mode of consciousness, a totalized tyrant over his every thought. In his vulnerability Osorio resembles Rivers, but Osorio's self-consciousness and repression of self-knowledge have a different flavor: he is more sympathetic, less ironically unaware of his feelings, and consequently a less interesting villain.

From his first scene, Osorio's weaknesses determine him. In front of Francesco the Inquisitor, Maria, Velez, and Alhadra, Osorio becomes agitated at Alhadra's mention of Ferdinand and Albert. Francesco asks Velez why Osorio looks so "strange." Velez explains that Osorio "doted" on Albert:

Osorio. (starting as in sudden agitation)

O heavens! *I doted! (Then, as if recovering himself,)*

Yes! I DOTTED on him! (I.143)

Osorio's guilt is so close to the surface that the mere mention of Albert's death destroys his composure. Though emotionally unstable, Osorio is crudely clever in manipulating psychological motives of others. A few lines later he takes credit for his own "distemper," blaming Francesco's brusqueness for exciting his own sensitivity and supposed grief over Albert:

Osorio. Strange! That this Francesco
Should have the power so to distemper me.

Velez. Nay, 'twas an admirable weakness, son! (I.154-5)

Velez, the sentimental patriarch of eighteenth-century English "sensibility," mistakes others' exteriors for true feelings and mistakes Osorio's guilt for sentimentality. Velez's purpose in Osorio is to identify the obnoxious effects of complacency and to distinguish Coleridge's own faith from Velez's unreconstructed credulity. Sympathy for another's misfortune is not weakness; only the need to repress one's own strong feelings is weakness, and in calling sympathy weakness Velez reveals the violence upon which his sentiment is ultimately based. The irony of Velez's sensibility is its setting: in this scene Francesco tries to arrest Alhadra for practicing the "Moresco" religion. Alhadra begs Osorio for aid, and Osorio only helps her after she hints darkly that she knows his story of fratricide. When Osorio suddenly "remembers" Ferdinand and Alhadra's Christianity, and Francesco, the Christian cleric, admonishes him not to be merciful: "I hope, my lord, your sensibility/ Doth not prevail" (I.161-2). The overt social ironies of the scene, though they do implicate corrupt institutions like patriarchy and the (Catholic) Church, do not challenge

the doctrines to which those institutions are supposed to adhere. Osorio's weakness before his own guilt rather confirms than undermines the traditional Christian doctrines of mercy, contrition, and repentance.

Osorio's weakness has led him to develop a system of ethics which is the inversion of the traditional one and which, in the negative, confirms the legitimacy of traditional morality. Unlike Alhadra, who does wrong in response to evil circumstance, Osorio has no disadvantage of class, race, religion, gender, or even hard luck. He is as close to a willing doer of wrong as Coleridge would create, his motiveless malignant. The radical power of Byron's Cain consists of a relativism with regard to the moral hierarchy between Satan and God. Osorio presents no such relativism; Osorio's repressed better self believes in the same ethics that Albert does.

In rationalizing his conscious guilt, Osorio subscribes to a vision of a chaotic natural world. Ferdinand, attempting to remind Osorio of the debt Osorio owes him so that Osorio will continue to protect him from the Inquisition, recalls the scene of Albert's would-be assassination. This touchstone sends the susceptible Osorio into an emotional, guilt-ridden tirade:

<i>Osorio.</i>	And you killed him?
O blood-hounds! may eternal wrath flame round you!	
He was the image of the Deity.	[<i>A pause.</i>
It seizes me--by Hell! I will go on!	
What? would'st thou stop, man? thy pale looks won't save thee!	[<i>Then</i>
<i>suddenly pressing his forehead.</i>	
Oh! cold, cold, cold--shot thro' with icy cold!...	
O this unutterable dying away here,	
This sickness of the heart!	[<i>A pause.</i>
What if I went	

And liv'd in a hollow tomb, and fed on weeds?
 Ay! that's the road to heaven! O fool! O fool! [A pause.
 What have I done but that which nature destin'd
 Or the blind elements stirr'd up within me?
 If good were meant, why were we made these beings?
 And if not meant — (I.102-118)

Osorio's moment of self-flagellation includes a brief flirtation with the plot of The Borderers (which in turn comes from the "Ancient Mariner"): self-imposed wandering. Osorio avoids Cain's exile by reifying "nature" as a rationalization for acting as if power were the only measure of human relations, attributing his fratricide to "nature." Osorio's nature is the human nature which gave him desires for Maria and jealousy of his brother, the "blind elements" in him. In Osorio's psychology his own desires are amoral, separate from himself, and therefore necessary. The two key influences of Byron's Manfred--Osorio (as Remorse) and Baillie's De Monfort--both explore externalization and alienation from one's own passions, arguing by example that ultimate culpability for acts based on those passions do not lie with the willing self. Baillie and Coleridge thus exploit a Hume-like model of psychology in which the passions flit by the self as if cinematically (see the previous chapter's discussion of Hume's bundle), and they do so in order to save the possibility of repentance from the skeptical tenor of Hume's argument. Byron removes this agenda from his dramatization of the riven self, showing that its political valences were quite fluid.

Osorio, then, is forced, and alienated from the wishes that impel him. Of a piece with this psychology is a theology: there is a God of "eternal wrath," like an Inquisitor, who created us in His image and whose purpose is to mete out punishment to those who damage that image. This fury-like God of blood-hounds is as alienated from us as Osorio is from his own desires. Osorio's imagined wrath is no less real for being so, but it is a

mental hell created by the alienation and division within Osorio's self, not from any discernible external causes, an absence that leaves a gaping hole in the drama. Osorio asks why he was given such a needy nature "if good were meant" to exist by a Creator. He has no answer, so he speculates if good were "not meant," implying either no God or a malicious God, the only choices that seemed available to Byron when he wrote Cain. There can be no moral principle, for Coleridge, without an idea of God. Indeed, for Coleridge a Godless world is a selfless one, since at the core of Osorio's evil, there is no causation. Of course, Osorio is not really evil, according to the play's plot, but then why did he do evil? His confusion implies that he does not know.

The best that Osorio's reasoned flailings can accomplish is a temporary coherence that lasts long enough to allow action, but which breaks down into guilt and sorrow soon after. During Osorio's naturalizing and rationalizing Coleridge maintains uncertainty. Prefacing his demand that Ferdinand help him manipulate Maria, Osorio says "Ferdinand! you are a man, and know this world" (II.16). He then says that Maria, his love, still loves Albert, whom he thinks Ferdinand has killed. To Osorio, "a man" is therefore willing to be cynical about whatever terrible truths Osorio could mention. "This world" is nature, a jungle, a cold amoral place that all "men" but fools know is ruled by might. Good is "not meant." Osorio's skeptical chaos gives him not modern sophistication, but terror and uncertainty. When Ferdinand begins to recount the assassination scene, and Osorio becomes wildly remorseful, he grips himself by asking "Am I not a man?/ 'Tis as it should be! Tut--the deed itself/ Was idle--and these after-pangs still idler" (II.75-77). A "man" is a skeptic about the existence of moral order in the universe. The logic of this position may be a caricature of Hume's, but Coleridge is not assailing it on logical grounds; rather, he attacks Osorio's position as a psychological lie in which Osorio, at bottom, does not believe. The trouble with this position is that Coleridge does not really confront skepticism in Osorio.

Since Osorio's contempt for human feeling is Coleridge's idea of madness, Coleridge does not present a serious case for amorality. After being shaken by Albert's mouse-trap, Osorio has a trance-like episode caused by a momentary break in his constant repression. Osorio, as if unaware of Velez standing next to him, expresses his derivation of nature as power relations:

Osorio (in a slow voice with a reasoning laugh). Love-- Love-- and then we
hate--and what? and wherefore?

Hatred and love. Strange things! both strange alike!

What if one reptile stings another reptile,

Where is the crime? The goodly face of Nature

Hath one trail less of slimy filth upon it.

Are we not all predestined rottenness

And cold dishonor? Grant it that this hand

Had given a morsel to the hungry worms

Somewhat too early. Where's the guilt of this?

That this must needs bring on the idiotcy

Of moist-eyed penitence--'tis like a dream!

Velez. Wild talk, my child! but thy excess of feeling

[Turns off from Osorio]

Sometimes, I fear, it will unhinge his brain!

Osorio. I kill a man and lay him in the sun,

And in a month there swarm from his dead body

A thousand--nay, ten thousand sentient beings

In place of that one man whom I had kill'd.

Now who shall tell me, that each one and all,

Of these ten thousand lives, is not as happy

As that one life, which being shov'd aside
 Made room for these ten thousand?

Osorio's alienation from emotion leads him to discount the special value of the human form. Feelings are things worms can experience; they are purely animalistic, separated from reason. Guilt for murder ought to be unreal because murder is merely a quantifiable transaction between living forms. What prevents Osorio's potentially powerful critique of the idea of order from taking hold, however, is his overt mental instability and unreliability in this scene. Rivers is uncertain too, but successfully represses his uncertainty and dies unrepentant at the end of The Borderers. Osorio, in his madness, seems to acknowledge his own penitence consciously.

Osorio here is lost within his own consciousness. In 1813, Coleridge would see Hamlet's disease as one of over-internalization:

In Hamlet I conceive [Shakespeare] to have wished to exemplify the moral necessity of a due balance between our attention to outward objects and our meditation on inward thoughts—a due balance between the real and the imaginary world. In Hamlet this balance does not exist—his thoughts, images, and fancy [being] far more vivid than his perceptions, and his very perceptions passing thro' the medium of his contemplations, and acquiring as they pass a form and color not naturally their own.⁶

We may observe Coleridge struggling to dramatize a similar principle in the ways in which Osorio has constructed his skepticisms in isolation from any other character. Unlike Hamlet, who overcomes his own skepticism himself (by growing up), Coleridge makes Osorio unable to see beyond his repressions until others intervene to shame him. Two plot

⁶Raysor, I, 34: 1813.

elements operate to resocialize Osorio: his love for Maria and Albert's benevolence. In Osorio's love, Coleridge argues that the social impulse is already innate. In Albert's heroism, Coleridge suggests the future ideal human relation. Osorio's psychology, then, always points outside of itself, back toward other people for whom he feels loathing and desire. He seeks confirmation of his naturalization of chaos so that he can continue to avoid the love for others that threatens to overturn his hold on power.

For example, in the fourth act, Osorio plots to meet and kill Ferdinand at a solitary cave in order to destroy the last witness of Albert's murder. Osorio delivers, to Ferdinand, an autobiographical speech he uses to screw up his courage and kill his listener. Ferdinand with reason to be skeptical of Osorio's benevolence, brings a sword in order to frighten Osorio, to "scare to coward" who could not do his own killing. Osorio is almost gleeful at this show of hostility and suspicion from Ferdinand:

Osorio. Now this is excellent, and warms the blood!

My heart was drawing back, drawing me back

With womanish pulls of pity. Dusky slave,

Now I will kill thee pleasantly, and count it

Among my comfortable thoughts hereafter.

Ferdinand. And all my little ones die fatherless! Die thou first! (IV.142-47)

They fight, and Ferdinand drops his sword. Osorio pretends to give Ferdinand space to pick it up but pushes him over a cliff in the cave. Coleridge employs a brutal poetic justice by having Ferdinand be the murder victim, as if to say that consort with villains brings its punishment. Osorio's successful trickery is his skepticism's own confirmation, since there is no individual justice in Osorio's victory here. In the juxtaposition of Osorio's racism and gynophobia, the naturalizing rationalizations enter into the play's social purposes. Ferdinand, the "dusky" Moor, is the more honorable character than the sophisticated

European villain. But that social content includes condescension, which, as we shall see, is repeated in Coleridge's defense of Maria. Ferdinand is not naive, but he is morally superior to Osorio to the degree to which he lacks Osorio's intellectual complexity. Only Albert, the European male hero of the play, can attain both moral fineness and intellectual sophistication.

Before the fight between Osorio and Ferdinand, Osorio gives an auto-biographical speech that is Coleridge's imitation and revision of Rivers's long narrative in The Borderers. The immediate dramatic point of Osorio's speech to Ferdinand is to rationalize his act of murder, to bring Osorio to the point where he can kill in cold blood. His need to narrate his autobiography in order to gather murderous purpose is consistent with Coleridge's argument about the nature of human relations. Osorio must verbally assert a version of his identity that includes a philosophy of might-makes-right before he can snuff out the identity of another. Again, Cavell's phrasing seems to apply to the way in which Romantic dramatic characters interact:

...both skepticism and tragedy conclude with the condition of human separation, with a discovering that I am I; and the fact that the alternative to my acknowledgment of the other is not my ignorance of him but my avoidance of him, call it my denial of him.⁷

Osorio's denial subsists even in his grammar, since he begins as if he were speaking to himself, though he also obviously knows that Ferdinand is there. As with his unintended and unheard confession to Velez, Osorio's denial of the other is staged by his willed forgetting of another's presence:

[Osorio stands in deep study--then, after a pause.]

⁷The Claim of Reason, 389.

Osorio. There is no reason why it should be so.

And yet it is.

Ferdinand. What is, my lord?

Osorio. Unpleasant

To kill a man!

Ferdinand. Except in self-defense.

Osorio. Why, that's my case: and yet 'tis still unpleasant. (IV. 64-67)

The dramatic irony, of course, is that Osorio discusses the abstract problem of murder with his intended victim, showing that he does abstract the action from human presence. In his discussion he notices that his intellect does not adequately explain his feelings, but keeping the discussion abstract maintains his ability to ignore his own “findings.” Osorio, like Rivers, represents the dangers of philosophy, but in Wordsworth’s play those dangers came into play when a character acted upon them. Coleridge, oppositely, shows Osorio ignoring his own philosophy, arguing optimistically that vicious action cannot square itself with searching thought. Osorio also seems to follow Hume where Hume claims that philosophy makes nothing happen: “And this discovery in morals, like that other in physics, is to be regarded as a considerable advancement of the speculative sciences; tho’, like that too, it has little or no influence on practice”; for only passions influence practice.⁸ Osorio himself is a tissue of passions rationalized, but in making his villain conform to Hume’s bifurcation between ethics and action, Coleridge refutes Hume’s academicizing of all morality.

Since Osorio, unlike Rivers, does not draw strength from an elaborate and consistently articulated philosophy, his base-line motivation is self-worship. Rivers and Osorio are both in a line of radical-individualist villains in Romantic drama that also includes De Monfort and Manfred. The differences between these villains lie in the details

⁸Treatise, 469.

of their descriptions of selfhood. Rivers, as we have seen, is a separatist from human contact because of a trauma. In Osorio, however, the separation is almost a random event:

Osorio. He was a man different from other men.

And he despised them, yet revered himself.

Ferdinand. What? was he mad?

Osorio. All men seem'd mad to him,

Their actions noisome folly, and their talk—

A goose's gabble was more musical.

Nature had made him for some other planet,

And press'd his soul into a human shape

By accident or malice. In this world

He found no fit companion!

Ferdinand. Ah, poor wretch!

Madmen are most proud.

Osorio. He walk'd alone, and fantasies, unsought for, troubled him.

Something within would still be shadowing out

All possibilities, and with these shadows

His mind held dalliance. Once, as so it happen'd,

A fancy cross'd him wilder than the rest:

To this in moody murmur, and low voice,

He yielded utterance as some talk in sleep.

The man who heard him—...

With his human hand

He gave a being and reality

To that wild fancy of a possible thing.

Well it was done.

[Then very wildly.]

Why babblest thou of guilt?

The deed was done, and it pass'd fairly off. (IV.83-100, 105-109)

Here Coleridge presents the logical consequence of the Cartesian map of the human being as soul that happens into body because of "accident or malice"; amoral chaos or malignant force that controls the universe. Osorio is Coleridge's motiveless malignant, since his exalted sense of self is without origin; yet Coleridge is of Osorio's party in believing in the coherence of the self. The result of fashioning Osorio's such that there need be no aetiology behind Osorio's decision to kill his brother is that Osorio's germinal character is murderous. That is, Coleridge wants to argue in Osorio that there is a generic core of sympathy innate in the human soul, but he also begins, in 1797, to form the belief in the coherence of the individual self. Yet Coleridge wants to argue as well that even a character like Osorio can repent. Coleridge makes it seem, then, that Osorio is not in contact with a true self that we know ought to exist—a benevolent, remorseful self. But the tensions in Coleridge's belief in the core individual self and his hope for a generic benevolent self remain unresolved in Osorio.

Like Baillie's De Monfort and Byron's Manfred, Coleridge's motiveless character experiences his own thoughts—his "fantasies" and "fancies"—as if they were external stimuli, though they come from within. Osorio lives as one of Hume's bundle of perceptions, ironically, since even as he proves himself to be subject to random impulses, he is asserting the coherence of his identity. Coleridge wants most of all to show that the amoral position of the skeptic is self-contradictory. If Coleridge's skeptic reduces all human relations to power by arguing that there is no order to the universe, then, Coleridge claims, that skeptic is himself blown by incomprehensible impulses. Why try to gather power for oneself, since in a true chaos there is no self to defend? Osorio's egotism, however, is meant to show that there is a self with innate moral characteristics that may be repressed but not destroyed. Osorio lives in a perpetually excruciating tension, like that of

Hamlet, caused by this self-contradiction. Here, alienated from the self he describes, Osorio tells the story of his own repressed conscience, even as his intention, as a character, is to fashion his own identity as transcending conscience:

Osorio. Surveying all things with a quiet scorn
Tamed himself down to living purposes,
The occupations and the semblances
Of ordinary men--and such he seem'd. (IV.116-119)

Osorio's repression, his "quiet scorn," though it engenders the self-alienation subsisting in every line Osorio utters, is not just a relation between parts of himself. In Coleridge's play, repression is also a social relation, an action Osorio makes in public. Byron's Manfred is not socially repressed, but rather almost entirely alone. The difference is that Osorio feels shame, as we will see in a moment, and not guilt, even though this difference threatens to deny Coleridge's assertion of the individuality of selfhood. When in 1819, Coleridge describes Claudius praying, Coleridge argues that the individuated yet alterable self is the basis for Christian redemption:

Nay, even as an audible soliloquy, it is far less improbable than is supposed by such as have watched men only in the beaten road of their feelings. But it deserves to be dwelt on, that final 'All may be well'; a degree of merit [is] attributed by the self-flattering soul to its own struggle, tho' baffled, and the indefinite half-promise, half-command, to persevere in religious duties. The divine medium of the Christian doctrine of expiation [is] in this: not what you have done, but what you *are*, must determine. Metanoia [repentance].⁹

⁹Raysor, I, 29: 1819.

In Hamlet, in many ways a more skeptical play than Osorio, the late Hamlet dies with his sins on his head, condemned. Claudius's prayer admits the impossibility of repentance without the physical contrition he cannot face, and dies, presumably, with his sins on his head as well. The scene in which Claudius prays, Hamlet says in soliloquy that he hesitates before killing the knee-bent Claudius because Hamlet does not want Claudius to die shriven:

Now might I do it pat, now he is praying;
 ...and am I then revenged,
 To take him in the purging of his soul,
 When he is fit and season'd for passage?
 No. (III.iii.73-96)

This reason for hesitation became a problem for eighteenth-century critics who were loath to believe such absolute vengefulness of Hamlet. Johnson, though he condemns Hamlet's sentiment, does not deny that Shakespeare meant its literal sense to stand: "This speech, in which Hamlet, represented as a virtuous character, is not content with taking blood for blood, but contrives damnation for the man that he would punish, is too horrible to be read or to be uttered."¹⁰ In the Afterword we will see how Blake similarly condemns the vengeful blood sacrifice, but only after a critique of the orthodox sentimentality that Johnson upholds. Coleridge, however, goes even farther than Johnson by denying the literal meaning of Hamlet's remark, preferring instead to explain away Hamlet's hesitation as the symptom of something else. "Dr. Johnson's mistaking of the marks of reluctance and procrastination for impetuous, horror-striking fiendishness! Of such importance is it to

¹⁰Johnson on Shakespeare, ed. Arthur Sherbo, The Yale Edition of The Works of Samuel Johnson, gen. eds. E.L. McAdam Jr., Donald Hyde, Mary Hyde, VIII (New Haven & London: Yale UP, 1968) 990.

understand the *germ* of a character.”¹¹ In the case of Claudius, then, Coleridge seizes upon the alterable self to keep open the crack in the door for redemption. Then Coleridge uses a portrait of Hamlet’s individual self to argue that Hamlet does not mean what he says. In either case, Coleridge machines his interpretations so that Shakespeare comes out looking like less of a skeptic, and more of an orthodox Christian, in every particular moment of his drama. A fuller reading of Hamlet, beyond the scope of this study, would show that the play entertains the challenges of skepticism in order to overcome them, but only in the end. Before Hamlet returns from sea the play is a skeptical text.

In Osorio, however, Coleridge cannot let a moment go by in which skepticism stands without irony or challenge, so married is he to notions of poetic justice in which Osorio’s impressive selfhood cannot go unscolled. As he says of Iago,

For such are the appointed relations of intellectual power to truth, and of truth to goodness, that it becomes both morally and poetic[ally] unsafe to present what is admirable—what our nature compels us to admire—in the mind, and what is most detestable in the heart, as co-existing in the same individual without any apparent connection, or any modification of the one by the other. That Shakespeare has in one instance, that of Iago, approached to this, and that he has done it successfully, is perhaps the most astonishing proof of his genius, and the opulence of its resources.¹²

This passage comes after two decades of changes in Coleridge’s thought, but its abiding belief in the divinely “appointed relations” subsists in Osorio and prevents Coleridge from exploring the interesting but “dangerous” skepticisms in The Borderers. The play’s interest for a student of Romantic skepticism, then, is not its skeptical arguments about the soul,

¹¹Raysor, I.29-30.

¹²Raysor, I, 52, 1819.

In my experience of shame, the other sees all of me and all through me...and the expression of shame...is not just the desire to hide, or to hide my face, but the desire to disappear, not to be there...With guilt it is not like this; I am more dominated by the thought that even if I disappeared, it would come with me.¹³

When Osorio defends himself against what he calls "guilt," I apply his feeling to what Williams calls shame here. For though Coleridge believes in guilt as a mental phenomenon, he rejects it as a means toward poetic justice because he does not, in 1797, want to write a play about individual punishments, but rather one about the prospects of reform.

* * *

To counter the rational naturalization of chaos and power, Coleridge takes the position that it is necessary actively to use reason, and even cunning. Such an active cunning traveler, Odysseus-like, is Albert. Albert's actions counter to Osorio are effective, Coleridge argues via his plot, because Albert has the more powerfully explanatory theory of human nature. Coleridge wrote in "A Moral and Political Lecture" (1795) that there is a "necessity of *bottoming* on fixed Principles, that so we may not be the unstable Patriots of Passion or Accident."¹⁴ In other words, Albert counters Osorio's superficially skeptical dogmas of nature-as-chaos with principles of Albert's own. In Coleridge's play, neither the hero nor the villain is fully skeptical. Both employ some of the same tools, specifically trickery. The difference is absolute: Albert's core principles are right, and Osorio's

¹³Shame and Necessity, 89.

¹⁴Lectures 1795 on Politics and Religion, ed. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann, Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, gen. ed. Kathleen Coburn, vol 1 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971) 5. (Hereafter Coleridge's Works)

philosophy is wrong. Coleridge's quarrel is not with skepticism so much as it is with liberal half-measures and allies who are either afraid to act or who (like Wordsworth) deny the possibility for defending right principles.

In 1795, Coleridge develops three "classes" of "Professed friends of Liberty" in England. They are the indolent, the vengeful, and the steady. The vengeful are the violent mobs that conservatives fear, but Coleridge does not spend as much time on them in this Lecture as on the other two. The indolent friends of liberty are "unaccustomed to the labor of thorough Investigation and not particularly oppressed by the Burthen of the State...Their sensibilities unbraced by the co-operation of fixed principles, they offer no sacrifices to the divinity of active Virtue."¹⁵ In the lecture "On the Slave Trade" printed by Coleridge in his Watchman journal of March 25, 1796, there is an attack on those who whose "sensibilities" abhor human suffering but who take no action except to remove the suffering from their notice. "Provided the dunghill be not before their parlor window they are well content to know that it exists. To this grievous failing we must attribute the frequency of wars, and the continuance of the Slave-trade. The merchant finds no argument against it in his ledger...the fine lady's nerves are not shattered by the shrieks!...Sensibility is not Benevolence...Benevolence impels to action, and is accompanied by self-denial."¹⁶

Coleridge designed Albert as if in response to these criticisms of the "indolent" class of idle sensitives. Throughout the play, as we have seen, Albert is in disguise as a Moor. He lives in poverty as part of his disguise. Osorio, Velez, and even the other Moors condescend to him. He is imprisoned by the Inquisition under circumstances meant to typify the Moorish experience: claiming (in his case, honestly) to be a Christian, he is imprisoned without trial on the denunciation of a socially powerful person. In addition to placing himself in the position of the other, Albert's self-denial includes the emotional pain of not revealing himself to Maria, and the tremendous act of true benevolence in attempting

¹⁵Coleridge's Works, I; 8.

¹⁶Coleridge's Works, II: Watchman, ed. Lewis Patton, 139-40.

to reclaim Osorio's soul. Albert's actions in the play, then, form a religious and political ideal that is a moral ideal, in contrast to the corrupted religion in which Francesco seems sincerely to believe: the Inquisition. Coleridge's moral Christianity of 1796, not merely in opposition to the power of the established church, was interwoven with his whole view of action just described. Albert's motives are moral principles such as those which Coleridge expresses to John Thelwall. He criticizes Thelwall's phrases:

"Morals for the Magadalen & Botany Bay." Now Thelwall! I presume that to preach morals to the virtuous is not quite so requisite, as to preach them to the vicious. "The sick need a physician." Are morals, which would make a Prostitute a wife...the ferocious benevolent, Thieves honest, *mean morals*?...It preaches *Repentance*...a repentance that completely does away all superstitious terrors by teaching, that the *Past* is nothing in itself; that if the Mind *is* good, that it *was* bad, imports nothing.¹⁷

The basis for Albert's character, then, is Coleridge's feeling that heroes help sinners, and that repentance ought to be available to the social outcast as well as the socially powerfully oppressors. The line against "superstition" sounds like Hume's skepticism of the soul, but Coleridge, even here, never fully embraces such a skepticism. He turns it to orthodox use.

Albert begins the play with a scene between himself (in disguise), Maria, and Alhadra. In this scene, Albert tells the story of his own supposed death in order to see whether Maria feels remorse, and to discover whether Maria was a co-conspirator three years earlier in the plot to kill him. Later, in the magic show, Albert covertly tests the feelings of Osorio by repeating the death scene Osorio thinks Albert suffered. Albert, the play's hero, is also its Iago, though not at all Shakespeare's combination of evil and gusto that worries Coleridge in 1819. Albert's actions, then, are not a problem for Coleridge,

¹⁷Letters, I, 282.

since they exemplify the right way to think about the appointed relations between beings in the universe, and between body and soul. In the last act, Osorio comes to kill Albert, thinking him a cohort of Ferdinand, but as with Ferdinand three years before, Albert is able to shame Osorio out of violence:

Albert. For shame, put up thy sword!
 I fix mine eye upon thee, and thou tremblest!..
 Thou blind self-worshipper! thy pride, thy cunning,
 Thy faith in universal villainy, thy pretended scorn
 For all thy human brethren—out upon them!
 What have they done for thee? Have they given thee peace? (V.182-3, 187-91)

This speech, for me, is the weakest part of the play, for it fails to correspond with any verisimilitude to the situation Coleridge has plotted. It is sheer self-righteous optimism, a comic moment within a tragedy that lays claim to comprehend human viciousness.

Albert's bases his ability to shame Osorio upon a belief in correspondences. Osorio gives him a drink which Albert understands must be poison. Albert does not drink (reversing the final scene of *Hamlet*, with its pile of bodies), but asserts his vision of nature's connections:

Albert. Yon insect on the wall,
 Which moves this way and that its hundred legs,
 Were it a toy of mere mechanic craft,
 It were an infinitely curious thing!
 But it has life, Osorio! life and thought;
 And by the power of its miraculous will
 Wields all the complex movements of its frame

Unerringly, to pleasurable ends!
 Saw I that insect on this goblet's brink,
 I would remove it with an eager terror. (V.169-70)

Albert's morality seems to be congruent with Coleridge's. They do not define the natural world, even the relations between man and animals, as primarily power relations. The analogies between natural beings, and especially between human beings, allows the moral person to apply physiognomic standards to judge appearance. In the first act, after testing Maria, for example, Albert can determine from her appearance that she is innocent:

How sad she look'd and pale! but no like guilt.
 And her calm tones--sweet as a song of mercy!...
 No start! no jealousy of stirring conscience!
 And she referr'd to me--fondly, methought!
 Could she walk here, if that she were a traitress?
 Here where we play'd together in our childhood?
 Here where we plighted vows? Where her cold cheek
 Received my last kiss, when with supress'd feelings
 She had fainted in my arms? It cannot be!
 'Tis not in nature! I will die, believing
 That I shall meet her where no evil is,
 No treachery, no cup dash'd from the lips! (I.350-1, 361-70)

It is "not in nature," or possibility, that Maria could appear as she does, unresponsive to his mouse-trap dream and be innocent. In asserting this correspondence between inner and outer nature, Coleridge is "correcting" a fault in Shakespeare, in which a man may smile, and smile, and be a villain. The relation of "truth to goodness" is Coleridge's problem, the

link that establishes a cosmos rather than a chaos. Coleridge felt a moral imperative to make Osorio twitch and involuntarily speak his guilt, just as Milton's narrator reports of Satan that

Thus while he spoke, each passion dimmed his face...
Which marred his borrowed visage, and betrayed
Him counterfeit, if any eye beheld.
For heav'nly minds from such distempers foul
Are ever clear. (IV, 114-119)

In Paradise Lost the correspondence between inner states and outward forms is a metaphysical rule of supernatural beings, but complex humankind may not have such fixed equations, for we are not only good or only evil: as Stanley Cavell asks, "But isn't the question raised by skepticism (about other minds) why it is that we attach such extreme importance to the human guise, I mean form?"¹⁸ Coleridge, in his search for a moral epistemology, a way of knowing the character of other minds, lead him, as it did Wordsworth, toward physiognomy, though in Coleridge, unlike Wordsworth, physiognomy of faces gets intertwined with physiognomy of races. Physiognomy, like shame, links the psychological and the social elements of Osorio.

Physiognomy, as we know, is double-edged, and not just because of its association with geneticists and Nazis. Bernard Williams quotes Aristotle's Politics on slavery to show how physiognomy is a original rationalization for oppression:

Nature aims to make the bodies of free men differ from those of slaves, the latter adapted in strength to necessary employment, the former upright and not suited to work.

¹⁸Claim of Reason, 393.

These ideas, together with a familiar set of Greek prejudices about the slavish nature of barbarians, are the ancestors of the physiognomic and other ideological myths that have been so notorious in modern times.¹⁹

Cavell, however, (as we have seen), shows how difficult it is to reject physiognomy outright:

To know another mind is to interpret a physiognomy, and the message of this region of [Wittgenstein's] Investigations is that this is not a matter of "mere knowing." I have to read the physiognomy, and see the creature according to my reading, and treat it according to my seeing. The human body is the best picture of the human soul—not, I feel like adding, primarily because it represents the soul but because it expresses it. The body is the field of expression of the soul.²⁰

Cavell grounds his idea of physiognomy in the liberatory passage from Blake's Marriage of Heaven and Hell: "Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that call'd Body is a portion of the Soul discerned by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age."²¹ This positive assertion from the Marriage does not, however, make physiognomic claims. It is easy to imagine a confusing, unreadable physiognomic correspondence, for example, between a dissembling soul and his body. In Blake's annotations to Lavater's Aphorisms on Man (1788), Blake seems to side with physiognomism: "...if Raphael is hard & dry it is not his genius but an accident acquired for how can Substance & Accident be predicated of the same Essence! I cannot concieve [sic] But the substance gives tincture to the

¹⁹Shame and Necessity (Berkeley: U of California P, 1993) 115.

²⁰Claim of Reason, 356.

²¹Quoted in The Claim of Reason, 357. William Blake, The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake, ed. David V. Erdman, commentary by Harold Bloom (rev. ed. Berkeley, Los Angeles: U. of California P., 1982) 34.

accident & makes it physiognomic..." (532). This discussion is of the artist trying to express the contents (Substance) of his soul. Blake was not sentimental about trickery. Where Lavater writes "Everything may be mimicked by hypocrisy, but humility and love united," Blake responds: "all this may be mimicked very well. this Aphorism certainly was an oversight for what are all crawlers but mimickers of humility & love" (586).

Blake is an outright skeptic compared to Coleridge, who wrote: "Observe the face of an whoremonger or intriguer, and that of a married man—it would furnish physiognomic demonstration" (1796).²² The difference between physiognomy in The Borderers and physiognomy in Osorio is the difference between a last-ditch attempt to find some basis for communication in the withering face of modern alienations, and a self-assured sense of the categories in nature.

* * *

Maria is Coleridge's ideal of womanhood in Osorio, but whether she is Coleridge's ideal of the fully realized human being is unclear. Osorio is not a fully realized person, but Coleridge makes him into a specific kind of (male) person, while Maria's "class individualized" is of the upper-class female. Maria is characterized by feeling overwhelming reason. Natural feelings have been allowed to flourish in her despite the society's efforts to crush them; yet her reason has not been cultivated (improved). She

²²Letter to John Thelwall, May 13, 1796. Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, I (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1956) 214. Of himself he wrote self-deprecatingly, "As to me, my face, unless when animated by immediate eloquence, expresses great sloth, & great, indeed almost ideotic, [sic] good nature. 'Tis a mere carcase of a face: fat, flabby, & expressive chiefly of inexpression. --Yet, I am told, that my eyes, eyebrows, & forehead are physiognomically good --; but of this the Deponent knoweth not" (259-60).

resembles an ideal of womanhood that Coleridge describes in the 1813 lectures on Shakespeare:

In Shakespeare's females the sweet yet dignified feeling of all that *continuates* society, as sense of ancestry, of sex, etc. A purity inassailable by sophistry, because it does not rest on analytic processes—but in feeling may be misinterpreted to the worst purposes—but in that sane equipoise of the faculties during which the feelings are representative of all past experience, not of the individual but of all those by whom she has been educated...²³

In his essay on The Tempest (1817), Coleridge includes the above language, and continues about Shakespeare's women, their "distinctive energies" are "shown in all of them as following the heart, which gives its results by a nice tact and happy intuition, without the intervention of the discursive faculty."²⁴ However, as Coleridge's view of Caliban makes clear, Coleridge did not locate essential humanity in the intellect:

Caliban, on the other hand, is all earth, all condensed and gross in feelings and images; he has the dawnings of understanding without reason or the moral sense, and in him, as in some brute animals, this advance to intellectual faculties, without the moral sense, is marked by the appearance of vice. For it is in the primacy of the

²³Raysor, I, 206-7.

²⁴Raysor, I, 120. There is little criticism that might address these issues. As Anya Taylor has recently written, "The extent of Coleridge's concern with women's situations has not previously been noted, largely because it has been overshadowed by biographical and critical disagreements about his responsibility for his failed marriage and by the ambiguous presentation of women in poems such as 'Kubla Khan,' 'Christabel,' and 'Dejection: An Ode.'" In "Coleridge, Wollstonecraft, and the Rights of Women," in Coleridge's Visionary Languages, ed. Tim Fulford, Morton D. Paley (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993) 83.

moral being only that man is truly human; in his intellectual powers he is certainly approached by the brutes, and, man's whole system duly considered, those powers cannot be considered other than means to an end, that is, to morality.²⁵

By making Maria the picture of feminine emotion and intuition, Coleridge makes his own patriarchal naturalizations. He also gives her what he considers the core of humanness, but as we shall see, this position puts him at odds with at least one contemporaneous feminist vision. Coleridge claims to be defending womanhood from misogyny by assigning women to keepers of tradition, but in doing so he strips women of part of their selves, making them the products of their (male) educators. The combination of a lack of susceptibility to sophistry and total mental dependence upon external educators implies that women possess an innate, unself-conscious ability to purify their perceptions. This laudable ability, unfortunately, makes women like noble savages. In 1830, Coleridge again defends women, this time against Alexander Pope's open misogyny:

"Most women have no character at all" said Pope, and meant it for satire.

Shakspeare, [sic] who knew man and woman better, saw that in fact it was the perfection of woman to be *characterless*. Every man wishes for Desdemonas, Ophelias and creatures who, though they may not always *understand* you, do always *feel* you and *feel* with you.²⁶

Coleridge's ideal creature seems to have no soul independent of the male subject she serves. In Osorio, Maria is class individualized of female goodness in feeling and sympathy. But she does experience growth in the play. Maria begins the play in its first

²⁵Raysor, I, 120.

²⁶From Table Talk, ed. Carl Woodring, I; 208 (26 Sept. 1830). [XIV in Coleridge's Works].

scene with Velez pressuring her to re-consider Osorio as a husband. Coleridge introduces her to us as a protected and dominated girl, not yet familiar with a wider world of suffering than her own experience with upper-class patriarchal authority. Maria's natural feeling guides her judgment, the play argues, before her experience and reason are matured. When Osorio makes a great show of feeling in the first scene for the missing Albert, she sees through him and declares to herself, "I do not, cannot love him...Is my heart hard? that even now the thought/ Should force itself upon me--yet I feel it!" (I. 144-46). Coleridge shows Maria turning in on herself, internalizing the negative disjunction between her trusted advisor's opinion and her own heart. By the fourth act, however, Maria's resistance is not as internally questioning. Here she again discusses Osorio with Velez:

Saw you his countenance?

How rage, remorse, and scorn, and stupid fear,

Displac'd each other with swift interchanges?

If this were all assumed, as you believe,

He must needs be a most consummate actor;

And hath so vast a power to deceive me,

I never could be safe. And why assume

The semblance of such execrable feelings? (IV.260-67)

Here Maria has grown to the point where she can articulate the central philosophical tenet of the drama; something is rotten with the outside that cannot be unrelated to the inside, or; there is a disjunction between outside and inside that itself overthrows all human knowledge. Maria's natural connection to her own humanity (as opposed to her intellect) gives her the ability to read Osorio's face. Even after she accuses and forgives Albert-as-Moor for Albert's murder, her natural judgment draws her to him: "Mysterious man!/ Methinks, I cannot fear thee--for thine eye/ Doth swim with pity--I will lean on thee"

(III.145-7). Maria retains her innocent yet accurate eye until the play's end, and the continuation of her innocence despite the rigors of the world's evil is still another rebuke to Wordsworth's drama of an idealistic youth betrayed.

Maria meets some of the challenges of evil with strength, but whenever she does so Coleridge seems to be apologizing for it. At the end of the play Maria interrupts Osorio's attack on Albert. Walking into the prison without seeing Osorio, she begins to describe an escape plan to Albert (still disguised):

Maria. I have put aside
The customs and terrors of a woman,
To work out thy escape. Stranger! begone,
And only tell me what thou know'st of Albert. (V.228-31)

She still conforms to Coleridge's future description of Shakespeare's women; she is primarily motivated by love, not an abstract sense of justice or virtue. Maria has moved from passive suffering in that love for Albert to active defiance of the patriarchal tyranny that hems her in. In this act she partakes of some of the same qualities that make up Coleridge's male hero, suggesting that Coleridge entertains actions exceptional to the sex divide, though his norms and ideals remain.²⁷

Two events in particular mark the change in Maria. One is her long dialogue with Alhadra in the first act, to which we shall return. The other, in the fourth act, is the more

²⁷ Anya Taylor points out that love is not an ignominious word in Coleridge's usage: "Coleridge's advocacy of women's freedom depends, however, on certain presuppositions that apply, in his view, to all human beings. First, love is one of the instinctive and essential aims of any human life, far more important than power or money...Love is not an exclusively female neediness brought on by the absence of social effectiveness or a faulty nature, but rather a distinctive power that characterizes the human being insofar as he or she is human" (84).

dire menace the patriarchal authorities thrust on her as she continues to refuse to marry Osorio. In a scene that prefigures Beatrice Cenci's last act, Maria, beset by both Velez and Francesco the Inquisitor, delivers a powerful assault on the institutions that underlie her personal loss of liberty. In the fourth act of *Osorio*, Velez, frustrated by Maria's independence, bellows that her alternatives are Osorio or the convent, a terrible choice for a generally prejudiced anti-Catholic audience to consider. When Maria launches into a bitter attack on Catholic practice, she follows Shakespeare's Isabella in *Measure for Measure*, a Catholic character written for a Protestant audience that threatens to challenge the Protestants' faith in their own clerical institutions:

Maria. With tame and credulous faith,
 Mad melancholy, antic merriment,
 Leanness, disquietude, and secret pangs!
 O God! it is a horrible thing to know
 That each pale wretch, who sits and drops her beads
 Had once a mind, which might have given her wings
 Such as the angels wear! (IV.299-305)

It should be impressive that Maria is able to respond this way, even if some of the content of her critique may have originated in Albert (Osorio, though unreliable, tells us that "Her lover schooled her in some newer nonsense" (II.30)).²⁸ Her ability to do so under pressure is part of Coleridge's intent to show what strength is peculiarly female: the revolutionary impulse. As Julie Carlson writes, "Her renunciation of the convent...comes

²⁸This is a veiled reference to Coleridge's Unitarianism, in to which he still adhered in 1797. He gives to his villain the line disparaging innovation in religion, just another way of equating Anglican anti-Dissenters in England with Catholics of the Inquisition.

straight out of Wollstonecraft" (117).²⁹ The opposition between empty Catholic ritual and the "mind" Maria mentions self-righteously suggests Coleridge does give Maria internal depth, but again, only in the "pure" realm of feeling, tradition, and religion.

The comparison to Wollstonecraft's own writing is pertinent. At the end of her novel Maria, published in 1798, Wollstonecraft's heroine delivers a powerful public courtroom indictment of the oppressive laws of English society. Wollstonecraft's Maria counters the tradition that Coleridge re-inscribes, that claimed a lack of critical intelligence in women. That scene has certain dramatic affinities with that of Coleridge's Maria resisting patriarchy above. But in Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Women (published in 1792), the general lack of critical intelligence or reason in women in society is admitted and pinned on male dominance distorting the economy of female subject formation:

...the neglected education of my fellow-creatures is the grand source of misery I deplore...[which] I attribute to a false system of education, gathered from the book written on this subject by my men who, considering females rather as alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers; and the understanding of the sex has been so bubbled by this specious homage, that the civilized women of the present century, with a few exceptions, are only anxious to inspire love, when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition. ³⁰

²⁹For Wollstonecraft's influence on Coleridge's poetic diction, see Jane Moore, "Plagiarism with a Difference: Subjectivity in 'Kubla Khan' and Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark," Beyond Romanticism: New Approaches to Texts and Contexts 1780-1832, eds. Stephen Copley and John Whale (New York, London: Routledge, 1992) 140-59.

³⁰A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, ed. Carol H. Poston, 2nd ed. (New York, London: W.W. Norton, 1988) 7.

This passage makes a good example for comparison since it sounds something like what Coleridge's Maria says against the convent. Maria's point in Osorio is that the female mind ought to pursue internalization rather than idle idolatry. Maria, though she is resisting a forced match here, does so in the name of love, not in the name of reason. Maria's resistance rather confirms her place as creature of purer feeling than the outworn patriarchy she fights. Coleridge's definition of the human does not place reason at the top; even Caliban, who is not yet fully human, can think. And yet, if Caliban can think, why not women? Should not the female mind, if an ideal of humanity, possess reason as well as feeling? Coleridge does not follow Wollstonecraft's debunking denunciation of women, preferring to idealize them as sympathetic, if not rational, than to critique their traditional roles. In Alhadra as well, the problem about which Coleridge complains is the way in which political oppression precludes women from adopting their ideal, traditional place.

* * *

Whatever depth Maria shows surfaces in the face of suffering under patriarchy. Coleridge has Maria learn a germinal lesson about suffering from Alhadra the moor in the first act. Between the exit of Osorio, Francesco, and Velez and Albert's first entrance in disguise, Maria and Alhadra have a brief scene that goes far toward establishing their relative freedoms. When Francesco leaves, Alhadra curses him. Maria, still in her innocence, expresses pity for Alhadra, and Alhadra responds by angrily admitting that she "clutch'd my dagger,/ And half unsheathed it" (I.190-1). Alhadra follows the play's pattern of presenting characters on the brink of losing control over their passions. Her repression of them is, like Albert's, honest to her self, but also like Osorio's, full of violent desires. When the men leave, however, Alhadra tells Maria of her impulse to have pushed Francesco over a cliff they had passed on the way to see Osorio:

'Twas with hard toil I made myself remember
 That his foul officers held my babe and husband.
 To have leapt upon him with a Tyger's plunge
 And hurl'd him down the ragged precipice,
 It had been most sweet! (I.194-98)

Alhadra has just met Maria and is incautious in letting her passion burst from herself so nakedly. Her desire for revenge is an uncontrollable lust, as her own animal diction suggests. She describes revenge in terms of the physical pleasure she anticipates from it. Maria, the individual *genera* of woman, which for Coleridge is the genteel European female, responds "Hush, hush! for shame./ Where is your woman's heart?" (I.198-99). The suffering females in *Osorio* rebuke society by becoming unfeminine.³¹ Alhadra, a strong female character, is not a feminist expression because her strength is at odds with her womanhood. On the other hand, the relation of Maria as student to Alhadra is analogous to the friendship between Jemima and Wollstonecraft's Maria in *Maria*. Jemima, Maria's jailer, is a lower-class, trampled woman who arrives from bitter experience at the conclusion that it is moral to steal from the rich: "I began to consider the rich and poor as

³¹This was the source of one disagreement Coleridge and Wordsworth had over the theory behind *Lyrical Ballads*. Coleridge did not believe in the superiority or naturalness of simple folk, and was more of an Aristotelian who preferred the educated virtues. Against Wordsworth's claim that the best poetry will come from the language of "low and rustic life," Coleridge writes: "I adopt with full faith the principle of Aristotle that poetry as poetry is essentially ideal, that it avoids and excludes all accident; that its apparent individualities of rank, character or occupation must be representative of a class; and that the persons of poetry must be clothed with generic attributes" *Biographia Literaria*, Everyman (London: Dent, 1975) 192. The assumption is that the universal subject is of Coleridge's class. In Coleridge the lack of skeptical self-critique about class perspective makes the myth of universal subjectivity a nakedly self-interested expression of class ideology.

natural enemies, and became a thief from principle.”³² Both Wollstonecraft’s Jemima and Coleridge’s Alhadra are products of their environments, and as such not heroines, not ideal. They do not possess the individual selfhoods of either Coleridge’s heroes or Wollstonecraft’s Maria.³³

As the conversation between Alhadra and Maria continues we discover that their main difference is in their kinds of self-consciousness:

Alhadra. O gentle lady!
 You have no skill to guess my many wrongs,
 Many and strange. Besides I am a Christian,
 And they do never pardon, 'tis their faith!
Maria. Shame fall on those who have so shown it to thee!
Alhadra. I know that man; 'tis well he knows not me!
 Five years ago, and he was the prime agent.
 Five years ago the Holy Brethren seized me.
Maria. What might your crime be?

³²Maria: or The Wrongs of Woman ed. Moira Ferguson (rpt. of London, 1798. New York, London: W. W. Norton, 1975) 68.

³³It is Julie Carlson’s thesis that Coleridge, along with Romantic drama in general, denies women characters the “male” mental space of the internalized anti-hero: “their plays ascribe action to female characters, poetry to males. The former are at best single-minded and unreflecting; the latter are self-divided but lyrical in their remorse...Apparently the willingness of romantic poets to relinquish the action of theatre to women is not too high a price to pay. At least romanticists have been buying this line ever since” (21). Aside from ignoring Shelley’s plays (as I understand them), this critique gets complicated when we question whether Coleridge’s main intention was to create a Satan-like revolutionary hero. And, how much internalization does Osorio receive relative to Alhadra? Alhadra’s unheroic stature does not come from lack of internalization, but from a lack of self-determination. As we shall see, Alhadra is *overly* internalized, *too* self-divided, like Osorio, and like Coleridge’s view of Hamlet as unbalanced.

Alhadra. Solely my complexion. (I.199-207)

In defense of Christianity, if not its institutions, Coleridge contrasts the girl's complacent faith in authority with the facts of oppression. These miscommunication are simple products of experience talking with ignorance. As *Alhadra* continues, we see that her experience has made her into what Coleridge sees as unnatural:

O miserable, by that lamp to see
 My infant quarreling with the coarse hard bread
 Brought daily: for the little wretch was sickly--
 My rage had dry'd away its natural food!...

When I dozed,

My infant's moanings mingled with my dreams
 And wak'd me. If you were a mother, Lady,
 I should scarce dare tell you, that its noises
 And peevish cries so fretted on my brain
 That I have struck the innocent babe in anger! (I.215-218, 221-226)

This interaction between circumstance, feelings, and the female body is physiognomic, since all elements of the person correspond. *Alhadra's* suffering, has destroyed her natural female traits through attacks upon her feelings. This complaint by Coleridge against the suffering of women is in many ways opposite to the one which frames Mary Wollstonecraft's novel Maria. In Wollstonecraft, the main character is imprisoned *away* from her child (a daughter), so that her breasts ache with milk unconsumed. Wollstonecraft's mother-character suffers from a social interruption of her natural maternal task, but not because she has internalized bitterness. The difference is that Wollstonecraft avoids mixing condemnation of the individual sufferer into her political complaint against

that sufferer's wrongs. Wollstonecraft avoids, too, using physiognomy, since she does not interrogate the integrity of her heroine's mental condition. Indeed, Wollstonecraft's Maria is unjustly clapped in a mental asylum, suggesting that such psychological probing (or at least its institutions) is part of the political oppression Wollstonecraft describes.

Unlike Wollstonecraft's Maria, Alhadra's breasts go dry while her child is present, because of her rage. Alhadra's oppression is manifested mentally, her physical reactions having mental origins. In Wollstonecraft's character, the passions interact with physical circumstances but do not seem to cause circumstances to alter. Coleridge's characterizations of his Maria and Alhadra represent a large political difference. Jemima is not simply condemned the way that Coleridge gives an implicit condemnation of Alhadra. Coleridge keeps insisting, partly by contrasting her with her less activist husband, and certainly in contrast to Albert, that whatever the suffering violent resistance is an individual flaw.³⁴

To understand Coleridge's view of tragic movement in Osorio, examining Alhadra, we must ask to what degree she represents necessity internalized. For the degree to which her actions and even thoughts are determined by events that happen to her, beyond her control or will, is the degree to which Osorio, like a Sophoclean drama, argues that human

³⁴This reading is at odds with others that find in Alhadra evidence of Coleridge's willingness to entertain the spread of the Revolution to England. For example, Patrick Keane writes that "Osorio...is dominated by the violently revolutionary Alhadra, a heroine not at all restricted to the 'bloodless fight'" (Coleridge's Submerged Politics, 246, see n. 2), "Significantly, in Osorio, the images of political apocalypse now put in Alhadra's mouth are freed of cautious qualification. His empathetic identification with Alhadra, the one truly original character in the play, suggests that Coleridge was psychologically ready for action in 1797. It is hard to detect much political disengagement in an author who has his 'lower-class' Moorish heroine bring down the curtain..." (263) Daniel Watkins, as well, writes: "Osorio effectively illustrates the sort of radical thinking with which Coleridge wished to invest his poetry. The drama contains strong anti-Catholic, anti-military, and anti-aristocratic sentiments, going so far as to project the ultimate triumph of the lower orders over aristocratic tyranny." (A Materialist Critique, 21-22).

nature has its fixities and mechanical reactions. This problem of determinism falls more heavily on Alhadra because she is "other," more than the remaining characters. She is a woman, like Maria, but not of Maria's class, race, or religion. The problem of determinism with respect to Alhadra is also one of humanization. If Coleridge argues that the oppressed classes act out of complete necessity, he achieves a simple way to blame the power structure for their acts of revenge and violence. The price is that they, as opposed to the members of the power structure, lose their human wills in this conception of their acts, and so lose a large part of the reason behind increasing their liberty and equality. Coleridge negotiates this tension to create in Alhadra his most interesting character.

For one thing, Alhadra's rousing leadership of the Moors in Osorio fits well into Coleridge's argument that a culture of shame exists and ought to be acknowledged. For example, rousing her fellow Moors to violence, Alhadra gives this speech:

Warriors of Mahomet, faithful in the battle,
 My countrymen! Come ye and prepare to work
 An honorable deed? And would ye work it
 In the slave's garb? Curse on these Christian robes! (IV.338-41)

Coleridge had prepared the plot for this act of defiance in the beginning of the play, when Alhadra warns Albert not to wear the outlawed traditional Moorish clothes. Now, she calls Christian clothes "slave's garb" because they are the external sign of capitulation to the Inquisition, of mental enslavement, though up to that point, she wore them. "They are *spell*-blasted: and whoever wears them/ His arm shrinks wither'd, his heart melts away" (342-3). Coleridge gives voice to the resentful revolutionary by making slavery a mental condition. Coleridge's mentalization of slavery is dangerous because the authoritarian version of this doctrine accuses the oppressed for not imagining their way out of a situation. The origins of it can be traced to Seneca, as Williams explains:

Later antiquity [moved from Aristotle to the view] that slavery was not really harmful to the slave; in particular, that real freedom was freedom of the spirit, and this could be attained as well, perhaps better, by slaves. One of the most explicit, certainly one of the most repulsive, expositions of this attitude is offered by Seneca:

It is a mistake to think that slavery goes all the way down into a man. The better part of him remains outside it. The body belongs to the master and is subject to him, but the soul is autonomous, and is so free that it cannot be held by any prison. (from De Beneficiis)

...Aristotle did not have such a picture. But these views, and his, do share an objective: to sustain the belief that life cannot be ultimately or structurally unjust. (115-116)

In 1795, Coleridge was as opposed to the stoical conclusion of the slave's mental freedom as he was to its grounding in the rosy picture, as he makes clear in the lecture "On the Slave Trade." Summarizing the Atlantic middle passage, Coleridge refutes the stoics' claims and grounds his refutation in language that recalls Biblical suffering:

...often that infernal engine of torture the thumb screw is applied--an engine so exquisitely cruel as to be used by the Spanish Inquisition--their allowance of water for the day is little more than a pint--in the afternoon they are made to dance, and flogged if they refuse--they have been heard to sing in their captivity, and this has been mentioned as proof that they cared little for slavery-- but a witness who knew their language heard them sing, & their songs were songs of lamentation.³⁵

³⁵Lectures 1795, 242.

Here Coleridge explicitly connects the slave trade and the Inquisition, and addresses the claim that the slaves did not react mentally the way that common sense tells the European he would act. Against this attempt to estrange the Africans, Coleridge conveys the slaves back into the Judeo-Christian European tradition with the word "lamentation," as if their exile were the Egyptian or the Babylonian. Osorio, as we have seen, contains harrowing descriptions and dramatizations of suffering, refuting the claims of the ruling class and the suggestions of The Borderers that suffering can be borne with equanimity.

Coleridge, through Alhadra, advocates a defiant re-alignment of the label "slave" to a meaning that was, in fact, older than Osorio's usage. "Slave," used like "knave" as a term of general disparagement, had more to do with the classical use of the term and the classical context for slavery, not the Atlantic slave trade. The difference, in Aristotle, for example, is that some people are slaves because of their lack of virtues and their *inherent* inability to acquire virtues through education. Slavish people acted slavishly. As Bernard Williams explains, "[Aristotle] argues not merely that it is natural that someone or other should be a slave, but that there are people for whom it is natural that they, rather than someone else, should be slaves" (114). For Aristotle, as we have seen in connection with physiognomy, the body of a slave is destiny. Alhadra's cry to the troops to cast off their slavish garb is rhetoric meant to shame them into action, as if action can refute Aristotle's tautology. In Marino Faliero Faliero's shame moves him to an involuntary leadership of the rebellion, as if Byron were showing how shame, because it enters from the outside (from society), is a circumstance as much as an individual feeling. In Osorio, Alhadra's leadership is much more of an individual choice, since she herself is hurt, but not shamed into action.

Alhadra's leadership dramatizes the struggle in Osorio between the effects of external wrongs and natural moral strengths. She tells the Moors that Ferdinand has been "Murder'd by a Christian" and calls on Naomi (a man) to take Ferdinand's place as Chieftain:

Brother of Zagri! fling away thy sword:

This is thy chieftain's!

[He steps forward to take it.

Dost thou dare receive it?

For I have sworn by Alla and the prophet,

No tear shall dim these eyes, this woman's heart

Shall have no groan, till I have seen that sword

Wet with the blood of all the house of Velez!

Enter Maurice

All. A spy! A spy!

[They seize him.

Maurice.

Yes! ye can kill a man,

Some twenty of you! But ye are Spanish slaves!

And slaves are always cruel, always cowards.

Alhadra. That man has spoken truth.

This passage is thick with the tension between nature and oppression's nurture. By acknowledging Maurice's point about slavish sufferers, Alhadra proves it wrong. Alhadra first swears that she must see all of Velez's family die, but then adjusts to Maurice's story and her own memory of Maria and Albert, part of that family who do not deserve death. Later, she spares Maria even the sight of death. She begins this passage rousing her tribe to nearly indiscriminate violence, but her native dignity and ethical sense is pricked by Maurice's remonstrance. She welcomes him, but insists that he join their violence or be their enemy. This trajectory continues throughout the drama; she tempers her violence, falls back onto the human sympathy for others that has been so offended in her by Osorio and his society, but she cannot abandon her vengeance as such. "Slaves" to Alhadra is a mental term, but it means people who capitulate to the oppressor instead of revolting,

whereas to Maurice it meant those who kill. Maurice's idea of the slavish mind is like Rivers's declaration,

A whipping to the moralists who preach
That misery is a sacred thing! For me,
I know no cheaper engine to degrade a man,
Nor any half so sure. (III.ii.17-20)

In Rivers's philosophy, violence is a way of proving one's selfhood. Osorio works to re-align violence as the just means for the oppressed to redress wrongs, but is deeply suspicious of falling into Rivers's way of thinking. At the end of the fourth act and the start of the fifth, Coleridge presents Alhadra's selfhood as violent but not self-possessed, not slavishly crushed, but nevertheless compelled by experience. She gives a final speech to the Moorish crowd, a vision that both gives her depth and shows how much she reacts to perceptions:

Alhadra. I looked far down the pit.
My sight was bounded by a jutting fragment
And it was stain'd with blood! Then first I shriek'd
My eyeballs burnt! my brain grew hot as fire
And all the hanging drops of the wet roof
Turn'd into blood. I saw them turn to blood !
And I was leaping wildly down the chasm
When on the further brink I saw his sword
And it said, Vengeance! Curses on my tongue !
The moon hath moved in heaven, and I am here,
And he hath not had vengeance ! Ferdinand !

Spirit of Ferdinand! thy murderer lives!

Away ! away!

Act V

Moresco. This was no time for freaks of useless vengeance.

Naomi. True ! but Francesco, the Inquisitor,

Thou know'st the bloodhound--'twas a strong temptation.

And when they pass'd within- a mile of his house

We could not curb them in. They swore by Mahomet,

It were a deed of treachery to their brethren

To sail from Spain and leave that man alive.

Moresco. Where is Alhadra ?

Naomi. She moved steadily on

Unswerving from the path of her resolve.

Yet each strange object fix'd her eye: for grief

Doth love to dally with fantastic shapes,

And smiling, like a sickly moralist,

Gives some resemblance of her own concerns

To the straws of chance and things inanimate.

I seek her here; stand thou upon the watch.

The juxtaposition of this war-whoop with the reasoned conversation of the next act is Coleridge's vision of the crowd in the French Revolution, and looks forward to Byron's vision of the same subject in Marino Faliero. In Byron's play, the mob conspires to perform the bloodiest acts of violence indiscriminately upon the entire aristocratic class. Osorio is an idealization compared to Marino Faliero, since in Osorio there is no such massacre. Every victim of the crowd is an unsympathetic character, and dies according to poetic justice. In that optimistic plotting, Osorio fails to achieve acknowledgment of the

modern skeptic's comprehension of violence in history. Byron and Shelley, responding to Coleridge, correct this fault. In doing so, however, and in fashioning Beatrice Cenci and Marino Faliero, they draw heavily upon Coleridge's plot of passion leading the hero beyond rational intent.

Alhadra's remembrance of discovering Ferdinand's death, adapted from Macbeth's dagger speech, shows how her passions have taken over even her perceptions. Naomi's description of Alhadra shows how she has retreated into her own mental world. Her inwardness, like that of so many other characters in Romantic drama, is a double-movement, exalting her with sublime rhetoric, but making her tragic. External Nature, as represented by the moon, is reduced to a part of her need for revenge; she is a magnificent self, but a violent one impelled by her pain. Alhadra negatively exemplifies, like Coleridge's view of Hamlet in 1813, "the moral necessity of a due balance between our attention to outward objects and our meditation on inward thoughts—a due balance between the real and the imaginary world."³⁶ The way in which Alhadra's internalized resistance is both understood in the drama and yet rejected—but only in the ultimate horizon, where other solutions may become available—makes her a prefiguration for Shelley's Prometheus. Like Prometheus, Alhadra is involved in a mental circle in which she is the helpless product of external suffering and yet the chief contributor to the continuation of the violence that can only end in pain.

Alhadra's battle-trance shows her to embody the key tropes of Romantic drama. She is, on the one hand, the drama's most successful resistor of Power and, on the other, deeply determined, impelled from within by the shame of victimhood. In the movement of the last two acts of the play she comes into her own as a revolutionary leader, but just then Coleridge makes her realize the price of action:

Alhadra (alone). The hanging woods, that touch'd by autumn seem'd

³⁶Raysor, I, 34.

As they were blossoming hues of fire and gold,
The hanging woods, most lovely in decay,
The many clouds, the sea, the rock, the sands,
Lay in the silent moonshine, and the owl,
(Strange! very strange!) the scritch owl only wak'd,
Sole voice, sole eye of all that world of beauty!
Why such a thing am I! Where are these men?
I need the sympathy of human faces
To beat away the deep contempt for all things
Which quenches my revenge. Oh!--would to Alla
The raven and the sea-mew were appointed
To bring me food, or rather that my soul
Could drink in life from the universal air!
It were a lot divine in some small skiff,
Along some ocean's boundless solitude,
To float for ever with a careless course,
And think myself the only being alive! [Naomi *re-enters*
Naomi. Thy children--
Alhadra. Children? Whose children? [A pause--then *fiercely*.
Son of Velez,
This hath new-strung my arm! Thou coward tyrant,
To stupefy a woman's heart with anguish,
Till she forgot even that she was a mother! (V.39-61)

This passage's plaintive self-realization sounds like Coleridge's "Dejection Ode," and "To a Nightingale." Alhadra is now, at the height of the play's violence, the Romantic lyricist, internalizing nature, envisioning herself in solitude with nature. She is in

“contempt for all things,” a stoical mode, uncaring of the shame that defines her identity in society. Coleridge seems, like Wordsworth in The Borderers, tempted by this vision, and needs to ring a bell to toll Alhadra’s self back into social relations: “Thy children.” Then we hear repeated Alhadra’s loss of maternity blamed upon her wrongs, implying perhaps that the whole vision of aloneness did not belong to her were she allowed to remain within the female roles as Coleridge defines them. The interruption of Alhadra’s vision of retreat and exile brings her back to “sympathy,” ironically something that for her impels revenge even as it tempers her violence. It is as if Coleridge is admitting that though sympathy (as in Albert) is the highest ideal, the vicissitudes of modernity have poisoned even it.

Alhadra’s soliloquy allows the action of the play to pause for a moment to dwell upon the mental state and physical fate of this individual person. Her speech suggests that while she will not abandon her political cause, there is no hope for her to transcend her wrongs or reach for the sort of solution Albert tries to accomplish—the use of social relations to bring about an improvement in human nature. The loss of Alhadra as an individual leads us to the sense in which Romantic tragedy is ultimately conservative (and the reason *Prometheus Unbound* is the most radical of all Romantic dramas): it precludes hope for change in this world. As Coleridge would write of the origin of classical drama,

...the tragedy...[raised] the emotions, fears, and hopes which convince the inmost heart that their final cause is not to be discovered in the limits of a mere mortal life [and] force us into a presentiment, however dim, of a state in which those struggles of inward free will with outward necessity, which form the true subject of the tragedian, shall be reconciled and solved.³⁷

Though this statement is not from the Coleridge of 1797, it points back to how action in Osorio is such a mixed bag. Albert accomplishes his ideal act of saving his

³⁷Raysor, I, 154; 1812.

brother's soul, but cannot save his brother's life. Alhadra wins her local revenge, but what of the fate of her people? The future of The Borderers is the image of Mortimer leading himself away from human contact, guilty and alone. Osorio, somewhat more closely tied to historical event than The Borderers, is fashioned in relation to history. As Daniel Watkins writes,

In fact...as Coleridge himself knew, the Moors—whose presence in the drama constitutes its major plot-level public event—were brutally crushed by Philip II. The omission of this historical fact, accompanied by the implicit conclusion that Alhadra and her followers win justice, allows and perhaps encourages a misreading of history by hinting that social stability follows directly on the fall of the house of Velez, though of course further social misery—at least for the Moors, who are lower-class people of color—is in fact what follows. Such misrepresentation of history arises...not from Coleridge's desire to withhold information but rather from his own deep-seated desire for stability in the face of certain and extreme instability.³⁸

Watkins fails to mention that the particular Moors in Coleridge's play seem to be leaving Spain (As Naomi says, "They swore by Mahomet, / It were a deed of treachery to their brethren / To sail from Spain and leave that man alive" [V.i.5-7]). In other words, they are going into exile, beginning a wandering life for themselves as a subgroup that may escape the Inquisition if not overthrow it. The evils of this world cannot be redressed in this world. Watkins's historical point stands, since Osorio's "revolution" seems less local than it is. But Watkins, in my opinion, reads Alhadra too heroically, as if the play's promise were supposed to lie in her actions. The knowledge of history to which Watkins points may help Coleridge subtly to undermine and ironize Alhadra's revolution, because

³⁸A Materialist Critique, 25-6.

he did not believe in it. The irony of the Inquisition's continuation surely stands to say that Alhadra's violence, rather than Albert's wisdom, is to be rejected. The question of Osorio is whether one believes that Albert's Christian wisdom is really the means to bettering human nature or not. Further, since Albert's character is without self-division, Osorio seems to imply (despite itself) that his solution of sympathy floats just above human possibility in this world.

There is something finally pathetic about Osorio, a note that Watkins touched of desperation. Osorio was written just as Coleridge was abandoning his necessitarianism of the early and mid-1790s. It is the record of his strain to hold faith together against modern skepticism's troubling relation to political violence. The Borderers, as well, records a search for something in human nature that would resist the frightening will to power everywhere evident to both Wordsworth and Coleridge. Both plays suffer under the strain of trying to acknowledge the evil of the world yet insisting that all is not lost, that human benevolence, inherent with everyone, cannot fully be repressed. The Borderers succeeds better at dramatizing the skeptical positions it seeks to condemn, but fails to present any hope in the end. Osorio presents a faith in repentance and social action in response to Wordsworth. But Osorio's faith seems hollow, and in the end proposes a form of social exile only a little different from Mortimer's wandering at the end of The Borderers. The plays leave us with a theme of homelessness, and the assertion that society, whether or not human nature is predisposed to social harmony, is not yet near a stage of meaningful reform.

In Shelley's two dramas, Prometheus Unbound and The Cenci, the strains of presenting evil and hope is relieved by the division into two companion texts, though each mingles much of the thought of the other. Later, in Marino Faliero, Byron will reject that very strategy, insisting upon the pessimism of The Borderers without knowing that text, and turning Coleridge's hopeful use of shame against the kind of faith Coleridge tried to preserve. Only Shelley, in Prometheus Unbound, achieved a Romantic drama that is both

fully skeptical yet fully hopeful. Shelley's vision of love, however, builds upon Coleridge's less powerful text, just as Shelley's nightmare of injustice draws upon the oppressions in Osorio. It is to these dramas that we now turn.

“What Thing Am I?”: The Ethics of the Subject in The Cenci and
Prometheus Unbound

...the great secret of morals is Love; or a going out of our own nature, and
an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought,
action, or person, not our own. – A Defence
of Poetry¹

The cruxes in The Cenci and, separately, the difficulties of reading The Cenci together with Prometheus Unbound, are both problems about how to understand human agency in a world that threatens to become a deterministic totality.² These are also the problems of The Borderers and Osorio, Byron’s Marino Faliero, and Manfred, as well as Joanna Baillie’s De Monfort. How are we to understand Beatrice Cenci as an ethical example, especially in the context of the totality of the world of The Cenci? How should Prometheus Unbound’s “beautiful idealisms” affect our interpretation of Beatrice’s imaginative alternatives? How ideal is Prometheus Unbound, and how much does it still have to do with the earth-bound problems that The Cenci seems never to escape? Is it possible to perform actions in the world yet avoid being turned by it into a “miserable creature” (a phrase Mary Shelley’s Monster often used to describe himself), tricked by its evil contingencies into committing a terrible crime and alienated from its other inhabitants

¹ All quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from Shelley’s Poetry and Prose, eds. Sharon Powers, Donald Reiman (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977) 487. Hereafter *P & R*.

² Stuart Curran summarizes this problem succinctly: “In brief, the universal corruption of The Cenci appears flatly to contradict the universal benevolence of Prometheus Unbound.” Shelley’s Annus Mirabilis: The Maturing of an Epic Vision (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1975) 121.

like Mortimer, Osorio, or Beatrice Cenci? How much do characters in these dramas intend to do what they do, or is intention a coherent concept for understanding Shelleyan drama? Exactly how does Shelley make self-consciousness and internalization into the blessing and curse that we have seen Wordsworth and Coleridge describe?

These questions arise out of Shelley's rigorous skepticism which is in a dialectical struggle in Shelley's drama with a thoroughgoing idealism and hope. Shelley's plays show that skepticism is necessary but needs to be overcome as well. They dramatize the moral abyss into which skepticism may cast individuals tortured by cruelty, and the need to step away from skepticism's abyss. Shelley's critics have long argued about the relative degrees of skepticism and idealism in his writing, usually agreeing upon the presence of both but disagreeing about the relative primacy of each. Recently, this debate has become grist for the critical mill, a false binary waiting to be transcended. As William Ulmer has written,

Shelley's idealism undeniably receives its dues in many readings, and has been unduly emphasized in some. Still, few Shelleyans would dispute the claim that at present skepticism retains its privileged interpretive position. Critics ordinarily cite the fideistic options of a positive skepticism, stress Shelley's faith in the moral efficacy of hopeful representations, and treat his poetry's manifest idealisms as heuristic fictions--accommodating an idealistic superstructure to a skeptical base, rather than the other way around.

Ulmer then goes on to cast Shelley's dialectic between idealism and skepticism in terms laden with late twentieth-century values:

I would argue conversely that Shelley's poetry subsumes its antitheses in an idealist logic, the transition from Platonism to skepticism occurring only within an

encompassing logocentrism. Skepticism and idealism are equally oriented toward truth-as-presence. If the former doubts while the latter affirms, they merely assume reversed orbits around the same center.³

Ulmer's deconstructive stance serves here as an introduction to the sort of critical move that this chapter will seek to refute. In essence, the postmodern Shelley critic will look at a commonly acknowledged crux in a Shelleyan text—say, the debate over individual responsibility and external circumstance in The Cenci—and find there a means for reducing Shelley's text to the kind of mechanism that Shelley abandoned after Queen Mab (1813). Sometimes, as in Ulmer, the critic finds the conflicts in the text proof of Shelley's inadequacy as a politician, and sometimes Shelley is the hero because his text illustrates the universal mechanism better than any other. Jerrold Hogle's psychoanalytic reading of Shelley seems to be an example of the latter. In his postmodern reading of The Cenci,⁴ Hogle demonizes the subject as an abstract notion. It is the thesis of this chapter that not enough selfhood, or "self-esteem," to use Prometheus's term, is at the heart of Beatrice's false revolution. To pin the evil of The Cenci upon self-fashioning, as Hogle does, is to mechanize what otherwise appears to be an interaction between characters representative of how human beings themselves interact. Shelley was not sanguine about egoism, or selfhood construed as the independent will's transcendent ability to defy demonized enemies, but (and here I agree with Ulmer's statement, though not its values), ultimately

³Shelleyan Eros: The Rhetoric of Romantic Love (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990)
13.

⁴This reading is but a small part of Hogle's comprehensive argument in Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works (New York, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988).

Shelley relies upon the “innate passions” of the subject to accomplish the travel from the self which he called love.⁵

⁵A phrase from Shelley’s letter to Elizabeth Hitchner, June 2, 1812, in The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. Frederick L. Jones, I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965) 301. According to C.E. Pulos, in his study of Shelley’s skepticism, this letter marks Shelley’s turn, in 1811–1812, from a “unqualified acceptance of Locke’s theory of knowledge” to “Hume’s qualifications of Locke’s theory.” The Deep Truth: A Study of Shelley’s Scepticism (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1962) 46–47. This turn from an absolutist adherence to Locke’s *tabula rasa* is one way to measure Shelley’s commitment to the subject in his more mature writings.

See Stanley Corngold’s article “Hölderlin’s Poetry and the Persistence of the Self,” in Literature as Philosophy: Philosophy as Literature, ed. Donald G. Marshall (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa P, 1987) 205–231: “Recent literary theory has profoundly altered the way in which English and German Romantic writers are read. The thrust of the new criticism has been to discredit the self or subject as an origin of meaning and value...It is therefore to be expected that Romantic texts should come in for harsh treatment, including more than a little aversion and manhandling, with the purpose of having them turn critic’s evidence.” Corngold, 205. Corngold laments that the price of such criticism is that “It is only with a much diminished and ironical sense of self and time that many readers still maintain a feeling of community with Romantic writers” (205). In a close reading of Hölderlin, Corngold finds that “Hölderlin’s work is not the record of a sense of failure inside language but rather the record by language of a struggle to conserve in a superior mode of self what is threatened by loss” (212–13) and, finally, that “The deconstruction of the subject is a project that therefore lies always ahead of us. It has not been done; and on the evidence of those who are attempting to do it, it cannot be done, either factually or by right” 225–226.

Deconstructive criticism has undergone more than one critique, not the least from historicist critics. My objection to deconstructions of Shelley, however, are not (primarily) that they ignore history. Rather, it is that they distort Shelley’s text to fit into their own trap of pessimism as the only moral stance. (Again, this is my reading of their motives, for they would deny that there is a covert absolutist ethics motivating their analyses.) This sort of double-check on deconstructive reading can be found, for example, in Michael Fischer’s Does Deconstruction Make Any Difference? Poststructuralism and the Defense of Poetry in Modern Criticism (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985). Fischer revisits readings of “The Triumph of Life” by Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, and Tilottoma Rajan to conclude that

Generally, postmodern critics would deny that they are mechanistic, necessitarian, or reductionist—those are my assertions. In claiming to have transcended the false binaries in the Shelleyan text, they seek not to install new ones, but rather to undermine the notion of binary thought itself, asserting that the binary opposition, as differential, is necessarily, if unconsciously, tyrannical. No substitute for binarism is offered, for what is most conspicuously lacking in postmodern expressions are theories of agency and action.⁶ Instead, the deconstructive critic ends upon a note of despair, having shown that Shelley, too, despaired, or that he should have. In either case, there is an often unconscious value placed upon pessimism as if any idealism were reactionary complacency.⁷ As we have seen in the two previous chapters, the Romantic writers thought of drama as the place to present a modern skepticism that leads to pessimism, and the avenues of escape from despair. The drama in particular works through characters, or subjects, showing how their subject formations may lead either to a will to power or toward benevolence. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge evade an evisceration of the subject and assert a core benevolence. Wordsworth, I have argued, confirms the need for the moral subject without

their hypotheses determine their findings. His comment on de Man is typical: “De Man sees only language in control of “The Triumph of Life” because he already thinks language is omnipotent. He refuses to let the poem challenge his prior assumptions” (74).

⁶See the passage from Linda Hutcheson in the Introduction.

⁷As Corngold writes, “Now, however, it is said that, apart from its complicity with modern rhetorical deconstruction, the Romantic mood is gone, and we read Romantic anxiety with post-modern detachment. The conceptual pairs supplied to the older criticism by Romantic poetry—sentiment/ sensation; consciousness/ nature; imagination/ reason—having lost their cogency, are taken as instances of bad binary thinking. It has seemed possible, for example, to show Rousseau, Wordsworth, and Hölderlin valorizing the pole of Subject (Consciousness) and the pole of Object (Nature), alternately and incessantly. The outcome of such readings cannot therefore be a statement about a unified Romantic consciousness—neither one that registers its triumphs or its defeat vis-à-vis stubborn materiality and contingency, nor one that finds itself (or benignly loses itself), having been ministered to by Nature, even in negative pleasure” (207).

submitting to the sort of backward, unfounded optimism in Coleridge. The decision of whether or not adhering to the subject is inherently reactionary is up to the reader; this writer thinks not.

Separately, whether or not Shelley retained the subject or skeptically tossed it aside is debatable. Shelley wrote, for example, "Let it not be supposed that this doctrine conducts to the monstrous presumption, that I, the person who now write and think, am [the] one mind. I am but a portion of it" (*P & R*, 478)⁸ The challenge to understanding this passage lies in the Platonic phrase "one mind." Confusingly, it comes in a discussion of how the pronouns "I, you, they" are mere signs and conventions, not things-in-themselves. The "doctrine" of which Shelley speaks is his much written line, "Nothing exists but as it is perceived" (*P & R*, 477). How can we speak of a pan-sympathetic "one mind" if we cannot even know who "you" are? Shelley explains, "The words *I, you, they*, are not signs of any actual difference subsisting between the assemblage of thoughts thus indicated, but are merely marks employed to denote the different modifications of the one mind" (*P & R*, 477-78). This juxtaposition of statements shows that Shelley was engaged in a dialectic between his doubt and his idealism. If even language is an elusive counter for thought, we must attempt to locate, communicate with, and bind ourselves to the whole of which we may (or may not) be a part. His statement seems to deny the transcendental subject only to announce a wholeness incompatible with skepticism; there is no subject because we are united in an intersubjective "one."

⁸Hoagwood tries to reconcile Shelley's skepticism with his activism by saying that they lead back to each other; skepticism of authority leads to challenges to power, and activist struggle leads to its own skeptical justifications: "Shelley shows...how the critical, intellectual forms of skepticism are related to the most concrete kinds of political liberty and ethical action" (4). He strongly emphasizes that Shelley's skepticism is not solipsism, and quotes this passage from the fragment "On Life" often. Hoagwood writes: "the name for that monstrous presumption is solipsism, and Shelley's philosophy has nothing to do with that doctrine" (26).

In order to ground my denial of the postmodern Shelley, I read Percy Shelley in his historical, literary, and even familial context through comparison and contrast with his contemporary Henry Hart Milman. The contrast between The Cenci and Milman's Fazio⁹ illustrates the difference between a drama of skeptical self-consciousness and an example of the dramatic dogmatism to which Shelley responds. Reading Shelley in relation to a contemporaneous text, however, does not complete the task of explaining him for our time. To that end, alongside Shelley, I continue to employ, for example, Bernard Williams's study of Greek literature, Shame and Necessity, for its blurring of action, passivity, and desire.¹⁰ I draw upon Terence Hoagwood's study of how skepticism in Shelley's prose opposed not just dogma but the dogmatic mentality.¹¹ The underpinning for this whole project on Romantic drama is Stanley Cavell's understanding of skepticism in The Claim of Reason and Disowning Knowledge,¹² and his presence ought to be felt in this chapter

⁹Fazio, A Tragedy was printed in 1815 by Samuel Collingwood and sold by J. Parker and John Murray in London. See the title page in the facsimile version, ed., intro., Donald Reiman (New York: Garland Pubs., 1977). Shelley could have read it before he saw it performed, but there is no evidence of his having seen a copy.

¹⁰(Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: U of California P, 1993). I take my cue from Donald Reiman's comment that "The freedom of thought, even skepticism, that in fact underlay the greatest poetry of the age can be seen, through Milman's negative example, to have been a necessary attribute of greatness at that time." Donald Reiman, "Introduction" to Henry Hart Milman, Belvidere Apollo and Fazio and Samor (New York: Garland Press, 1976) x.

¹¹Skepticism and Ideology. Hoagwood's study is indispensable for any discussion of Shelley's skepticism, but as its title informs, it is limited to Shelley's prose. I differ from Hoagwood in my assessment of whether Shelley saw skepticism as a "crisis." Hoagwood equates such a view with a search for a "doctrinal resting place" (5), which may seem to be the case from the perspective of Shelley's closely argued rational prose arguments. It is my contention, however, that Shelley attempts to transcend his own rationalism and skepticism, without coming to some resting place, in the dramas, particularly in Prometheus Unbound.

especially. From Cavell I have drawn, most crucially, the notion of how skepticism may liberate *and yet may also dehumanize*; it may afford a critique of human constructs and yet help construct new institutions.

Skepticism and Action

No one understood more than Shelley the need not just to criticize institutions, but to act against oppression. Indeed he saw no other reason to write: "I have, what a Scotch philosopher characteristically terms, 'a passion for reforming the world:' what passion incited him to write and publish his book, he omits to explain" ("Preface" to Prometheus Unbound, P & R, 135). Shelley's skepticism did not preclude action.¹³ For though Shelley embraces "a vacancy" in "On Life" and elsewhere, he also expresses the need to reach out to other humans.¹⁴ This need, motivated partly by the hope that they are like oneself, exists despite the paltry evidence that there are others like the self, evidence that Shelley said in "On Love" was diminishing as he aged. As we shall see in Byron's use of the poem to write Manfred, one of the morals of the story in Alastor is the need to engage with those others who present themselves to our perceptions even though they seem far less like us than our imaginations hope them to be. Shelley's hope for commonalty, as he describes it in "On Love," faced the constant pressure of, for example, the inexplicable complacency of oppressed peoples, the seeming lack of moral feeling in the many and the wise, not to mention the general failure of any reading public to receive his writings:

¹²The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy (Oxford, New York: Oxford UP, 1979). Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge UP, 1987).

¹³Hoagwood lists three essential elements of Shelley's justification for action: the "expanding circle of sympathy, the broad view of utility as the ethical end of action, and the definition of moral right" (154).

¹⁴Hoagwood traces Shelley's "vacancy" to the Greek Skeptics' term "epoche," which refers to a suspended uncertainty or permanent ambiguity (see p. 13).

I know not the internal constitution of other men, or even of thine whom I now address. I see that in some external attributes they resemble me, but when misled by that appearance I have thought to appeal to something in common and unburthen my inmost soul to them, I have found my language misunderstood like one in a distant and savage land. (*P & R*, 473)

Shelley, when he fashions a self as alienated as any character in his writings, rests his alienation on expressions misunderstood; the attempt to communicate is there, not just the solitude. Miscommunication, the deaf ear, and the garbled transmission do not define Shelley's concept of evil—they are a necessary structural element of the gap between individual souls—but they may be overcome through sympathy, even if only provisionally. The evils that result from miscommunication seem as inevitable as the inadequacy of language itself to express thought, but that is because the one has always led to the other. But misunderstanding need not cause conflict, just as any event need not cause any other. The Cenci, as a drama set in the past, is meant to challenge our understanding of the inevitability inherent in our definitions of both history and tragedy.

In the "Preface" to The Cenci Shelley writes that he tried to avoid "converting names and actions of the sixteenth century into cold impersonations of my own mind" (*P & R*, 240). Integral to the act of turning history into drama, then, is a need to go out of oneself. This externalization, however, is not reporting or realism in the sense we understand of the journalist or academic historian striving for "accuracy." In the Dedication of the play to Leigh Hunt Shelley called the situation of The Cenci a "sad reality," and contrasts it with "dreams of what ought to be, or may be" that he had "hitherto published" (*P & R*, 237). There is, even here, a dialectical understanding of what a drama about a sad reality is. In the "Preface" he explains that "The person who would treat such a subject must increase the ideal, and diminish the actual horror of the events..." to achieve the

proper mixture of “pleasure” and “pain” (*P & R*, 239). So too is Prometheus Unbound filled, even to its last Act, with images of non-ideal horrors. Not only must any simple division of The Cenci and Prometheus Unbound into the realistic and the idealistic dramas be abandoned, but further we must realize that even within The Cenci Shelley creates a need for the audience to go out from itself to a general understanding of its public self as portrayed in an ideal yet historical way. The history is idealized and the idealism is historicized so that neither element may easily be categorized by the mind, filed away, and forgotten.

This critique of history as inevitability stems from Shelley’s doubt of causality. Shelley’s dialectical skepticism never admits of an absolute certainty beyond his own mind. He never, for example, forgets that cause and effect are, after Hume, mere commonly perceived sequences to which we ascribe some deeper, though unproveable, connection. Yet he makes positive statements like this one in A Defense: “The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause. Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight” (*P & R*, 488). In this claim the imagination is the cause and good acts its effect, facilitated by the connector of poetry, itself also a good act. In the very next paragraph, though, Shelley reminds us of Hume’s assertion: “We know no more of cause and effect than a constant conjunction of events...I appeal to what has already been established to distinguish between the cause and the effect” (*P & R*, 489). If we concentrate on some specific aspect of society at a given moment in thought we may (even must) suspend (but not abandon) our skepticism and call imagination the cause of ethical progress. We understand that our attributions of cause are conventional fictions, internal to ourselves and merely ratified in our perceptions of society, but we must act as if they were real. We must act.

At one point in Shelley's life, he used skepticism of cause and effect to claim that a Godwinian style of necessity governed every human action. In Queen Mab, Shelley apostrophizes the

“Spirit of Nature! all-sufficing Power,
Necessity! thou mother of the world!
Unlike the God of human error, thou
Requirest no prayers or praises; the caprice
Of man's weak will belongs no more to thee
Than do the changeful passions of the breast
To thy unvarying harmony...
...all that the wide world contains
Are but thy passive instruments, and thou
Regardest them all with an impartial eye,
Whose joy or pain thy nature cannot feel,
Because thou hast not human sense,
Because thou art not human mind.” (VI.197-219)

At the word “Necessity,” Shelley appended a note:

“He who asserts the doctrine of Necessity means that, contemplating the events which compose the moral and material universe, he beholds only an immense and uninterrupted chain of causes and effects...Motive is, to voluntary action in the human mind, what cause is to effect in the material universe. The word liberty, as applied to mind, is analogous to the word chance, as applied to matter...The doctrine of Necessity tends to introduce a great change into the established notions of morality, and utterly destroy religion...” (in *P & R*, 50)

Though Shelley's motives for adhering to the "doctrine of necessity" are obvious, the mechanistic model would not persuade him forever. But the later part of the decade, when he writes The Cenci and Prometheus Unbound, he no longer attributes to necessity a liberating randomness, but rather sees necessity as a bastion of tyranny. The inhuman, chaotic nature of Queen Mab is replaced in the Defense of Poetry by the possibility of a "one," and Queen Mab's accusation that a malevolent God exists becomes, in Prometheus Unbound, the mentally deficient stance that chains Prometheus to the rock. There is a movement, then, in Shelley's thought toward necessity and away from religion, but then away from necessity and toward a non-religious idealism. One notion he retains along the way is that of the "weak will" as a cause of human evil.

In seeing Shelley as dialectically skeptical about the issue of human agency and passivity, the humanity of the other, and the possibility of love, we may understand him as not merely stagnantly self-divided but engaged in a constantly moving struggle and dialogue with himself. This struggle is everywhere evident in his drama, not just because it is a literature of dialogues but also because of the ways in which Shelley's characters go through the very dialectical processes he does. Doubts conflict with doubts, just as claims may conflict with claims in a non-skeptical discussion. The unproveability of the existence of a "one" is not the proof that there is no "one." As P. F. Strawson explains,

Strictly, skepticism is a matter of doubt rather than of denial. The skeptic is, strictly, not one who denies the validity of certain types of belief, but one who questions, if only initially, and for methodological reasons, the adequacy of our grounds for holding them. He puts forward his doubts by way of a challenge--sometimes a challenge to himself--to show that the doubts are unjustified, that the

beliefs put in question are justified. He may conclude, like Descartes, that the challenge can successfully be met; or, like Hume, that it cannot...¹⁵

The deep truth is imageless *so far*, and may or may not always be so, and, as we shall see in Prometheus Unbound, the understanding that the deep truth continues to elude us is necessary not only for our liberation from dogmatic forms, but also for our ability to construct a liberating theory of action.

Beatrice, Bianca, and the Self

A comparison between The Cenci and one antithetical “source” for the play will show one of the ways in which Shelley wrote his play to address the issue of the need for and limits of skeptical doubt. To repeat Stanley Cavell’s formula:

...both skepticism and tragedy conclude with the condition of human separation, ... and the fact that the alternative to my acknowledgment of the other is not my ignorance of him but my avoidance of him, call it my denial of him.¹⁶

The Cenci attacks the physical institutions and mental self-justifications of European society of Shelley’s own day. It shows how Europe’s patriarchal institutions permit a father to rape his daughter and get away with it. It offers a critique of the apologies for that society which claim a divinity in its organization, an ordained best-of-all-possible social structures. That philosophical critique is rendered through the spectacle of the mental trajectory of Beatrice Cenci. She is Shelley’s fatal mixture of revolutionary virtue and

¹⁵Skepticism and Naturalism: Some Varieties (The Woodbridge Lectures 1983) (New York: Columbia UP, 1985) 2.

¹⁶Claim of Reason, 398.

dogmatism, turned by the patriarchal powers into a parricide whose reality becomes a skepticism unchecked by hope or love.

In creating The Cenci, as has often been noticed, Shelley drew upon Measure for Measure, Macbeth, and King Lear, among other Shakespearean texts. The relation of Shelley's play to Shakespearean drama is not simply one of homage but of correction, especially in the area of ethics. But when Shelley radically revises a more contemporary play, Henry Hart Milman's Fazio, he does not merely correct it; rather he treats it as a moral and political antagonist.¹⁷

To see how this difference operates, we need to turn again to Stanley Cavell's explorations of skepticism—specifically how skepticism can pave a road to dehumanization as easily as it can help decertify institutionalized dehumanizing traditions. Cavell distinguishes between two results of the skeptical view: There is the skepticism of the naturalness of human customs and institutions, and there is what Cavell calls the skepticism

¹⁷Joseph W. Donohue, Jr.'s comparison of the dramas from 1970 comes to the opposite conclusion that Shelley borrows directly from Milman's ethics, dismissing Shelley's comments to the contrary (on the other hand, the problem remains for me as to why Shelley enjoyed the play at all). See Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age, 169-72. Here is Donohue on Fazio, as compared to an Elizabethan revenge tragedy: "...its fundamental qualities are the product of a later innovation, the Romantic tragedy of betrayal through circumstance, displaying characters in situations so extreme and so unexpected that no previous experience of the world can aid them in emerging unscathed." Actually, this is not true of Fazio, and it shows a misunderstanding of The Cenci based on a complacent view of what humans commonly suffer in the world. Donohue again: "...the boldest fact emerging from a comparison of Shelley's and Milman's plays is their common casuistical treatment of a virtuous human being seduced into committing a vicious act. It is imperative to see that the problem of 'morality' in The Cenci derives from the same concept of human nature implicit in Milman's drama. While violating the conventional ethical premise of human responsibility for action, the concept at the same time affords great scope for the development of pathos" (172). Donohue misses Shelley's critique of "conventional ethical premises" entirely. But his emphasis on connecting the plays through their shared ethical conversation is valuable.

of the other. Skepticism of the ontological reality of other souls or selves like the one which thinks itself is, for Cavell, closely related to the dehumanization of others in institutions like slavery or in the oppression of women. The thesis stated in the opening quotation is that such dehumanization, though couched in the form of skepticism, requires an act of denial that is ultimately dogmatic, not skeptical. Dehumanization of a present human body requires a paradoxical doubt based upon some other abstract certainty which a true skeptic would eschew. The slave-owner, for example, who claims that his slaves are not, like him, human is “missing something about himself, or rather something about his connection with these people, his internal relation with them, so to speak.”¹⁸

As the two previous chapters delineate, Wordsworth and Coleridge call for a faith in physiognomic signs of humanness in other bodies, despite our knowledge of hypocrisy and our well-founded doubts of the inner/outer connection. In The Borderers Mortimer struggles mightily with the conflict between what his senses tell him is an innocent, helpless old man and what Rivers-as-Philosophy tells him is a monster to be expunged. The rift between the sight of the other human being's body before one and the humanness of that human body, so to speak, is also a primary concern of Osorio, a play of disguises in which one brother cannot even recognize the other because of racism, ambition, and remorse. In The Cenci the problem of the other's body and self is the issue around which Shelley wraps his own debate with himself between skepticism and love.

The Cenci, as opposed to Fazio, is a study of the way a person must change within herself in order to harm another person, another body. The miseducation of Beatrice Cenci is the moral crux of Shelley's play. Shelley wrote the part of Beatrice keeping in mind the actress Eliza O'Neill, who had played Bianca, the female lead in Fazio, which is one of the few plays Shelley most probably saw performed before he left England.¹⁹ Though

¹⁸Claim of Reason, 376.

¹⁹Donohue notes that Fazio was performed at Covent Garden in February, 1818. It was printed in 1815, and performed as The Italian Wife in 1816-17 at the Surrey theatre.

Thomas Love Peacock remembers Fazio as the only play Shelley enjoyed watching in London,²⁰ Shelley disparaged it in a letter to Peacock in which he wrote that he was considering writing “a tragedy on the subject of Tasso’s madness,” which he said would have “better morality than Fazio, & better poetry than [Maturin’s] Bertram, at least.”²¹ Mary Shelley, in a “Note on The Cenci,” wrote

Shelley wished The Cenci to be acted. He was not a play-goer, being of such fastidious taste that he was easily disgusted by the bad filling up of the inferior parts. While preparing for our departure from England, however, he saw Miss O’Neil several times; she was then in the zenith of her glory, and Shelley was deeply moved by her impersonation of several parts, and by the graceful sweetness, the intense pathos, and sublime vehemence of passion she displayed.²²

Shelley himself wrote to Peacock that “The principal character, Beatrice, is precisely fitted for Miss O’Neil, and it might even have been written for her, (God forbid that I should see her play it—it would tear my nerves to pieces) and in all respects it is fitted only for Covent Garden” (Works, II, 158). There can be no doubt that Shelley did intend the play for performance, and that he conceived of it as a strong critique of what he knew of the English

The alternate title is significant, showing that Bianca may be considered the main character. (Dramatic Character, 169).

²⁰Peacock records in Memoirs of Shelley: “With the exception of Fazio, I do not remember his having been pleased with any performance of an English theatre.” The Works of Thomas Love Peacock, eds. H. F. B. Brett-Smith, C. E. Jones, VIII (rpt. 1924–34. New York: AMS P, 1967) 82. Mary records seeing Fazio in London on February 16, 1818. The Shelleys left London for the Continent on March 12, 1818. See the “Chronology” in Donald H. Reiman, Percy Bysshe Shelley, updated edition (Boston: Twayne Pubs. of G.K. Hall, 1990) xxxi.

²¹Letter 462, April 20, 1818, The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley, 8.

²²The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley II, eds. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck (New York: Gordian P, 1965, ed. from. of 1926–30 edition) 157.

theater. The Cenci is, therefore, among other things, a direct response to Milman's sentimental piece.

Fazio's Bianca bears some superficial resemblances to Shelley's Beatrice Cenci, with the crucial difference that Bianca ends up affirming the "even-handed justice" that condemns her in Fazio. Shelley's concept of justice in The Cenci, though no character is able to articulate it there, is expressed by Prometheus: "For Justice, when triumphant, will weep down/ Pity, not punishment, on her own wrongs,/ Too much avenged by those who err" (l.403-5).²³ Both heroines defy patriarchal authorities, but Bianca's defiance is cynical and motivated by personal, contingent frustrations that do not form a lasting critique of those authorities, and indeed serve to authenticate their motives for punishment. Shelley's purpose is dialectically to explore, within a play that assaults the reigning European institutions, the good and ill of skepticism and dogmatism within the revolutionary impulse. Although Bianca can be critical at times about the justice that she receives, Fazio as a play renounces even the gentlest suggestions of the need for reform in England or skepticism of its hoary customs. Instead, in the punitive system it upholds, Fazio supports the denial of the other in almost every relation between its characters.

The title character of Fazio is a poor and unsurprisingly unsuccessful alchemist, married two years to Bianca. Fazio still desires a former mistress Aldabella, a vain, greedy "courtesan." By chance, Bartolo, a rich miser, is stabbed by robbers in front of Fazio's house, but the robbers do not succeed in getting Bartolo's money. Fazio takes Bartolo's fallen gold, robs Bartolo's house, and buries the body in his yard. Fazio attributes his new wealth to successful alchemy. Bartolo was without kin, so that the state in the form of the

²³As Susan Brisman points out, this passage in Prometheus Unbound is as much "the poet's best comment on Beatrice's casuistry" as it is an illustration of Prometheus's inadequacy: it shows that "the language of passive resistance and the language of rebellion are still interwoven and inextricable" by this part of that drama. See "Unsayings His High Language: The Problem of Voice in Prometheus Unbound," Studies in Romanticism 16.1 (1977): 53.

Duke would have received his money, and Fazio rationalizes the theft of the dead miser's house by saying "our Duke hath pomp enough" (I.ii., p.13). This is emphatically not a revolutionary act but merely an illegal and selfish one that sets the tone for the play's understanding of the defiance of authority. Aldabella, formerly standoffish, seduces the newly enriched Fazio. Bianca shrilly warns Fazio not to commit adultery, because in Aldabella there is,

...more than death --

A death beyond the grave--a death of sin--

A howling, hideous, an eternal death--

Death the flesh shrinks from. (II.iii,p.40)

We can see even here that Bianca's character is conceived to express an orthodox system of belief based on demonizing others; nothing in Fazio ironizes Bianca's accusation of "sin." When Fazio ignores her warning, Bianca, in a jealous rage, falsely accuses Fazio of Bartolo's murder and supports her accusation by accurately telling where the body is hidden. The Duke rebukes her disloyalty to Fazio as "of those crimes, whose ancient fame Hell joys at" (III.ii,p.61). Bianca has broken faith with one patriarchal institution-- marriage--but only by serving a greater one. In Fazio the Duke has the role of ultimate patriarchal moralizer, thus lending the state authority the play's moral high ground without even the fruitful ambiguity of, say, the role of the Duke in Measure for Measure. Fazio is brought to court where Bianca screams for his death, she embodying the misogynist's nightmare of the monstrous female. When the Duke sentences Fazio to death, Bianca has a change of heart, (again in a misogynistically conceived role: the culpably changeable female). Bianca spends the last two acts alternately lamenting the necessity of Fazio's death and trying to prevent it. Since Bianca seems mad during her accusation and her attempt to recall it, it is only after Fazio is executed that the authorities come to believe that

he was not a murderer. Bianca's mid-play madness resembles Beatrice Cenci's madness just after Beatrice is raped, but the divergences immediately seem larger than the similarities. Milman presents Bianca's "wrong" in order to enforce a dogma of punishment, not to afford a critique of his society.

Milman's dogmatic oppositions of good and evil follow the literature of his age in valorizing internalization, but in doing so they assign internalized good to possessors of power, and evil to those who deserve to be stripped of power. Among Milman's dogmas, for example, is the traditional renunciation of wealth in favor of love and feelings. Bartolo the miser is a symbol of this sentiment; he dies alone. Bianca expresses it when she laments that her newly enriched household is cold without her Fazio. Underlying this version of the renunciation of wealth is the play's theme of comeuppance that visits those who seek to transcend their class. The distinction between Fazio and The Cenci is not an emphasis on internal suffering but a skeptical understanding of suffering. At the play's end, for example, Bianca puts her hand to her forehead, so that another character thinks she tears at her hair. She replies, "I do not tear my hair: there should be pain/ If that I did; but all my pain's within (*with her hand to her bosom*)."(V.iii,p.101) But Bianca's pain is manifestly her own creation as she readily admits, and even though others contributed to her misfortunes, those individuals are also seen as tragic deviates, not instruments of any bad social rule. The play unequivocally blames her previous actions for her present pain, finally not admitting circumstance to mitigate her guilt. The morals of the moment are designed to make the audience pity her emotional distress, but not enter her mind (or their own minds) to experience her choices. Her manifest inwardness is not a retreat from conventional ethics, but an internalization of social rules. In The Cenci, such subjectivity receives a reversed valuation; Beatrice is not made into an individual isolated from external causes of her criminality. Rather, Shelley shows her to lack sufficient strength in herself to withstand becoming what she beholds.

Like all sentimental texts, Fazio uses inwardness and skepticism to shore up a profoundly dogmatic and punitive theology evident in the play's many deserved deaths.²⁴ There is, for example, a moment in the play when Fazio is skeptical of the humanity of his wife's form. When he finds that she has accused him of Bartolo's murder, he cannot believe that she is Bianca:

No; it is a horrid vision!...

If thou'rt a fiend, what hellish right has thou
To shroud thy leprous and fire-seam'd visage
In lovely lineaments, like my Bianca's? (III.ii, p.63)

This moment of avoidance, of doubting physiognomy, is a central problem in The Cenci, but in Fazio it is merely a passing theatrical device. Fazio is satisfied when he sees that this Bianca is still wearing her wedding ring, a sign which ought to be even more subject to skepticism than her face. I take the ring to be a symbol of the "marriage hearse," the orthodox regulation of sexuality like the adultery taboo that drives Milman's play. Fazio's assertion of skepticism gives way to this even more "superstitious" image.

The pattern of sentimental literature like Fazio is to assert a critique only to have the critique absolutely undermined by the weakness of the characters articulating it. This is not The Cenci's procedure, for Beatrice's critique outlasts her weaknesses and further, even those weaknesses form a dialectically secondary critique of the circumstances of the society that fosters them. Fazio, however, leaves no lasting criticism of an institution. For example, Bianca's reconsidered complaint against Fazio's death sentence shows that the play does not come to a critique of capital punishment (an institution Shelley passionately opposed).

²⁴This view of sentimental literature is supported by Janet Todd's remarks in Sensibility: An Introduction (New York, London: Methuen, 1986) 2-4.

Bianca. Oh why wear ye thus
The garb and outward sanctity of law?...

Duke. Woman, th'irrevocable breath of justice
Wavers not: he must die.

Bianca. Die! Fazio die! --
Ye gray and solemn murderers by charter!
Ye ermined manslaughter!...

Oh ye smooth Christians in your tones and looks
But in your hearts as savage as the tawny
And misbelieving African! (III.ii, p.65)

In context this speech is the complaint of someone who has committed the tragic “sin” of bearing false witness. The Duke sentences Fazio on the basis of her earlier testimony and the found body of Bartolo. Bianca claims here that the law is something “sacred” that these particular judges follow only outwardly. She shows how solidly she believes in the same European system they follow by accusing them of not being true Europeans. Fazio thus dramatizes a cruel necessity set in motion by individuals who sin. It takes a complacent view of human inequality and misfortune, attributing both to an exaggerated insistence upon individual agency and paradoxically to a theology of “just” rewards and punishments in this world. The absolutist racism of the last few lines, in a play written at the height of the Atlantic slave trade, only underscores the oppressive dogmatism informing Milman’s dramatic production.

It may be that Shelley enjoyed watching Fazio because of the extended scenes in which Bianca upbraids the judge. An active audience member, hearing a sentimental piece, may always retain its social critiques even though the work itself undermines them. Though he doubtless could have gotten them from Antigone , Measure for Measure or even

Mary Wollstonecraft's Maria, Shelley may be indebted to Milman for some of his dramatic images, especially for the political and moral context into which Milman puts them.

In general, Shelley turns Fazio's certainties into uncertainties. The central problem of The Cenci occurs in the last Act, when Beatrice, whom we saw order and administrate her father's murder in Act IV, defiantly and with extraordinary dignity castigates her judges and denies any guilt in the murder. Mary Shelley, in her notes to the play, wrote: "The Fifth Act is a masterpiece. It is the finest thing [P.B. Shelley] ever wrote, and may claim proud comparison not only with any contemporary, but preceding poet."²⁵ But Beatrice's actions at the play's end create a problem because of their mixture of good and ill. Her admirable critique of European law and society seems undermined by her insistence on her own innocence. As the "Preface" states, Beatrice engenders a

restless and anatomizing casuistry with which men seek the justification of Beatrice, yet feel that she has done what needs justification; it is in the superstitious horror with which they contemplate alike her wrongs and their revenge, that the dramatic character of what she did and suffered, consists. (*P & R*, 240)²⁶

²⁵The Complete Works, II, 158.

²⁶For summaries of the casuistry in criticism of Shelley see Hogle, Shelley's Process, notes in 365, and Stuart Sperry, Shelley's Major Verse: The Narrative and Dramatic Poetry (Cambridge, London: Harvard UP, 1988) 130-31. Stuart Curran and William Ulmer are virtually alone in finding that Beatrice's wrongs and circumstances outweigh her crimes and options. Ulmer writes: "Curran's darker view of the play strikes me as entirely just. It has the supreme virtue of recognizing that Beatrice and her world must be assessed together. The reciprocal interdependence of self and world in The Cenci focuses Shelley's tragic vision, generating a pessimism that ramifies from Beatrice to her society to the past" (Shelleyan Eros, 110). As Ulmer claims, Curran's view in Shelley's Cenci: Scorpions Ringed With Fire (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970) and in Annus Mirabilis is to attribute pessimism to Shelley. In Scorpions, Curran quotes a canceled epitaph to Shelley's original preface to "Epipsychidion": "He was an accomplished & amiable person but...his fate is an additional proof that 'The tree of Knowledge is not that

As Hogle writes,

To begin with, [The Cenci] tries to highlight and then explicitly answer *the* question posed in tragedy since Aeschylus and even before: to what extent is personal choice responsible for the evil that finally destroys some individuals, and how much is a tragic figure the nearly helpless victim of fate or cultural pressure?²⁷

Later, I will approach Hogle's and Ulmer's efforts to circumvent Shelley's binary opposition. For the moment I merely note that Coleridge claims that tragedy is only resolved in eschatology. This claim is a truly conservative justification of the ways of a God in this world.²⁸ The religiosity of The Cenci's characters is a refutation of Coleridge's other-worldliness, and an insistence upon not abandoning solutions to the social critique present in Osorio to states unknown. It is Coleridge's efforts to transcend the binary opposition that led him into abandoning critique and undue optimism, a mirror image of postmodern despair.

of Life.' By invoking Manfred, Shelley suggests his common accord with Byronic pessimism" (151). These readings, either of Manfred or The Cenci, are not my own. However, Curran's overall understanding of Shelley in Annus Mirabilis is more complex than Ulmer credits. For example, Curran writes: "Necessary as it is to discern the 'sad reality' of The Cenci or 'the unconnected exclamations of...agony' of Julian and Maddalo, to know hell is not to know how to make it pass away. Rather the opposite: to descend into hell is to surround oneself with its terms" (Annus Mirabilis 152). Hell is a postmodern vision that ascribes to Shelley the hell he would have us understand but transcend.

²⁷Shelley's Process, 148.

²⁸"the tragedy...[raised] the emotions, fears, and hopes which convince the inmost heart that their final cause is not to be discovered in the limits of a mere mortal life [and] force us into a presentiment, however dim, of a state in which those struggles of inward free will with outward necessity, which form the true subject of the tragedian, shall be reconciled and solved." Quoted in the previous chapter, from Raysor, I, 154; 1812.

One way out of the circular task of weighing Beatrice's wrongs and faults in the fifth Act itself, after all has occurred, is to return to the third Act, just after Beatrice has been raped by her father. Among the reasons that Shelley chose to dramatize a historical rape and parricide rather than, say, any number of historical revenge cycles of murder is in the nature of rape itself. In rape the physical and mental violence of the act are inextricable in a way unlike any other crime. Because it bears a hideously analogous relation to physical acts of love, rape is a crime that more obviously than others depends for its criminality not only on a criminal's intent but on the victim's perceptions of the act. Like parricide, the relations between the rapist and the raped are an inversion of Shelley's human ideal of love. Each is a case of someone turning what custom has made good between humans to his or her own evil nature. As Prometheus tells us: "Evil minds/ Change good to their own nature" (I.380-1).²⁹ In each case there is a special (if customary) possibility for overcoming what Cavell calls the "skepticism of the other" that is endemic to human interactions. In "On Love," Shelley writes

We are born into the world and there is something within us which from the instant that we live and move thirsts after its own likeness. It is probably in correspondence with this law that the infant drains milk from the bosom of its mother. (*P & R*, 473)

Shelley the skeptic is capable of this sort of refusal to accept Locke's *tabula rasa*. Shelley, remaining empirical, asserts the possibility of an innate characteristic upon observable phenomena. He transcends an otherwise crippling skepticism, without abandoning the skeptical stance, to assert a possible basis for hope. Sexual relations, as described in

²⁹As in Prometheus's line about punishment (see n. 12), these words express a dogma about evil's power that Shelley critiques in Prometheus Unbound. The line's appropriateness for The Cenci only confirms its flawed conception. See Brisman, 53.

Alastor, for example, also hold out the possibility of finding something like the self in another. So does the father-child bond. In rape or parricide there is, then, a special effort of skeptical avoidance of that other that necessarily coincides with the act.

Beatrice reaches her moment of avoidance--the point at which she no longer believes in her father's humanity--after he rapes her. Shelley sees her act of revenge as an error, and he shows how she comes to that error by making her into a virtuous but deeply dogmatic person from the beginning of the play. Her first line is "Pervert not truth,/ Orsino" (I.ii,1-2). Shelley believes in the possibility of truth. As we have seen in Strawson, the skeptic merely doubts that truth is provable.³⁰ But Beatrice believes in a certainty analogous to pervertably pure sexuality. Her relations with Orsino, for example, are an exercise in the dogma of chastity. Shelley reveals Beatrice's dogmatism to include straight denials of what she perceives. When her father shocks the banquet guests by joyfully announcing his own sons' deaths, she tries to refute him:

It is not true!--Dear Lady, pray look up.
 Had it been true--there is a God in Heaven--
 He would not live to boast of such a boon.
 Unnatural man, thou knowest that it is false. (I.iii.51-54)

This weak yet earnest denial, coming as it does before she impressively and passionately implores the guests to be taken away from her father, reveals the dogmatic weakness at the heart of Beatrice's character.

Count Cenci's surface of strength is built upon a lack of such dogmas. Cenci's own sarcastic critique of the society in which he lives is apt, as when he accuses the Pope of hoping that he, Cenci, remains rich and sinful so that the Pope may enjoy payoffs for

³⁰Hoagwood explains that the skeptic does "not show that nothing is true or that truth does not exist" (10).

“indulgences” (I.i.27-32). The Count sounds like a skeptic, inventing his own morality and rejecting the arbitrary moral rules of others, which experience has taught him are empty.

As to my character for what men call crime,
 Seeing I please my senses as I list,
 And vindicate that right with force or guile,
 It is a public matter, and I care not
 If I discuss it with you. I may speak
 Alike to you and my own conscious heart,
 For you give out that you have half reformed me;
 Therefore strong vanity will keep you silent,
 If fear should not; both will, I do not doubt.
 All men delight in sensual luxury;
 All men enjoy revenge, and most exult
 Over the tortures they can never feel,
 Flattering their secret peace with others' pain.
 But I delight in nothing else. I love
 The sight of agony, and the sense of joy,
 When this shall be another's and that mine;
 And I have no remorse and little fear,
 Which are, I think, the checks of other men. (I.i.68-85)

Sounding like Wordsworth's *Rivers*, Cenci employs the modern skepticism of crusty institutions to conclude that pure power governs all human relations. Shelley's source, which Mary Shelley appended to her "Note on The Cenci," calls the historical Francesco Cenci an "atheist, but does so via dogmatic accusation:

Sodomy was the least, and atheism the greatest, of the vices of Francesco; as it is proved by the tenor of his life; for he was three times accused of sodomy, and paid the sum of 100,000 crowns to government, in commutation of the punishment rightfully awarded to this crime: and concerning his religion, it is sufficient to state, that he never frequented any church...³¹

Shelley inverts the values of his orthodox source, confident as it is in the supreme wickedness of atheism, the religious sanctity of the church, as well as the morality of punishment. Shelley rolls these dogmas into Cenci himself, ironically not an atheist in The Cenci but a devout enjoyer of punishment. Through him, as much as through his “reformer” Beatrice, Shelley, dismantling the church’s claim to moral or religious authority, reveals punishment itself to come from Cenci’s own psychology. He is not the devil that Camillo and Beatrice call him. He enjoys watching pain because it confirms his power, and because, as the skeptic that church actions (among other causes) have made him, he lacks the sympathy with others’ selves. At the heart of Cenci’s confident-sounding skepticism, however, there is weakness just as there is in Beatrice, or else there would be no need for the Count to desire the sight of others’ pain, no need to rape Beatrice. Like Rivers, who claimed perfect emotional autonomy but spent his life in search for a companion, the Count is the Romantic dramatic figure who claims to be a rugged individual but who desperately needs to prop up that image. As Hogle writes:

³¹“Relation of the death of the family of the Cenci.” Complete Works, II, 159. The dogmatism of this source extends even to sanctifying the capital punishments of the Cenci family: “...Divine Justice, which would not allow so atrocious a wickedness to remain hid and unpunished, so ordered it, that the Count of Naples, to which the account of the death of Cenci was forwarded, began to entertain doubts concerning the mode by which he came by it, and sent a commissary to examine the body and to take informations” (161).

Shelley exaggerates the Shakespearean `self' to the point of questioning the direction of such a conception of character...the self-fashioner is easily tempted into configuring himself according to the great text of an enthroned Jupiter or superego.³²

The play, like so many Romantic texts, is a record of maturation by horror and betrayal. Within this horrible world Beatrice embodies the limits of a revolutionary spirit which relies on certainty, and which is always in need of a God to embody her abstract belief in the necessity of a moral controller in the universe, an abstract Power whose attributes change according to what Beatrice thinks the universe needs most. At first hers is a God of pity and refuge, then of revenge. The Beatrice who calls out "Oh that the earth would gape! Hide me, Oh God!" (II.i,111) will become the Beatrice who refers to the "unappealable God" of punishment now judging her dead father's soul. The rape causes her to embrace a doctrine of necessity that justifies her violence. The feeling of inescapability that The Cenci so powerfully creates is a product of the dogmatic necessitarianism of its characters. They see no way out, so neither can we.

Hogle's observation about self-fashioning and the Jupiter effect, then, seems fair, but Hogle's point is that self-fashioning, when based upon belief in a core self, is *per se* the source of self-tyrannization:

Neither [Beatrice nor the Count] would regard the other as a figure to be deployed, `known,' controlled, penetrated, or even condemned from a subjective distance if both did not assume an essential `object' at the deep core of a person's demeanor that seems entirely self-determined and thus separate from the interpreting thoughts probing into the mystery of its surface. (155)

³²Shelley's Process, 149.

For Hogle, the moral of The Cenci's pessimism is a general critique of selfhood, as if the core self were inherently at odds with sympathy, which Hogle calls "transference."³³ On the contrary, it is the evisceration of Beatrice's selfhood that moves her to clutch at external certainties. As we see her in the beginning of the third Act, Beatrice skirts close to what she calls madness:

(She enters staggering, and speaking wildly.)

Reach me that handkerchief! My brain is hurt;

My eyes are full of blood; just wipe them for me --

I see but indistinctly... (III.i.1-3)

Beatrice's "madness" consists of a change in the thoughts that are her perceptions. The other characters see no blood on her eyes. The blood on her gates of perception (to use Blake's term) is an "indistinct" urge for bloody revenge against her father. She sees indistinctly because her reality is unsettled:

The pavement sinks under my feet! The walls

Spin round! I see a woman weeping there,

And standing calm and motionless, whilst I

Slide giddily as the world reels.--My God!

The beautiful blue heaven is flecked with blood!

³³Hogle's The Cenci is the site of impersonal "drives" and needs that lead deluded "characters" to fashion their own selfhoods, which are, necessarily, their hells. A "drive" must "prevent itself," though through what agency, if not the self's will, it is not clear. Space is too limited here to discuss Hogle's key terms, such as "transference" (see Hogle 15). Hogle describes in "transference" an innate drive to sympathy not much different from what Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley himself dramatize, *against* skepticism of the other *self*. It matters less whether transference is a "center" than that in practice, Hogle conceives of transference between individual wills. What else is a will than a self?

The sunshine on the floor is black! The air
 Is changed to vapors such as the dead breathe
 In charnel-pits! Pah! I am choked! There creeps
 A clinging, black, contaminating mist
 About me--'t is substantial, heavy, thick;
 I cannot pluck it from me, for it glues
 My fingers and my limbs to one another,
 And eats into my sinews, and dissolves
 My flesh to a pollution, poisoning
 The subtle, pure, and inmost spirit of life!
 My God! I never knew what the mad felt
 Before; for I am mad beyond all doubt! (III.i.9-25)

Like that of Shelley's madman in Julian and Maddalo, Beatrice's madness is a refusal to adopt a better picture of the universe than her unwilling perceptions tell her exists. In that sense, she is mad because she was unskeptical; she is weak insofar as her expectations fail her. The "black mist" that "contaminates" Beatrice is analogous to Demogorgon's terrible black shapelessness in Prometheus Unbound. There Demogorgon represents unknowable Necessity, with whom Asia, or Love, miraculously converses. The purpose of Asia's conversation with Demogorgon is self-knowledge; starting from a sense of herself that only an allegorical character can possess, Asia can fearlessly discover even more by confronting Necessity directly. In The Cenci, Beatrice cannot converse with uncertainty. Beatrice is enveloped by a shapeless mist that she calls "pollution," suggesting that her "necessity" is the sexual violence that just occurred. Beatrice, clinging to dogmas, rejects empirical experience, finally deciding that her father never existed and that what he did to her cannot be named. Beatrice's denial of reality comes because her sense of self, based as it was

upon collapsible dogmas, was not strong enough to withstand attack. The result is that she embodies Hume's mental bundle:

What hideous thought was that I had even now?

'T is gone; and yet its burden remains here

O'er these dull eyes—upon this weary heart! (III.i.29-31)

Despite her shows of strength later in the play, Beatrice reveals the weakness of her mental foundations here, where thoughts pass through her as if cinematically, but without anyone watching the screen.

Beatrice's gradual progression toward a new certainty based on revenge, then, is grounded on the evisceration of self. Beatrice first introduces parricide as a metaphor, showing that, though she desires it, it is not yet so firmly placed in her new reality: "Like Parricide.../Misery has killed its father: yet its father/ Never like mine...O God! What thing am I?" (III.i.36-38). There is something terribly modern about asking that question, and yet the desperation with which Beatrice asks it makes her, not the modern philosopher summoning the courage to face the abyss, but the victim of circumstance thrown headlong into that abyss.³⁴ The arbitrary origin of how parricide enters her head as a metaphor suggests that she is *the* postmodern being: a victim of linguistic forces, a product of unconscious drives. And yet the coupling of that existential state with her next question,

³⁴It is possible to read Beatrice's question "What thing am I?" as rhetorical, not about a loss of identity, but a despairing realization of her identity as one raped by her father. See, for example, Stuart Curran, *Annus Mirabilis*, 131, which speaks of "the identity suddenly thrust upon her." My conclusions, however, do not change with this reading. There is as much existential horror in being force-fed an identity as there is in having none, and indeed, Curran has written about Beatrice as an existential nightmare. See *Scorpions*, 129-30 and *Annus Mirabilis*, 120-36.

“What thing am I?” points to Shelley’s rejection of selflessness, not his call for more of the same. A moment later, Beatrice repeats the question:

Oh, what am I?

What name, what place, what memory shall be mine?

What retrospects, outliving even despair? (III.i.74-76)

Hume’s theater of the mind, a metaphor for the evisceration of self, is a hell to Beatrice. Hume wrote that “The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations.”³⁵ Theatrical skepticism is a hell to her because she thinks she needs dogma to survive, not a theater of endless illusions. Her cries of “Oh God!” underline that dogmatic need for us. What Shelley is suggesting, then, is that her need for dogma and her lack of identity are intertwined, the one causing the other in turns. After this moment in which she feels she does not know herself, Beatrice regains what she calls sanity by asserting a doctrine of necessity. If the body of Lucretia before her really is Lucretia, then Beatrice is herself a daughter who was raped:

For then if this be truth, that other too
Must be a truth, a firm enduring truth,
Linked with each lasting circumstance of life,
Never to change... (III.i.60-3)

³⁵David Hume, A Treatise on Human Nature: Being An Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, rev. P.H. Nidditch, 2nd ed (Oxford: Clarendon P; New York: Oxford UP, 1978) 253.

By the time he wrote The Cenci Shelley thought this necessitarianism a superstitious belief in cause and effect. Demogorgon contradicts Beatrice's assertion when he says that "All things are subject" to change except "eternal Love" (Prometheus Unbound II.iv.119-120). As Mary Shelley, in her note to Prometheus Unbound, wrote:

The prominent feature of Shelley's theory of the destiny of the human species was, that evil is not inherent in the system of the creation, but an accident that might be expelled ... Shelley believed that mankind had only to will that there should be no evil, and there would be none. ³⁶

The note is apt, for it calls for an act of will, but on the part of the collective as much as the individual. In fact, Beatrice has no real agency in The Cenci, no real selfhood, though in the weakness of her vengeance, she believes that she does, just as she believes what Mary Shelley states Percy did not: the metaphysical necessity of evil. In every speech after her rape this belief seems present, as it is, for example, when she efficiently removes a problem that kept Hamlet uncertain for an entire play. Lucretia complains that they are to kill Cenci "without confession!" but Beatrice invents a theological answer:

Oh!

Believe that heaven is merciful and just,
And will not add our dread necessity
To the amount of his offences. (IV.ii.12-15)

Dripping with irony, this passage shows how Beatrice can speak of a divine mercy that will overlook the consequences of her lack of mercy. As The Borderers does to Rivers, Shelley's text undercuts her speech and shows, in her lack of self-consciousness, a radical

³⁶The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, II, 269

weakness undermining her superficial confidence. There is an analogy to her subject formation: it is not from her subject formation *per se* that her evil mistake stems but rather from Beatrice's particular circumstances, conditions that have led to her peculiarly damaged, dogmatic weakness.

After acquiring her self-serving necessitarian crutch, Beatrice builds two claims upon it: she asserts the unnamability of her wrong and she asserts that the unnamable wrong must be avenged by her as God's own instrument of justice. The existence of an anthropomorphic God who desires justice in human mundanity cannot, for Beatrice, be compatible with the truth of her father's act, making her the servant of her own construction. Therefore that act and that person must be erased. Lucretia asks her to hide her wrongs, but she replies,

I hide them not.

What are the words which you would have me speak?

I, who can feign no image in my mind

Of that which has transformed me. (III.i.108-110)

The ironic parallel of this line in Prometheus Unbound is Demogorgon's answer to Asia that "the deep truth is imageless" (II.iv.116), which reveals the need for skepticism, not of the humanity of other humans, but of a certainty that underlies all truths. Beatrice's inability to image forth her rape is an attempt to fend off Demogorgon's skepticism, to clutch certainty in the wake of self-shattering transformational experience.

Yet, who are we to say that Beatrice's silence is wrong? Perhaps Shelley's most important critic and editor, Mary Shelley, repeated the lacuna in The Cenci in the source she appended to it:

Francesco [Cenci] carried his wicked debauchery to such an excess, that he caused girl (of whom he constantly kept a number in his house), and also common courtezans, to sleep in the bed of his wife, and often endeavored, by force and threats, to debauch his daughter Beatrice, who was now grown up, and exceedingly beautiful --” Here the narrative breaks off, and there is a note from Mary Shelley: “The details here are horrible, and unfit for publication.”³⁷

It is perhaps worth noting as well that the source seems to be headed for a voyeuristic if reproving account of Cenci’s “wicked debaucheries,” just as the lengthy descriptions of the executions (which Mary Shelley included) seem to salivate off the page. It seems out of place, then, when William Ulmer accuses Shelley of a failure of nerve, and of himself becoming subject to “language” by not having Beatrice speak:

As the reflex of an evasive “delicacy,” Beatrice’s inability to say “my father raped me” shows the play internalizing the moralistic strictures of bourgeois propriety. Rape is eradicated from Shelley’s writing, and from Beatrice’s speech, by an imposition of power disturbingly rape-like itself...We witness a final metalepsis, the play’s corruption by the debased world over which it aspired to wield reformatory influence. Instead of compelling spectators to see themselves reflected in Beatrice, the distorting mirror of The Cenci compelled Shelley to see himself reflected in the forces that deny rape access to stage, courtroom, and even consciousness.

This complicity provides Shelley’s investigation of writing its final tragic irony. The Cenci makes the poet a cooperative participant in the reconsolidation of oppression --a possibility Shelley may deny elsewhere but finally cannot deny here” (127).

³⁷Collected Works, II, 159-60.

But as Mary Shelley's own matching lacuna suggests, she could not merely have said "he raped me" without going on to describe the rape, and that way playing into a prurient interest much like Cenci's own when he says he likes to watch suffering in others. And aside from the undue faith that Ulmer places in speaking ones wrongs, as if that act always leads to some power righting them, Ulmer seems to ignore the very overdetermined role that her silence plays. When Orsino suggests that she "Let the law/ Avenge thee" (III.i.152-3), Beatrice gives her absolute refusal to publish her wrongs:

If I could find a word that might make known
 The crime of my destroyer; and that done
 My tongue should like a knife tear out the secret
 Which cankers my heart's core; aye, lay all bare
 So that my unpolluted fame should be
 With vilest gossips a stale mouthed story;
 A mock, a bye-word, an astonishment:—
 If this were done, which never shall be done,
 Think of the offender's gold... (III.i.154-62)

Beatrice's understanding of the corruption of the "justice system" of her time correct, as Cenci's purchase of indulgences has already shown. She is not only afraid of the gossip and shame to which she would be exposed; she is skeptical that there exists in society the capacity for justice as she understands it. Since even Orsino's call for legal action show that the "law" is merely an instrument for revenge, Beatrice understandably concludes that she must exact justice through whatever effective revenge exists. In following the complete

pattern of skepticism leading to the conclusion that power alone defines human relations, Beatrice mirrors her father.³⁸

If Beatrice would cathartically speak her wrongs rather than repressing them, then she would not here begin to develop her flimsy claim of separate, internal and unknowable selfhood that culminates in her resistance against the tribunal. There is, though, the more disturbing implication that Beatrice is not merely a strong-willed calculatingly internalized plotter in her silence. In fact, she has already internalized the shame that she cites to Orsino. When Lucretia asks her “What has thy father done?” her answer is “What have I done?/ Am I not innocent?” (III.i.60-70). The question form indicates a repressed belief that she is guilty of her father’s crime, as she knows her society would view her. Her reason for silence is a question that illustrates the irrational yet not entirely avoidable step that she has already taken: allowing the act of another to shame herself. She seems not just unwilling, but unable to articulate her wrong. As Asia tells us of Prometheus, “He gave man speech, and speech created thought” (II.iv.72). Removing the necessity of speaking would remove the need to think the event which Beatrice acknowledges has transformed her. Her avoidance of speaking the rape reveals her claim of selfhood to be built upon a belief that she is not autonomous, that the acts of her father have determined her. That avoidance, then, is an avoidance of her own selfhood that makes possible her avoidance of the human self within her father.

There is the question of whether it is possible for Beatrice not to “think” the rape yet to understand everything peripheral to it; that it will cause her shame if it becomes known, that she must avenge it somehow, that it was a thing done to her. We cannot directly know her mind; significantly, she is a Shakespearean heroine with not a single soliloquy. This absence of soliloquy in a character whose internal life is as important to the drama as Beatrice’s points to how her selfhood is too strongly socially constructed. If only she were

³⁸The importance of mirroring in The Cenci is fully explored in Hogle, Shelley’s Process, 147-162.

able to find solitude, to form her self apart from the pressures of her vicious or ineffective family members and the equally vicious or ineffective surrounding society, she might build a self strong enough to fend off the damage caused by her experiences. Her wish, as she desperately begs for it in the first Act, is to be taken away from her father, to achieve a separation that she never achieves. Her father only rapes her after dragging her (with Lucretia) to a remote castle. The crime occurs away from social scrutiny, yet not as far away as Cenci thinks, since Beatrice is able to hire killers to enact revenge. That revenge, too, is conceived in isolation, like any crime. No one will find out, and then when they do, as long as nothing is spoken, there will be no consequence. The Cenci thwarts the earnest desires of its characters to be alone in order to commit crimes. That society is not therefore a reason to hope, a source of fruitful shame as Coleridge envisions it. Society's inescapability in The Cenci, as in Byron's Marino Faliero, crushes the individual self and makes morality impossible.

Yet, Beatrice's selfhood hardly seems crushed in the last Act, when she speaks in self-righteous denial of parricide. We may recall, however, the role of individual selfhood in the heroine's socially critical speeches at the end of Fazio: to re-assert the contingent nature of such critique and to shore up the institutions that form its object. Milman's Bianca experiences mental pain entirely because of her own bad acts. Shelley blames the individual for her acts, but avoids Milman's one-way simplification by mixing her faults and her wrongs inextricably. The difference between The Cenci and Fazio is not merely that Fazio espouses certain dogmas with which Shelley disagrees, but that Fazio supports the reliance upon dogma by showing that deviation from dogma is punishable by death. The Cenci, on the contrary, shows how the dogmatic impulse itself can lead to death.

In contrast to Bianca's speeches against the Duke-as-judge, when Beatrice scorns the threat of tortures that the judge makes against her, the audience is forced to acknowledge her humanness even as it recoils from her strategy:

Judge. Confess, or I will warp
 Your limbs with such keen tortures...

Beatrice. Tortures! Turn
 The rack henceforth into a spinning wheel!
 Torture your dog, that he may tell when last
 He lapped the blood his master shed...not me!
 My pangs are of the mind, and of the heart,
 And of the soul; aye of the inmost soul,
 Which weeps within tears as of burning gall
 To see, in this ill world where none are true,
 My kindred false to their deserted selves. (V.iii.60-69)

When Bianca of Fazio says that her pain's within, there is no reason to question the nature of that pain; she is simply anguished over her own actions. But Beatrice's inner pain seems more complex, since she seems so certain of herself in defying the judge. Beatrice seems even at this moment to be lying to the judge, but his blatant sadism obviously deserves her spite. The Duke's harshest implacability in Fazio comes nowhere near this judge's lust for violence. The judge, of course, is trying to force Beatrice to acknowledge what he believes is in her mind. In refusing to give in to the institution of torture, Beatrice thwarts the power of the corrupt state to have that mental access. The irony of her position—saying that her kindred are “false to their deserted selves” when she knows they admit the truth—is that she is playing the same game of power that the judge plays. He says, “I can force you to reveal your mind,” proving himself to be a cynical wielder of amoral power, a skeptic of human benevolence. There is undeniably something similar in the two plays' heroines' defiant cry of “my pain's within.” What do they mean? Where else would it be? Is the pain of the body not felt “within?” As Cavell puts it: “either

I am inside my body or else I am my body.”³⁹ The torturer believes that the person is the body, and cannot hide when the body is subject to force. Beatrice defies this connection between body and soul upon which torture is based. She asserts a separate, unassailable selfhood “within,” but what evidence does the audience have of that selfhood, other than her assertions? What we see is a dignified, righteous liar, a paradoxical, self-disintegrating soul. The price Beatrice pays for her skeptical deconstruction of physiognomic connections is an evisceration of her already weak selfhood, not a triumph of internalization. Who is she at the end? Without any clear identity she seems a product of the forces arrayed against her.

Beatrice’s mix of skeptical success and ethical failure is one way in which The Cenci conducts a dialogue with itself over the usefulness, ethics, and limits of skeptical critique while it allegorizes the consequences of revolutionary violence. In a critique of myths of human agency, The Cenci seeks to show how circumstance may cause so radical a change in the perceptions of a victim of oppression that the victim can only understand reality itself as a place that trades violence for survival. In Prometheus Unbound, Shelley asserts a hopeful side of skepticism that is just as rigorous in its doubt as the pessimism of The Cenci.

Skepticism Unbinding Skepticism

Skepticism becomes incoherent if thought of as a permanent cure for dogmatism, or a permanent anything. It is, rather, a necessity to be acknowledged and possibly, occasionally, surmounted. The effort to overcome skepticism involved, for Shelley, a twofold movement in his writing epitomized by the dual dramatic project of The Cenci and Prometheus Unbound. Written concurrently, one presents a bleak, constricting social

³⁹Claim of Reason, 397.

fabric, and the other an abstract vision of freedom. One, set in the past, is the dramatization of conditions of the past and a warning about the future. The other, beginning at the end of the present, so to speak, is a representation of possibility, yet written self-consciously from within our fallen condition still fraught with hierarchies. The dramas are united in their treatment of the need to acknowledge skepticism coupled with the need to transcend it. Beatrice, though a skeptic of her age's corrupt structures, needs to be more skeptical of the structures of thought of her age in order to become less skeptical of her father's humanity. She needs to learn what Asia learns from Demogorgon and from herself: that rather than clutching at God-ideas, it is better to cling to love, the "Life of life," which Shelley defined as going out of oneself.⁴⁰ Prometheus, often glossed as the drama's representation of intellect, is the character who learns the need for love, and Asia, who in this allegory is the heart, learns skepticism.

In reading Prometheus Unbound after The Cenci, the temptation is to find relief from the latter's depressing monochrome, finding in the former a unified, if utopian, vision of hope, sounding universal themes and avoiding The Cenci's dark doubts. Such, for example, is Earl Wasserman's reading which begins with the premise that Prometheus "must be whatever Shelley's philosophy provides for as eternal and immutable."

⁴⁰For an extended comparison of the two dramas, see Curran, Annus Mirabilis, 120-30. Curran compares symbolism and plot to find, for example, Beatrice's Prometheanism: "In the extremity of her vision Beatrice apprehends the ultimate extension of these images: that her grave, the final prison, will be indistinguishable from her father's bed, where she will be confined and violated forever. The incessant rhythms of sexual attack are in a human realm equivalent to the daily tortures Jupiter's eagle inflicts upon Prometheus" (122). Curran's comparative reading of the plays is my starting point. I am also in debt to Hogle's reading of Prometheus Unbound in Shelley's Process for underlining the transitional nature of the plot; to Susan Hawk Brisman for her reading of miscommunication between Prometheus and the Earth; and to Carol Jacobs for defining the meanings of the "recall" in the first act in Uncontainable Romanticism: Shelley, Brontë, Kleist (Baltimore, London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989) 26ff.

Prometheus is therefore “Existence itself” or “the One Mind.”⁴¹ Without having space to do justice to Wasserman’s powerful allegorization, I merely note that it is not compatible with a drama I read as re-asserting mutability, despite Prometheus’s curious comment that he and Asia will remain “unchanged” for the foreseeable future.⁴²

Stuart Curran’s seminal exegesis of the relations between Prometheus Unbound and a world history of myth similarly attaches a unifying movement to Shelley’s drama that I do not discover there: “he adopts the story of Prometheus as an ur-myth, distinct from any of the world’s practicing religions but capable of subsuming their major symbols.” Though Curran sees the drama as a unifying precursor to other myths, he also suggests a way in which Shelley’s myth dismantles myth itself: “If most writers on mythology confine their subject to what, following Jacob Bryant, might be called a ‘new system,’ what distinguishes Shelley is his endeavor to enlarge his mythic conception to include a catholicity of interpretations.”⁴³ When Jerrold Hogle refutes Curran’s ur-mythic reading, finding that Shelley’s “mythography” cannot be that of a “syncretist,”⁴⁴ he both clarifies a problem and knocks on a partially open door. Hogle’s view of the drama as specifically anti-syncretic seems to fit best with the skepticism everywhere present in the play. Shelley’s myth is an exposé of ideological self-justifications, like those of Count Cenci and Beatrice, that simultaneously lean upon and recreate outworn creeds. The allegory of Prometheus Unbound is specifically provisional in suggesting that constant re-mythification, though potentially dangerous, is also the only possible means to performing and re-performing mental liberation. The planned obsolescence of Shelley’s poem, however, is not deconstructive in a postmodern sense, since its movement requires not

⁴¹Earl R. Wasserman, Shelley: A Critical Reading (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1971) 255-56

⁴²See II.iii.24. Even here Prometheus does not promise eternity, nor, even if he did, is he to be trusted as the play’s narrator. His unreliability enforces the dramatic dialectics of this text.

⁴³Annus Mirabilis, 44.

⁴⁴Shelley’s Process, 169.

only skeptical re-reading of old texts but, crucially, a provisional suspension of disbelief to write new ones. That latter act seems beyond the postmodern critical imagination.⁴⁵

The issue of unification in Prometheus Unbound is closely tied to that of agency, passivity, and necessity. Is the drama's plot a natural inevitability, as many readers have concluded?⁴⁶ What is the meaning of Prometheus's "action," in the first Act; or, to step back, is what he does by recalling his curse an action at all?⁴⁷ A closer look at the problem of necessity in Shelley must precede a reading of the play to answer these questions. In the "Preface" to Prometheus Unbound, Shelley gives a model for his mixed view of the interactions between original creation and external determinants: "Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors and musicians, are in one sense the creators and in another the creations of their age" (*P & R*, 135). This remark is not one of strict, one-way necessity. The inclusion of philosophers in this list, consistent with the way Shelley would

⁴⁵Though the debt is most often unstated, and though I at times disagree with his positions, my understanding of Shelley's skepticism follows in the footsteps of Hoagwood's work on Shelley's prose in Skepticism and Ideology. See, for example, 3-4 and 38-39 for explanations of how skepticism and action are of necessity related, and 68-69 for a contrast between Jacques Derrida's acceptance of the "infinite regress" of language and Shelley's escape from the "epistemological circle": "Derrida offers thus a critique of regressive absurdity: signification is doomed if it rests upon an object that is always absent, always deferred. Shelley is also sensitive to the problem, but he eludes the infinite regress, rather than merely exposing it....Shelley arrests the regression and eliminates the absurdity that, as Derrida points out, afflicts the more conventional notions of signification."

⁴⁶See, for example, Angela Leighton, Shelley and the Sublime: An Interpretation of the Major Poems (Cambridge, London, New York: Cambridge UP, 1984): "Thus, while the political message of Prometheus Unbound is the inevitable fall of tyranny and liberation of the race, the dramatic interest of the work centres on how those events may be imaginatively motivated and apprehended" (74).

⁴⁷Frederick Pottle, for example, in "The Role of Asia in the Dramatic Action of Shelley's Prometheus Unbound." Percy Bysshe Shelley: Modern Critical Views. ed., intro. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1985), saw Prometheus's recall as the drama's *only* act. (Originally in Shelley: A Collection of Critical Essays. ed. George Ridenour (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965)).

trump philosophy with poetry in the Defense of Poetry, implies that there is no transcendent rational system available to explain the sweep of human history. It is not, however, that there certainly is no equivalent of Newton's mechanism for human interactions, but that we can never apprehend such a system, so that the reformer is best off describing provisional universals:

But it is a mistake to suppose that I dedicate my poetical compositions solely to the direct enforcement of reform, or that I consider them in any degree as containing a reasoned system on the theory of human life. Didactic poetry is my abhorrence...My purpose has hitherto been simply to familiarize the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence; aware that until the mind can love, and admire, and trust, and hope, and endure, reasoned principles of moral conduct are cast upon the highway of life which the unconscious passenger tramples into dust, although they would bear the harvest of happiness. (*P & R*, 135)

The passage avoids denying the existence of discoverable principles of morality, and merely asserts that without the passions, without love, such principles are irrelevant. That assertion, however, is quite large. For while Shelley is not calling for a specific program of reform, the deeper grounds for reforming action are what he seeks to describe, as we have seen, "I have, what a Scotch philosopher characteristically terms, 'a passion for reforming the world': what passion incited him to write and publish his book, he omits to explain" (*P & R*, 135). As C. E. Pulos notes, this passion runs up against any strict necessitarianism: "There is, perhaps, a theoretical conflict between Shelley's necessitarianism and his passion for reforming the world, on the ground that any form of determinism reduces man to the status of passive and irresponsible agent."⁴⁸ Pulos, who

⁴⁸The Deep Truth, 61.

sees a deep necessitarian strain in Prometheus Unbound, reconciles the conflict by removing necessity's ontological reality: "...Necessity is an unknown power and any conception of it must be a fiction, a creation of the imagination" (*P & R*, 66). Pulos's escape into fiction allows him to load much onto Shelleyan Necessity:

Scepticism, however, often leads to some kind of faith. In Shelley's case, it led to faith in the essential soundness of his already active passion for reforming the world. In accordance with this faith, therefore, he held that Necessity, though an unknown power, must operate in favor of the perfectarians. (64)

In other words, Pulos reads Prometheus Unbound as not merely hopeful for a apocalyptic reform but, like Christian dogma, insistent that the day will come and in the form Shelley describes. But Shelley, I think, was not so sure. He would have liked, perhaps, to appropriate a hopeful doctrine of necessity from the uses to which conservatives like Malthus and his own Count Cenci put it. But Shelley placed his hope not so much in necessity as in uncertainty itself. Demogorgon is, as we shall see, better read as Uncertainty bringing down the false godhead than as Necessity, despite, or perhaps because of, his shifting self-identifications.

The beginning of Prometheus Unbound begins an exit from the closed, tragic necessity of The Cenci. The recantation is only a beginning, but it crucially addresses the very theme of totality and inescapability by claiming that the past need *not* be prologue. As Carol Jacobs has shown, Shelley's Prometheus suffers from an uncertain identity because, contrary to his name, he does not know when Jupiter will fall, only that he will.⁴⁹

⁴⁹Prometheus does not know the hour of Jupiter's fall because he is not a prophet "in the gross sense of the word," as Shelley puts it in the Defense: meaning those who can "foretell the form as surely as they know the spirit of events" (483). As Jacobs points out, however, his lack of knowledge in this instance is curious: "What does it mean to have a figure who promises the coming of the millennium, whose very name, in fact, marks him

Mercury: ... Once more answer me.

Thou knowest not the period of Jove's power?

Prometheus: I know but this, that it must come. (I.411-413)

Even in these lines, necessity is not at all clear. What is the nature and source of Prometheus's knowledge? Prometheus is far from a reliable source in the first Act. He is not simply "reformed" after he decides to pity Jupiter. Well after that decision, Prometheus still defines himself in relation to Jupiter: he tells the Earth, "I am his foe./ The Titan" (I.247-8). Though much has changed since his vengeful stance at the top of the Act, there seems to be a long way to go, longer even than the Act. The suggestion is that without Asia's actions in the second Act, Prometheus cannot learn alone how to bring about

Jupiter's fall from power over himself.⁵⁰ We have already learned to be suspicious of his naked assertions, given his (fruitful) propensity for recalling them later. Since Prometheus's statements are not dictates with metaphysical necessity, Prometheus's unsupported "knowledge" that Jupiter must fall is not evidence of necessity but of the belief he requires to endure.

Given the contingent nature of Prometheus's thoughts, we are prompted to ask, why does feeling in Prometheus change at the moment that it does? We are told of the eons

as a fore-thinker (Prometheus), but who cannot name the hour of his enemy's fall?" (*Uncontainable Romanticism*, 24). Jacobs sees the answer in the way in which Prometheus begins the act by insisting upon his own power to reverse his fate as an oppressed rebel: "Prometheus wishes to repent and thereby to prove the power of his words, to reaffirm his own identity or even to become conscious of his past errors in order to transcend them. And if he cannot authentically renounce his will to power, this might be because the very desire for repentance reasserts that will...Recalling cannot at this moment continue to serve as the remembrance of a particular consciousness, the repetition of a particular voice, or a revocation brought about by the will of a particular subject" (27). The deferment of the revolution to the third act supports this thesis. Jacobs's de Manian readings, however, focus too narrowly on the ways in which the drama refers to the inadequacies of language. The poem also holds out hope for language, as in Asia's lines on Prometheus: "He gave man speech, and speech created thought,/ Which is the measure of the universe" (II.72-3), and "Language is a perpetual Orphic song,/ Ruling with daedal harmony a throng/ Of thoughts and forms, which else senseless and shapeless were" (IV.415-17). Brisman reads these lines as claims for world-creative power: "Promethean utterance strives to bring word and world into being simultaneously and to make their single presence the ground of all signification" (58).

⁵⁰See Marlon B. Ross, "Shelley's Wayward Dream-Poem: The Apprehending Reader in *Prometheus Unbound*," *Keats-Shelley Journal* 36 (1987): 110-133: "Imaginative reformers can bring society to the brink of egalitarian community, but, as with the French Revolution, unless they are psychologically prepared for sustaining such a community, their dreams will be trampled in the dust. While strengthening the reader's capacity for individual envisioning, Shelley must somehow also exercise the capacity for communal dreaming" (112).

that he has waited for freedom. Why does it happen in the play's "now?"⁵¹ If Prometheus's move toward pity is essentially random, not willed by an autonomous subject, then what does this randomness mean for the possibility of a rational revolution via rebellious critique? The question applies equally to The Cenci, where the analogy is, why does the virtuous and courageous Beatrice fail to make Prometheus's choice? What stops her from pitying her father, rather than coming to kill him? Shelley severed belief from will; we cannot control what we believe and we certainly cannot control those thoughts within us that are our perceptions of what seems to exist outside of us. Though for Shelley "our actions, sentiments, and probability judgments are *ours* , phenomenal rather than absolute," Shelley did not avoid "acknowledging facticity" (9, 58). In this he follows William Drummond: "Ideas (sensible data-carriages) of intellect or of imagination (chimeras, hallucinations) `do not always present themselves to the mind by an act of will'"(58).⁵² All things exist as they are perceived, but I cannot simply decide to think that there is a rock in my pocket if I do not perceive one to be there. Perception is passive thought. Nor is perception the only kind of thought that is passive. Belief, too, has passive elements that may even defy the conclusions of reason.

However, this passivity does not show that Prometheus and Beatrice are not subjects, for even in the Humean model of the mind as a theater of flitting images, many images are available from which the self may choose.⁵³ Beatrice's weakness consists of choosing that ones most often and most insistently presented to her. But even that answer

⁵¹As Frederick Pottle wrote, "Though the opposition counts distinguished names, majority opinion seems agreed that there is only one action in the whole so-called drama, and that action is completed before the First Act has hardly got under way. Prometheus announces at line 53 that he pities Jupiter; the remaining 2557 lines, it is maintained, consist merely of the unrolling necessary consequences of that action...This does not accord at all with what I find the text saying." (47).

⁵²See Sir William Drummond, Academical Questions. ed., Terence Hoagwood (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1984) 13.

⁵³See A Treatise on Human Nature, 253.

is inadequate because it is based on an intentional model. In Bernard Williams's reading of the Sophoclean character in Shame and Necessity,⁵⁴ Williams notes that in Oedipus at Colonus Oedipus makes a case that what he did was not his "fault," that "he did not really *do* the things for which he blinded himself--and in a notably compact expression: 'I suffered those deeds more than I acted them'" (68). To what is this statement a response? To the question, asked about Oedipus's killing of his father and incest with his mother,

Is it as though such things had happened, but not by his agency--that Laius had died, for instance, indeed been killed, but, as Oedipus first believed and then, for a short while, hoped, by someone else? The whole of the Oedipus Tyrannus, that dreadful machine, moves to the discovery of just one thing, that *he did it*. Do we understand the terror of that discovery only because we share magical beliefs in blood-guilt, or archaic notions of responsibility? Certainly not: we understand it because we know that in the story of one's life there is an authority exercised by what one has done, and not merely by what one has intentionally done...*What has happened to him, in fact, is that he has brought it about*. That is the point of Oedipus's words at Colonus. The terrible thing that happened to him, through no fault of his own, was that he did those things. (69-70)

Williams calls the kind of regret that Oedipus suffers "an agent's regret, and it is in the nature of action that such regrets cannot be eliminated, that one's life cannot be partitioned into some things that one does intentionally and other things that merely happen to one." (70) To decide that Prometheus is not a subject is to insist upon a fire-wall between intended acts and unintended ones. Prometheus's moves throughout Prometheus Unbound, however, defy such a distinction. As Cavell writes,

⁵⁴(Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: U of California P, 1993).

If I say that any action can be done actively or passively, then I should say that an action done through will is done passively...To act through will is to be commanded by oneself, perhaps driven; it is to be a good soldier...Kant, I take it, was of the opinion that the best one can hope for in our present circumstances is to be commanded by the will, and he called this freedom. Nietzsche called it suffering, passiveness, on the ground that our will is not, not yet, our own.⁵⁵

As we shall see when confronting Joanna Baillie's and Lord Byron's dramas, the will in Romantic drama is not the complete self. Prometheus needs to understand the way in which his will is not all his own before he is able to reach out to his lost love, Asia. He comes close to this realization when he refuses "submission" because he suggests to himself (and Mercury) that there can be no submission without an autonomous will, and there can be no autonomous will if it submits. But that is not all that Prometheus said there: he also said that he *would* not submit, continuing to think of himself, paradoxically, as an autonomous will in rebellion.

Cavell, like Williams, locates the distinction primarily in Kant, but it is also Augustinian; the need to pin blame, to accuse another of sin. The Augustinian model Shelley combats in Prometheus Unbound comes directly from Paradise Lost. Milton complicates the question of agency in the story of the fall in Paradise Lost, and not only by making Satan a powerful, "subtle" rhetorician; blaming the fall on Satan does not solve the problem of whether God is ultimately responsible. Satan himself, though he would seem to be the locus of the pure act of will in the poem, is never in control, always instead carried away by himself. Whose agency, then, is responsible for evil? God supplies the answer to the all-important question of the fall of man, "whose fault?"

Whose but his own? Ingrate, he had of me

⁵⁵Claim of Reason, 384.

All he could have; I made him just and right,
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall. (III.96-99)⁵⁶

The pure act of will as disobedience remains, at least in this view. The theological answer, however, may be not as significant as the question itself, “whose fault?” which assumes the limited possibilities of God, Satan (the Manichaean position), or Adam and Eve. Why is the fall anyone’s fault? In Prometheus Unbound, Shelley reconfigures both the “fall” and the fault so that neither can be made an excuse for the punishment of humanity Milton’s God assigns. Yet the problem of self-punishment that is everywhere evident in Milton’s treatment of Satan is also central to Shelley’s drama. Prometheus Unbound does not do away with the subject, which would be to do away with the agent for change. Rather, it suggests a new way of becoming master of oneself that does not require one to be master of anyone else, as Demogorgon promises, “the man remains/ Sceptreless.../the king/ Over himself” (III.iv.193-6).

The fall of Eve and then of Adam in Paradise Lost each causes a fall in the natural world in addition to the internal fall in the way in which the “first parents” understand love. The language of Nature’s fall anticipates Shelley’s reconfiguration of it:⁵⁷

Earth felt the wound, and nature from her seat
Sighing through all her works gave signs of woe,
That all was lost. (IX.782-4)

⁵⁶All quotations from The Complete Poems and Major Prose, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey P, 1957).

⁵⁷The “Preface” to Prometheus Unbound admonishes the critic to understand Shelley’s poem as a continuation of Milton’s work, not as the kind of agonistic (Bloomian) rebellion which it is the purpose of Prometheus Unbound to critique: “the sacred Milton was, let it ever be remembered, a Republican and a bold inquirer into morals and religion” (134).

Earth trembled from her entrails, as again
 In pangs, and nature gave a second groan;
 Sky loured, and muttering thunder, some sad drops
 Wept at completing of the mortal sin
 Original. (IX.1000-1004)

Milton's prosopopeia authorizes an internalized reading of the way in which the humans' disobedient acts of will "cause" the natural world to become full of ill fortune, to develop what is colloquially called the "law of the jungle" as if our laws must reflect nature's inequities, which we invented. Earth, like a human being, "feels" a wound, "sighs," "trembles," and "weeps." We may understand the earth this way only with reference to our own internal states so that nature-as-human easily becomes, as it is in Shelley, nature from within the human. Picking up from the implications of this prosopopeia, Shelley puts the character of Earth into Prometheus Unbound as a trembling entity fearful of even more punishment from heaven:

I dare not speak like life, lest Heaven's fell King
 Should hear, and link me to some wheel of pain
 More torturing than the one whereon I roll. (I.140-2)

The Earth's fear of punishment is ironic since she⁵⁸ fears what she already experiences. Fear of the tyrant is, in general, a fear born of not imagining the future, not something that arises from the embrace of uncertainty. But the Earth, as an allegory of Nature, is a

⁵⁸The gender of the Earth is ambiguous since some characters call the Earth "mother," yet the Moon calls the Earth "brother" in IV.325. The earth's gender confusion is an avoidance of crystallizing any one vision of "nature."

personification of complacency in this act. Her fear of a literal, present hell on earth is typical of the first act's theme of self-punishing internalization of tyranny. Prometheus only becomes conscious of this self-oppression slowly, and begins the poem in error, granting, in a simplistic inversion of Milton, all responsibility for both types of evil to Jupiter. This error performs Jupiter's power for him, just as the Earth performs Jupiter's tyranny over herself by internalizing it and checking herself. Prometheus begins the drama by calling Jupiter the "Monarch of Gods," thus re-installing Jupiter in that position. Prometheus's denunciations are also self-descriptions, self-identifications, and self-accusations:

Whilst me, who am thy foe, eyeless in hate,
Hast thou made reign and triumph, to thy scorn,
O'er mine own misery and thy vain revenge. (I.9-11)

Prometheus refers to that part of the myth which tells of how he helped Jupiter defeat the older Gods (including the Titans) because he foresaw Jupiter's victory. He also, and with unconscious irony, refers to the way in which this act of hatred and denunciation—of speaking the hatred—forms a practice of making Jupiter continue to reign and triumph. At the bottom of Prometheus's erroneous view of the universe in the first Act, and the reason why not he, but Asia, becomes the key actor in bringing on the apocalypse is that *he is a necessitarian*. Like Beatrice, he has become a necessitarian out of the despair that suffering can cause.⁵⁹ One result of this necessitarian position is that Prometheus, like Beatrice, begins his drama with an oversimplified morality, in which he is the unimplicated victim

⁵⁹As Frederick Pottle puts it, "Until he falls, Prometheus expects to be tortured. To Prometheus evil is a fact of experience. He never asks why evil should exist, or if Jupiter comprehends all the evil there is in the cosmos" (52).

and Jupiter the solely responsible agent of evil. Here he perversely gives thanks for a victimhood that helps solidify his identity:

Scorn and despair,—these are mine empire:—
 More glorious far than that which thou surveyest
 From thine unenvied throne, O Mighty God!
 Almighty, had I deigned to share the shame
 Of thine ill tyranny, and hung not here...(I.15-19)

Prometheus's self-fashioned initial position is like a misreading of Beatrice as a character from sentimental literature: a pure victim. But victimhood is not, for Shelley, an absolute ennobler or a sentimentally aestheticized piece of entertainment. Shelley writes in the "Preface" that, in contrast to Prometheus, Satan "engenders in the mind a pernicious casuistry which leads us to weigh his faults with his wrongs and to excuse the former because the latter exceed all measure" (*P & R*, 133). Prometheus is engaged in a casuistical justification of his own hatred. His identity, his sense of self-worth, stems entirely from his hatred of Jupiter and vision of himself as martyr.⁶⁰

The refusal to sell out, relying as it does on Prometheus's projection of Jupiter's omnipotence, becomes complicated when Prometheus soon comes to pity Jupiter, to forget

⁶⁰Critical opinion is not unified on the question of Shelley's attitude toward martyrdom. As Stuart Sperry, for example, has written, "However brave and resourceful, Satan lacked those gentler traits of long suffering and self-sacrifice that belonged to the Christian savior, with which Shelley fully sympathized." *Shelley's Major Verse*, 72. The issue of suffering seems more equivocal in *Prometheus Unbound* than that, however, especially since Christ himself is in this poem a tragic figure whose very name "hath become a curse" (I.604). Less problematic is Sperry's next sentence: "As a mean between Christ and Satan, Prometheus represented the difficulty if not contradictory balance between militancy and submission, self-assertion and dedication to others that Shelley was struggling to project" (72).

his hatred, and to recall the curse he once made against Jupiter. This switch initiates a crisis of identity which is an inversion of Beatrice's question "who am I?" after her rape. Suddenly, after he decides to pity Jupiter, Prometheus cannot even remember the curse that made him what he was, and begs the Earth to repeat it for him. He insists upon compliance to his request based on what he is owed as martyr: "Know ye not me,/ The Titan, he who made his agony/ The barrier to your else all-conquering foe? (I.117-9). Prometheus cannot or will not remember or repeat the curse because he is now performing a new role: the innocent, yet defiant. He is uneasy with this role, and falters in it several times during the Act, but here he adheres to it in both in his insistence that the curse be repeated and in his refusal to repeat it himself. If another character repeats it, then it is in some measure no longer part of Prometheus's role; the curse is not part of his lines. This victim's identity still relies on Jupiter for its fulfillment, so that when the Earth answers him in fear of Jupiter, is it because Prometheus still retains Jupiter as God:

Prometheus: Speak, Spirit! from thine inorganic voice

I only know that thou art moving near

And love. How cursed I him?

The Earth. How canst thou hear

Who knowest not the language of the dead?

Prometheus. Thou art a living spirit--speak as they.

The Earth. I dare not speak like life, lest Heaven's fell King

Should hear, and link me to some wheel of pain

More torturing than the one whereon I roll...

Prometheus. Obscurely through my brain like shadows dim

Sweep awful thoughts, rapid and thick,—I feel

Faint, like one mingled in entwining love... (I.135-49)

The linguistic gap and disagreement between the Earth and Prometheus form an allegory of our human failure to understand nature as organic, not dead. Prometheus is right to say that nature is “living,” meaning dynamic and constructed; but nature is incapable of realizing this vision of herself. Nature alone will never “speak” to us, though we can feel nature’s external facticity the way we feel any externality. We feel the external through love’s ability to let us out of ourselves.

The curious consequence of this act of recall and recantation, however, is its lack of consequence; Prometheus remains bound and Mercury arrives to torture him.⁶¹ As Tilottama Rajan points out, the precise phrasing of the recall is ambiguous, and does not indicate that it has occurred: “Thus we do not know whether line 59 states an intention or an actuality, and whether the optative mode (“the Curse/ Once breathed on thee I would recall”) is used because Prometheus has not yet met the phantasm of Jupiter or because he has not yet become fully capable of forgiveness.”⁶² Since Prometheus remains bound after he forgets his hate, we must understand Shelley to mean that Prometheus has not yet learned what he needs to learn. In fact, what Prometheus still must learn is to become skeptical of the idea of Jupiter’s will in combat with his own, of the question, “whose fault?” itself, with all of its baggage of subjectivity conceived as exclusive of surrounding circumstance. There is no sudden replacement of Jupiter with Prometheus or any other enlightened despot, as Jupiter expects when he realizes in the third Act that Demogorgon

⁶¹Carol Jacobs has noticed this problem: “Not only does the repetition of the curse fail to solve the crisis of self-identity and authority, the revolution itself is not measurably closer at hand.” *Uncontainable Romanticism*, 23. Sperry agrees: “In the recalling of the curse it was not Shelley’s purpose to represent his hero’s instant self-transcendence through rejection of the past. The power of necessity that dominates the drama, the force that decrees that Prometheus must patiently await the coming of the promised hour, involves a profound element of historical and psychological fatalism...it is only from suffering over time that wisdom springs” (83).

⁶²*The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1990) 318.

has defeated him: "Gentle and just and dreadless, is he not/ The monarch of the world?" (III.i.68-9). Prometheus does not become the monarch, nor does Demogorgon, partly because Prometheus need not have all along acted as if Jupiter were the "monarch."

Prometheus is not an all-powerful agent of resistance, and he comes to know and accept it. Beatrice never learns this; instead she comes to the conclusion that she is a divine agent of revenge, both justified and capable of enacting revenge.⁶³

What Prometheus must learn, however, is precisely self-knowledge; a new subjectivity, not no subjectivity. To know when Jupiter will fall would be to envision the fall itself, which in turn would be for Prometheus to understand the fact about himself which allows Jupiter to reign. Prometheus is inside of a fully escapable conceptual circle, together with Mercury and Jupiter himself; conceptual realization is the true revolution. This circle is at the center of the Act: Prometheus does not, in fact, find his way out of it by the act's end, though the next time we see him, in the third Act, he seems to have done so. Prometheus, then, as the rational mind, is incapable of making this conceptual revolution. He needs a little help from his friends to know himself, and to love and be loved. Instead, for the moment, he receives confirmation of his separated identity and martyrdom.

The Furies attack Prometheus by attempting to convince him, not of a total lack of power to change the world, but of the necessity of both natural and human evil in the world: "We are the ministers of pain and fear/ And disappointment and mistrust and hate,"

⁶³Curran, though he authorizes the comparative reading of the two dramas in *Annus Mirabilis*, in *Shelley's Cenci* seems to oppose the kind of moral cross-evaluation of characters I am explicitly attempting here: "One might as well argue the criminality of Cordelia, whose reticence causes fragmentation, war, and bloodshed, as impose the ideals of *Prometheus Unbound* upon this mortal woman, impelled by her fate into a no-man's land where both action and non-action are evil and where objective standards dissolve into the absurd" (141). This reading assumes a "total disparity between the worlds of *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Cenci*," and is thus not compatible with my sense that the first two acts of *Prometheus Unbound* are scenes of the struggles of characters whose very immortality is a source of inadequacy.

(I.452-53) seethes the First Fury. They boast of their own evil brazenly so that in their own irredeemability they embody the hopelessness they wish to communicate. Prometheus asks, "Can aught exult in its deformity?" The Second Fury answers, "The beauty of delight makes lovers glad./ Gazing on one another--so are we" (I.464-6). Miserable evil loves company, but in that admission the Furies show the weakness of their own project; just like Rivers in The Borderers, the Furies are unconsciously in search of love. Like Prometheus, a mythic figure whose name means foresight but who does not know the future, the Furies' identities as Furies contradict their overt goals in the drama. This confusion of identity is a dismantling of myth's power to crystallize thought.

To undermine his faith in his own revolutionary power, the Furies show him Christ as a model of the misunderstood poet:

One came forth, of gentle worth,
Smiling on the sanguine earth;
His words outlived him, like swift poison
Withering up truth, peace and pity...
Hark that outcry of despair!
'Tis his mild and gentle ghost
Wailing for the faith he kindled. (I.546-55)

Christ is a symbol for the social construction of ideas, and as such makes the postmodern point that there is nothing outside of "power." Shelley places this pessimism in the mouths of the Furies, not because he disagrees with their analysis of what happened to Christ's words, but because he disagrees with their necessitarian view that Christ's words *had* to become a tool for evil. The pessimistic view is something Prometheus needs to hear and overcome, not by ignoring it, but by transcending it. In the Furies' hands Christ shakes

Prometheus's dogmatic and limiting faith in martyrdom as a solution to the problem of evil.⁶⁴

The first Act is a dramatization of the growth of a god's mind, ending with the beginning of Prometheus's education into the overcoming of both sorts of skepticism—the skepticism of the other and the skepticism of the inviolable self—through love. The second Act shows an education complementary to that of the first. Asia, who begins the drama already equipped with love, learns the intellect's lesson of skepticism of all dogmatic explanations of cause in the universe. She cannot use her love to overcome the abyss of skeptical doubt (of the other) until through Demogorgon she becomes self-aware of the deep uncertainty with which even a god must live.

Here, as in Prometheus's passive act of deciding to pity, Asia's coming to understand the fullest extent of skepticism is both something she does and something that happens to her. In her conversation with Demogorgon, Asia advances from unskeptical belief that the hierarchical principle in thought is also the creator of the physical universe.

Asia: What canst thou tell?

Demogorgon: All things thou dar'st demand.

Asia: Who made the living world?

Demogorgon: God.

Asia: Who made all

That it contains? thought, passion, reason, will,

Imagination?

Demogorgon: God: Almighty God.

Asia: Who made that sense which, when the winds of spring

⁶⁴As Jacobs writes, connecting this image of Christ with Prometheus's as yet ineffectual recantation, "Christ, it seems, brought ruin to the world through words that outlived him, words that lived on without him, despite his will to revoke, turning on the truth and peace they were meant to bring about" (25).

the basis of emotional truth. Paradoxically, she concedes that there is no transcendent authority for her vision, yet also nullifies this admission by elevating the voice of her own soul into a transphenomenal principle. But what Demogorgon has in fact said is that the mythmaking power of imagination is a self-projection which opens itself up to negation as well as to confirmation. Representation, the attempt to image the imagelessness of truth in language, must therefore involve a ceaseless dialogue between the possible being and the possible nothingness of human myths...The view of language which emerges from Demogorgon's responses to Asia is profoundly antimystical and antilogocentric.⁶⁵

Rajan's reading seems entirely just except for the way in which she sees an aporia between Demogorgon and Asia have said, and in the way she finds evidence here of profound antilogocentrism. Rather than an aporia, Asia's subjectivism, if we see it as free of any claim of pure intentionality, is not at odds with Demogorgon's point about self-projection. For "self-projection" is the skeptical way of understanding phenomena as thought, passion, and imagination. Prometheus's and Asia's self-projections enforced Jupiter's power, but they are also the agents of Jupiter's fall. Again, Demogorgon's point is not necessarily an

⁶⁵The Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism (Ithaca, London: Cornell UP, 1980) 90. Rajan's re-interpretation of Prometheus Unbound in The Supplement of Reading does not differ much on the specific points mentioned here: for example, she writes, "the inconclusive dialogue between Asia and Demogorgon often revolves around the signifier" (311). Not necessarily. But Rajan does see much more openness in Shelley's text than does the 1980 interpretation. See pp. 302-322, for an incisive catalog of the self-contradictions of the text. What has not changed in Rajan's reading from 1980 to 1990 is the valuation of self-contradiction as a sign of modernity. See also Michael Fischer, Does Deconstruction Make Any Difference? on this tendency in Rajan, whom he finds is finally not an absolute deconstructor like Paul de Man, but a critic who values deconstructive texts over others.

indictment of all possible linguistic combinations, just those already available. His remark that “a voice is wanting” does not smack of permanence.

Perhaps more challenging to the drama’s worth, Rajan reads Prometheus Unbound as bound to a wheel of corrupting idealism, finally failing to live up to a thoroughly deconstructive hermeneutic:

But somehow the fourth Act seems to press beyond the skepticism of drama into the singleness of lyric: to abolish the uncertainties of dialogue where no one point of view can be said to be absolute, and create instead a polyphonic hymn in which different voices are part of a single harmony. It is difficult to read the fourth Act and not to feel that its faith in the capacity of language to transform fact repeats the fallacies of the idealizing mirror. ⁶⁶

As has already been shown, the dichotomy Rajan raises between projection and skepticism is not Shelley’s. However, the charge of too much unity, with which we began this reading of Prometheus Unbound, needs answering. In short, the lyricism of the fourth Act, describing as it does a paradise to readers living outside of that paradise, partakes of Milton’s lament that we know good only by contrast with evil. The last two acts, though they figure forth the renovation of the world, are full of negations of evil:

Chorus Of Spirits: We come from the mind
Of humankind,
Which was late so dusk, and obscene, and blind... (IV.93-95)

⁶⁶Dark Interpreter, 93. Rajan may be too rigid in her associations between poetic form and meaning. See Stuart Curran’s Poetic Form and British Romanticism, 11 for a brief discussion of how Shelley eludes “the arbitrary constraints of genre.”

Both acts are littered with such negations, so that the hopeful vision is never finally able to shut out our skeptical knowledge of potential evil. When Rajan, however, evaluates the last act's transformative linguistics as naive idealism, she refers most of all to this speech of the Earth:

Man, one harmonious soul of many a soul,
 Whose nature is its own divine control,
 Where all things flow to all, as rivers to the sea;
 Familiar acts are beautiful through love;
 Labor, and pain, and grief, in life's green grove
 Sport like tame beasts; none knew how gentle they could be!

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

All things confess his strength. Through the cold mass
 Of marble and of color his dreams pass—
 Bright threads whence mothers weave the robes their children wear;
 Language is a perpetual Orphic song,
 Which rules with dædal harmony a throng
 Of thoughts and forms, which else senseless and shapeless were.

(IV.400-417)

A song of humanism, this passage nevertheless speaks in paradoxes that announce themselves and refuse to disappear. Does re-configuring “Labor, pain, and grief” as “tame beasts” finally get rid of those phenomena, or merely subdue them contingent upon humankind’s ability to restrain hierarchical constructions? The will, it seems, still contains its “mean passions,” rules by love, but not removed. The much-quoted comment about language is, in context, not a bald statement of idealism but a severely qualified warning about our potential to guide well or ill. The passage hedges just as Demogorgon does at the drama’s end when he warns that “Eternity/ Mother of many acts and hours,” could “free/ The serpent that would clasp her with his length” (IV.565-7).

Rajan’s valuation of uncertainty, decenteredness, and linguistic aporia and her disappointment when she does not find these things in the text is an extremely tempting form of anachronistic reading. A real defense against that sort of anachronism in reading Prometheus Unbound cannot come, however, from attempts to discover timeless truths there. For what are we to do with Shelley’s insistence upon monarchy as the Form of evil hierarchy? Or his belief that metaphorically describing the planets as an “unquiet republic” (IV.398, repeated on 533) is liberatory? As a citizen of this republic, the idea of a galactic imitation of our government gives me shudders. I could equally be disturbed, if I chose, by the metaphorical exultations of white skin and hair in the lines IV.219-235, or the positive metaphorical use of colonizing in IV.143, or the final line, with its triumphant cry of “Empire, and Victory!” Such is the tendency of William Ulmer when he writes,

In fact, Shelley's poetry often revalidates the conservatism that gives his radicalism its point of departure, and produces a deeply divided political vision. At times his poetry can appear reactionary from the perspective of nineteenth-century class interests. Shelley remains distrustful of the masses and fearful of populist violence. His liberalism was qualified by debts to subliminally elitist radical theory, such as Godwinian gradualism, with its hopes for an intellectually disseminated

revolution...In its assumptions about truth and language, Shelley's poetry internalizes the hierarchical structures and institutional violence endemic to Western culture. (23)

Given that all of the charges are, in fact, true, is there a way out of Ulmer's condemnation of Shelley, possibly in his use of metaphor and his self-consciousness about appropriating destructive imagery? For Ulmer, the answer is no:

...Shelley's affirmation of correspondence and concord do violence to the truth, or expose the violence *of* truth. His amatory ideal memorializes a metaphorical imperialism founded on the repression of difference. Shelleyan desire doubles itself though attempted appropriations of otherness.(9)

The operation of metaphor, for Ulmer, is inherently tyrannical. But what is ultimately most radical in Prometheus Unbound's linguistic vision of the abstract revolution is the way in which it self-consciously employs the very metaphors it Shelley elsewhere excoriates. To readers of "Laon and Cythna" it should come as no surprise that the horror of incest in The Cenci is rehabilitated in Prometheus Unbound in the suggestion of incestuous relations between the Spirit of the Earth and the Moon, brother and sister (III.iv.86-96). We have already seen the positive use of monarchy as a metaphor when Prometheus proclaims himself king of himself (III.iv.193-6). Kingship is made even more benign in this fourth-Act image: the sea's "vapors clothe earth's monarch mountain-tops/ With kingly, ermine snow" (IV. 286-87, Panthea's line). In other words, Shelley knowingly naturalizes his own metaphor for execrable tyranny, turning kingship into a feature of the landscape. If Shelley uses metaphor to appropriate otherness, he also dismantles that appropriation, and in doing so shows that, for him, all inscription is provisional, but not, finally, meaningless or necessarily oppressive. Prometheus Unbound

and The Cenci together form the high point of idealistic skepticism in the Romantic dramatic genre. In Byron skepticism may be transcended, but not for purposes of fully hopeful idealism. Byron's adherence to an all-the-way-down pessimism makes him more attractive to critics seeking their own versions of modernity in past textual productions. For we must listen to those critics when they find Shelley's skepticism qualified, though not necessarily when they devalue Shelley's productions on those grounds.

Byron, Romantic Drama, and Dialectical Pessimism

...the head conspiring against the body... (Byron, in a letter discussing the history of Marino Faliero)

To act through will is to be commanded by oneself, perhaps driven... (Stanley Cavell, Claim of Reason, 384)

Byron's plays mark the end point of Romantic dramatic pessimism. According to the metaphysical alternatives this study has outlined—skepticism, complacency, and transcendent hope—Byron's dramatic skepticism crushes complacency with such power that there is almost no energy left to think of reform, let alone rebirth or apocalypse, and yet even these plays maintain suggestions of apocalyptic change. Byron's dramatic selves are so fragmented, so violently divided against themselves, that Byron seems to aspire to a sublime of self-destruction as high-flown as any of the peaks Manfred climbs. Indeed, Byron's sublimely self-annihilating selves are much more pessimistically drawn than an eviscerated post-modern self could be, since the enemy within is indistinguishable from any other part of the self. And yet, Byron's plays, like all Romantic dramas but via different paths, dramatize the limits of skepticism. Everywhere in Byron's plays characters are subject to their desires, ashamed of the physicality that drives them, but manifestly unable to doubt embodiment. The spirit, even in Byron's "metaphysical"¹ plays Manfred:

¹Byron refers several times in 1821 to Cain as belonging to his "metaphysical style" along with Manfred. See, for example, Byron's Letters and Journals, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, VIII (Cambridge, MA: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1973-82) 206. Hereafter BLJ. See also Truman Guy Steffan, Lord Byron's Cain: Twelve Essays and a Text with Variants and Annotations (Austin, London: U. of Texas P., 1986) 6-8, for a discussion of the "metaphysical" in relation to Cain. Steffan notes that Byron abjured "metaphysics" in his work as early as 1815. See BLJ, 4:294 and 5:255.

A Dramatic Poem and Cain: A Mystery, is subject to the body and to history; but historical embodiment, which is another name for acting in the world, is finally Byron's only possibility for hope.

This chapter will first show how Manfred needs to be read less as a univocal celebration of the will and more as a dialectical acquiescence before physicality. Shelley's Alastor, Byron's model for Manfred, will serve as a self-critical analog. Physicality, however, is an aspect of the self, not separate from the mind. A brief look at a playwright Byron deeply admired, Joanna Baillie, will form an introductory note. Her dramatic theory and practice provides an example of an orthodox, sentimental theology supporting a drama of the soul as its own nemesis. Marino Faliero ends the chapter (along with its companion-piece, The Prophecy of Dante), showing how Byron responded to the dialectical hope of Shelley's dramas and to Baillie's sentimental hope. Byron finally denies, even in writing visionary prophecy, that there can be any abstract hope outside of history and real life.

Byron's acquiescence to the body has several features that set his dramas apart from those of the other Romantics. This admission in Byron that he cannot think his way out of presence and physicality is a refutation of what Byron perceived in Shelley's idealism: vision too disconnected from human life. It also denies the political judgment of some of Romanticism's critics. Jerome McGann, for example, writes: "The field of history, politics, and social relations is everywhere marked in the Romantic period by complex divisions and conflicts previously unprecedented in Europe. Romantic poetry develops an argument that such dislocations can only be resolved beyond the realm of immediate experience, at the level of the mind's idea or the heart's desire."² McGann has gone on to read Byron in terms of what he, McGann, calls the romantic ideology of sincerity, finding

²The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983)

even in Byron's shifting public personae a move to oppose truth to the cant of power.³ But in another section in The Romantic Ideology where McGann writes more specifically about Byron, he investigates what he calls "This idea that poetry, or even consciousness, can set one free of the ruins of history and culture," which "is the grand illusion of every Romantic poet" (137). McGann also attributes this illusion to Romanticism's critics, and presumably he has in mind the kind of claim that M.H. Abrams makes in Natural Supernaturalism:

To put the matter with the sharpness of drastic simplification: faith in an apocalypse by revelation had been replaced by faith in apocalypse by revolution, and this now gave way to faith in an apocalypse by imagination or cognition...the mind of man confronts the old heaven and earth and possesses within itself the power, if it will but recognize and avail itself of that power, to transform them into a new heaven and new earth, by means of a total revolution of consciousness. This, as we know, is the high Romantic argument....⁴

Abrams's simplification, whether or not it imposes a complacent Wordsworthian or Coleridgean pattern onto all of Romantic writing, does not work as an outline for Byron, a writer Abrams famously excludes from consideration in Natural Supernaturalism. Whether or not Abrams's rather escapist apocalypse really does form "every" Romantic poet's false ideology, McGann acknowledges that for Byron escape into a mind's eye can never be satisfactory: "In the end Byron's poetry discovers what all Romantic poems repeatedly discover: that there is no place of refuge, not in desire, not in the mind, not in imagination"

³See, for example, Jerome McGann "Byron and 'The Truth in Masquerade,'" Rereading Byron: Essays Selected from Hofstra University's Byron Bicentennial Conference, eds. Alice Levine, Robert Keane (New York: Garland, 1993) 1-19.

⁴Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York, London: W.W. Norton, 1971) 334.

(145). As we shall see, neither Manfred nor Marino Faliero (nor Cain) finds salvation in consciousness. Consciousness is not the revelation that Byron's characters reach upon failing to achieve political revolution. On the contrary, Byron's characters begin by being prisoners of consciousness. They struggle to come to terms with the curse of core selves, like those of Wordsworth's Rivers, Coleridge's Osorio or Ancient Mariner, or Joanna Baillie's De Monfort, that finally stand apart from the will as much as external events do.⁵

Pitted against McGann's tendency to read Romanticism as the earnest expressions of a flawed ideology is Jerome Christensen's powerful postmodern reading of Byron as the champion of insincerity.⁶ Christensen celebrates a Byron courageously but vainly resisting the inevitable bureaucratization of everything, opposing the deadening sincerity of the administrator with a play of superficial selfhoods resistant to categorization. Instead of

⁵Much the same point has been made by Terence Hoagwood in "Prolegomenon for a Theory of Romantic Drama," The Wordsworth Circle 23 (1992): 53-54: "Understanding of the historical displacement of the Romantic drama has been troubled (and I would even go further and say *mised*) by a speciously psychological and individualistic construction of what the plays and the playwrights are about. The rubric 'mental theatre' (a phrase Byron used) and the medium of presentation (lyrical drama, closet drama, and otherwise drama to be read) have frequently been thought to sever the dramas' *meanings* from the public domain, by resituating their *medium* in the (apparently) private realm of mentality...But Byron's sentence using the phrase 'mental theatre' refers more importantly to public than to private modes of response: 'I am trying an experiment -- which is to introduce into our language -- the *regular* tragedy -- without regard to the stage -- which will not admit of it -- but merely to the *mental* theatre of the reader. -- As yet -- I have had no great success -- people looking upon it as treason to the wild old English drama.' (To Lady Byron, Sept. 14, 1821)." See BLJ. The sorts of studies Hoagwood combats include, for example, Terry Otten's The Deserted Stage and, in a more recent example, Alan Richardson's A Mental Theater.

⁶See Lord Byron's Strength: Romantic Writing and Commercial Society (Baltimore, London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993) xiii-xiv. Both McGann and Christensen have been invaluable aids to reading Byron. Indeed, McGann's three decade long commitment to explaining Byron to the world is almost as much a part of reading Byron as Byron's own texts.

sincerity, Christensen offers a Nietzschean “strength” as the aesthetic criterion best able to explain Byron’s poetic goals: “Ethics, as I understand it and as Byron enacts it, is the deployment of a politics without rule or prescription and with no standing place except the site of a strong assertion.” (xviii). Christensen’s is a powerful reading, but seems to present too flat a view of Byron’s equivocations about the self. And while drama would seem an inherently friendly field upon which to oppose Byronic strength and bourgeois sincerity, Byron’s dramas, as opposed to his satires, seem too tragic, too deadly serious to avail a critic seeking postmodern answers to Romantic questions. While Christensen’s reading of the gender-bending Sardanapalus is brilliantly apropos, his view of Marino Faliero as a covert satire seems forced.⁷

The problem that most concerns Byron in the drama, however, is not whether to be sincere or to evade power through satire. As Christensen notes, Byron’s central question is whether the individual might have any source of self-generated power not only to direct historical events, but also agency over what that same person feels and thinks.⁸ If neither form of power is available, then the world and the self are both mysterious seas of chaos.

⁷See Lord Byron’s Strength, 258-275. Christensen writes, for example: “All relations in Venice, even the most intimate, are statements in a discourse that allows for no digression or, what is the same thing, no unintentional, non hierarchical, wordless sensuality...Digression, like all theatrical representation, is empty, purposeless speech...The text of Marino Faliero, however, extends the digressively theatrical to include *all* social and political speech and behavior, which is not framed by any supervisory purpose...” (270). The tortuous path from digression to theatricality to satire can apply as well to virtually any drama whose subject is politics.

⁸See the introduction to Lord Byron’s Strength, where Christensen defines strength as the ability to translate words into deeds: “The Romantic poet is after virtue, not truth” (xix). But Christensen gives too much credence to the idea that Byron thought only of power. See my afterword on Cain for how Byron acknowledged the possibility of innate love trumping power relations. Christensen does not mention Cain in his book; in it he might find his idea of Byron depicted as Lucifer, the flawed skeptic who believes only in striving to reign.

Byron was deeply skeptical of any optimistic dogma that might make order out of the chaos by denying harsh empirical realities. But in this very skepticism, Byron refuses to go as far as Shelley. In particular, Byron could not sustain a skepticism of the material because he could not doubt the body. Of course, to attribute his materialism to Byron's biography—say, to his club foot—is only to accept the contingency that Byron himself asserts. The body, for Byron, is a source of shame, a drag on the seeming divinity of the mind, the lesser part of the self which is "half deity, half dust." The body exerts its influence through our desires and passions. It is here that the drama and dramatic theory of Joanna Baillie becomes helpful for understanding Byron's psychology of agency. Baillie's drama of a man overcome by his own passions is a key example of how Byron conceived of alienation from the self. By controlling the passions, our bodies prevent us from achieving any state of moral purity abstracted from such concretes as history, politics, and sexuality. The body and the shame it can cause is the link between our psychologies and our histories. Knowledge of our necessary sorrows is another source of sadness, but self-consciousness is not our choice.

Like De Monfort as well as the other examples of the genre of Romantic drama, the dramas of Lord Byron are dialectical discussions of some key themes. Certain of these, such as the limits of individual agency⁹ and the relations between history and psychology

⁹The limits of agency in Byron's dramas should not be confused with the issue of heroism and the famous cliché, the "Byronic Hero," as it is found in Mario Praz's The Romantic Agony, trans. Angus Davidson (London: Oxford UP, 1933). See Peter L. Thorslev, Jr., The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1962); and Samuel Chew, The Dramas of Lord Byron (New York: Russell & Russell, 1915; rpt. 1964); Giorgio Melchiori's "The Dramas of Byron" in The Romantic Theatre: An International Symposium, ed. Richard Allen Cave (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble Books; Gerard Cross: Colin Smythe, 1986). Melchiori, however, asks us to take Manfred as "a final revisitation of the Byronic hero conceived in a spirit of self-irony" (53, 55). But see also Martyn Corbett, Byron and Tragedy (London: Macmillan, 1988), "...the belief that

are common to all Romantic drama and to a great part of Romantic writing in general. In exploring these themes and writing as he does within a specific understanding of his literary and historical moment, and from some varying sense of kinship with the other "Romantic" authors, Byron shares with them as well many tropes, such as, for example, the solitary, contemplative, alienated outcast hero. Byron's Cain, for example, shares with Wordsworth's The Borderers the structure of having a tutor who represents aspects of Enlightenment, with a complex yet clearly malevolent intention toward the student-hero. Though Byron never read Wordsworth's tragedy, there is nevertheless a clear line from Coleridge's Ancient Mariner (in 1797), to Wordsworth's Mortimer (also in 1797), to Coleridge's own character Osorio, to Byron's Cain: all are mental and physical wanderers, caught in dramatic situations they thought to control.¹⁰ The revision of Coleridge's play as Remorse, performed at the Drury Lane Theatre in 1812, was much admired by Byron¹¹ and directly influenced Manfred of 1816, a drama about remorse as much as Coleridge's was. Shelley's The Cenci and Prometheus Unbound, both written in 1819, form a split

Byron's egotism was so overweening that he was not capable of creating characters which were not, in some way, projections of himself" (10-11). Corbett's view still predominates.

¹⁰Mental wandering is, of course, Byron's forte, especially in Don Juan, despite the opening semi-sarcastic boast that "The regularity of my design/ Forbids all wandering as the worst of sinning" (I.vii). The boast touches the ancient trope of the wandering and sin, also made in Paradise Lost, in the description of the rivers Satan sees in Eden that "Wand'ring many a famous realm...Rolling on orient pearl and sands of gold/ With mazy error under pendant shades/ Ran nectar..." (IV.234-240). That Milton's God has imprinted wandering or "error" into the landscape of paradise, thus seeming to give its inhabitants a destiny, is part of the epic's problem of divine justification. In Byron's epic, wandering is something the narrator knows he should avoid and also knows he cannot, and so celebrates the failure. Before getting to that comic acknowledgment, Byron wrote dramas about how the unavoidability of wandering causes anguish because the dramatic characters do not perceive that, because their conception of the straight path does not fit their modern world, they must wander.

¹¹For example see Leslie A. Marchand, Byron: A Biography, II (New York: Knopf, 1957) 542.

reply to Byron's "metaphysical" Manfred. Then in 1820 and 1821 Byron produced a series of dramas including Marino Faliero and Cain, each of which, in turn, replies to Shelley's dramas.

Byron's plays, then, continue a conversation began in 1797. Holding up his end of the inter-play dialogue, Byron brought out events in dramatic history overlooked by other Romantics, such as Thomas Otway and Joanna Baillie, among others. Otway's influence, especially over Marino Faliero, was recognized even before Byron began to write.¹² Baillie's is less well known, though Byron claims her as one of the great playwrights of his age. Though Byron might have delved into similar dramatic areas without having read Baillie, overlooking her influence amounts to ascribing more literary self-generation than Byron claimed for himself. Crucially, Baillie gave Byron the example of a self betrayed by its own passionate temperament. Baillie's De Monfort is divided as Byron's own selves were anyway, but the way in which De Monfort's core self drives him into a tragic plot seems terribly important for how Byron came to understand dramatic character formation.

Baillie is one of three playwrights Byron bothers to praise in the "Preface" to Marino Faliero, and this praise is written only after Byron tried several times to have Baillie's work produced at Drury Lane.¹³ It is all the more startling that Byron could draw

¹² As we have seen in Godwin's influence upon Wordsworth's The Borderers and Henry Hart Milman's influence upon Shelley's The Cenci, each Romantic dramatist has influences outside of this set as narrowly defined here, especially when one includes the Romantics' antagonists. Marino Faliero, for example, responds to Otway's Venice Preserved and to the dramas of Joanna Baillie, on whom more later, as a refutation of their principles as much as for a respectful nod, though Byron said he liked Otway. When Murray first heard of Byron's plans to write a tragedy on Marino Faliero, he warned Byron on the similarity to Venice Preserved. See below for Byron's response. See also Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works (hereafter Byron's CPW), ed. Jerome McGann, IV (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) 524-526.

¹³ Allaying Murray's fears of merely reproducing Thomas Otway's Venice Preserved in a play about Marino Faliero, Byron shifts the discussion over to Baillie, significantly leading into her after a discussion of self-division and self-destruction: "but

upon Baillie, given her conservatism, but then Byron was one of Pope's greatest apologists, if for different reasons. For Byron, her protagonist's self-destructive passions transcended Baillie's sentimental plot. Self-destructiveness alone would not have been enough, however, without Baillie's complex depth and the degree to which she explores the psychology of self-division. In many senses, Baillie's deep psychology works against and, for a modern reader, beyond her simplifying plots.

As she explains in the "Introductory Discourse" to her Series of Plays on the Passions, there is nothing more interesting than learning about the hidden emotional motives behind all human actions. Baillie, like sentimental philosophers Adam Smith, Francis Hutchinson, and the Earl of Shaftesbury (as well as Coleridge in Osorio, 1797), sees benevolence and sympathy for others as innate in human nature:

It is to [a] sympathetic curiosity of our nature, exercised upon mankind in great and trying occasions, and under the influence of the stronger passions, when the grand, the generous, and the terrible attract our attention far more than the base and depraved, that the high and powerfully tragic, of every composition, is addressed.

(1)¹⁴

the story of Marino Falieri [sic]--is different & I think so much finer--that I wish Otway had taken it instead;--the head conspiring against the body--for refusal of redress for a real injury;--jealousy, treason--with the more inveterate passions (mixed with policy) of an old or elderly man--the Devil himself could not have a finer subject--& he is your only true dramatist.--- When Voltaire was asked why no woman has ever written even a tolerable tragedy? 'Ah (said the Patriarch) the composition of a tragedy requires *testicles*'. If this be true Lord knows what Joanna Baillie does--I suppose she borrows them. There is still, in the Doge's palace the black veil painted over Falieri's picture" (BLJ, V, 203, April 2, 1817). See also letters in which Byron tries to get Kean to play De Monfort at Drury Lane, BLJ, IV, 336-7 and VIII, 208-9, 210.

¹⁴All references are to the Longmans London edition of 1851.

There is a "sympathetic curiosity towards others which is...strongly implanted within us" (2). Baillie calls the curiosity "universal" (4) and says that it leads us to observe, to borrow Shelley's terms from the "Preface" to Prometheus Unbound, "the operations of the mind, or those external actions by which they are expressed." It is not merely external signs of the inner life that we seek, but men and women "betraying" their feelings, the candid sincerity of unintended emotion, and above all "weaknesses" (5) within us that decide how our passions may control us:

But above all, to her [tragedy] and to her only it belongs, to unveil to us the human mind under the dominion of those strong and fixed passions, which seemingly provoked by outward circumstances, will, from small beginnings, brood within the breast, till all the better dispositions, all the fair gifts of nature, are borne down before them...(8)¹⁵

Not only are the passions able to overwhelm the will, but it is only in situations when they do so that true drama can occur. The passions, then, are allied with those external circumstances, and even overshadow them in importance, acting as if they themselves had metaphorical agency:

Those strong passions that, with small assistance from outward circumstances, work their way in the heart until they become the tyrannical masters of it, carry on a similar operation in the breast of the monarch and the man of low degree. (11)

¹⁵See Daniel Watkins's useful reading of De Monfort in terms of class. Of that play, Watkins writes, "In Baillie's hands hatred is more than a purely psychological, private, self-generating, or autonomous passion: it is rather an *effect* of larger, if submerged, social forces and conditions, ranging most immediately, for instance, from the Counter-Revolutionary War that began in 1798, to the fear of a French invasion of England." (A Materialist Critique, 40-41).

Byron enlarges Baillie's personal, psychological metaphors and plot into an analogy between personal and political histories. In each dramatist's work, the core self is on both sides of every equation between agency and circumstance, freedom and determinism. Baillie's theory resembles a return of the repressed, or the Orc cycle that Jerome McGann sees in Marino Faliero.¹⁶

In plays of this nature, the passions must be depicted not only with their bold and prominent features, but also with those minute and delicate traits which distinguish them in an infant, growing and repressed state...The characters over whom they are made to usurp dominion must be powerful and interesting, exercising them with their full measure of opposition and struggle; for the chief antagonists they contend with must be the other passions and propensities of the heart, not outward circumstances and events. (15)

By excluding exterior circumstance, Baillie avoids confronting the ways in which the world's own structure, perhaps its metaphysically necessary evil contributes to psychological shortcomings. Here she discusses hatred, the passion on which De Monfort is based:

To endeavor to interest the mind for a man under the dominion of a passion so baleful, so unamiable, may seem, perhaps, reprehensible. I therefore beg it may be considered, that it is the passion and not the man which is held up to our execration. (16)

¹⁶See Fiery Dust, 210.

Baillie's dramas, following this prescription, record characters alienated from themselves and thus perform a new drama of the modern self. As if aware of the frightening implications of their own new revelations, the dramas also seek to ameliorate the full effect of their characters' self-divisions. De Monfort is a psychological drama wound tightly around its title character, like Manfred written eighteen years later. Like Manfred, De Monfort is a drama of a riven soul, following the prescriptions of Baillie's "Introductory Discourse" quite closely, developing the growth of a repressed hate until it bursts.¹⁷

When it does, when De Monfort kills his foe, the play turns into something else: a withering away of a wandering, blasted character whose psychological burden shifts from hate to remorse. Like Manfred and Wordsworth's Rivers, De Monfort then enters a mental hell on earth. His death, like Manfred's, has palpably uncertain consequences that threaten to unravel the drama's overt orthodoxies.

Baillie tries to hedge her plot by allowing the main character to be both driven by temperament and repentant in the end. While the idea of core temperament drives the

¹⁷For a very different reading of De Monfort and the "Introductory Discourse," see Catherine Burroughs "'Out of the Pale of Social Kindred Cast': Conflicted Performance Styles in Joanna Baillie's De Monfort," in Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices, eds. Paula Feldman, Teresa Kelley (Hanover, NH: UP of New England, 1995) 223-35. See also Anne K. Mellor, "Joanna Baillie and the Counter-Public Sphere," Studies in Romanticism 33:4 (1994): 559-67. Jane and her brother fit Caroline Franklin's gloss on Manfred that "The play hinges on the dualism created by linking intellectual aspiration with masculinity, and goodness with femininity," (227) as much as Manfred and Astarte do. See also Joseph Donohue, Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age, 81: "Joanna Baillie...returns the source of evil to the breast of man; but in doing so she does not compromise the sentimental premise under whose weight her pen moves. The relegation of evil to this interior position creates a character who manifests a fundamental division between virtuous nature and vicious passion...The reader's comparison of De Monfort with Manfred will go far toward illuminating the unexplained sickness of soul which drives Byron's melancholy hero to attempt suicide by hurling himself from a precipice in the Alps" (81).

drama, Baillie needs to subvert her protagonist's temperament to allow room for De Monfort's repentance. When De Monfort chases the object of his hate, Rezenvelt, through a forest path that leads to a convent, each soliloquizes upon his observations of the same scene. De Monfort sees Gothic horror, while Rezenvelt shows an alternate internalized view of the landscape. The differently internalized reality reinforces the notion that temperament is all-consuming and all-defining:

De Monfort. How hollow groans the earth beneath my tread!...

As in the wild confusion of a dream,
Things horrid, bloody, terrible do pass,
As though they pass'd not; nor impress the mind
With the fix'd clearness of reality...
It is the screech-owl's cry.
Foul bird of night! What spirit guides thee here?
Art thou instinctive drawn to scenes of horror?

...

Rezenvelt. Ha! does the night-bird greet me on my way?

How much his hooting is in harmony
With such a scene as this! I like it well...
The convent bell...
It sends a solemn sound upon the breeze,
That, to a fearful superstitious mind,
In such a scene, would like a death-knell come. (95)

When De Monfort murders Rezenvelt, then, it is as if De Monfort's passionate view overwhelms Rezenvelt's cheerful reason, or rather that De Monfort's passion itself conquers both of them. The play is attracted by the excitement of the passionate violence it

finds so repellent, since that violent passion adds a desirable inevitability to De Monfort's actions. But the play also records internalization's abyss: a mad, violent egotism. De Monfort's hatred of Rezenvelt, always appearing unmotivated to any other character in the play, at last becomes clear as the modern man's inability to allow any Other to exist within his mental world. The existence of the agent outside of the self is too much for the egotistically sublime self's image of its own autonomy. De Monfort, then, is a dramatization of the consequences, not of skeptical *avoidance* of humanity in another, but of the internalized soul's acknowledgment of another. Acknowledgment of another turns out to be tantamount to stepping off the earth, to death for both self and other.

For when De Monfort, stumbling into the convent after killing Rezenvelt, admits his guilt immediately, he also begins to question his own identity. Does the De Monfort who committed the murder still exist? When his sister Jane arrives, he avoids her with this message:

Tell her De Monfort far from hence is gone
 Into a desolate and distant land,
 Ne'er to return again. (99)

The suggestion of a plot like the ending of The Borderers, in which the outcast solitary leaves human society, is too untidy for this drama's eschatology. De Monfort means, in one sense, that "he" is gone from himself. He struggles with hope: "I've done a deed--But I am human still," (100), but, like Sophocles's Oedipus, he cannot live with the person he has become: "Disgrace and public shame abide me now..." (100). As a shamed self, De Monfort cannot live, since life under shame would mean a life without the autonomy that murdering Rezenvelt was supposed to accomplish. Jane's reaction to him--she calls him "My hapless Monfort!"--and the epitaph she writes for him suggest that she considers him sympathetic despite his guilt. She calls him one of "the noble and the brave" who felt the

“keenest sense of conscious ill/ And deep remorse” (100). Through most of the last act, however, De Monfort contradicts these hopeful ideas. Again and again he declares himself to be non-existent: “I have no name” (99), “I now am nothing” (99), “I have no name—/ I’m nothing now, not e’en to thee: depart” (100). It is as if De Monfort no longer has a self, or a soul. And yet, this soullessness is the basis for his repentance, since the his whole self was formerly his hatred. These lines’ finality, then, exposes a tension in Baillie’s plot between her religious orthodoxy and her psychological insight. It seems as if the modern self must cease to exist in order to achieve Baillie’s view of salvation. In that result, Baillie’s plot is more honest than it at first seems, though only if we decide that Baillie was of a more modern party, without knowing it, than she cared to choose. If Baillie’s drama is dialectical, it does not seem to contain Byron’s level of self-critique.

Byron’s dramas go beyond Baillie’s in the way Byron’s employ skepticism as form; how they let the competing characters’ views, devoid of a narrator’s referee, reach conclusions about their places in the public world. The dramas’ shifting perspectives and undermined characters are of a piece with Romantic narratives’ tendency toward generic self-questioning. The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, with its ironizing marginal notes,¹⁸ Frankenstein’s embedded narrations, and Alastor’s distance between its Poet and its “Preface” all undermine the authority of the story-teller. No Romantic narrative undermines itself more, and in more ways, of course, than Don Juan. Romantic drama achieves, if not a “level,” then a form of skepticism about itself that is unique, partly because the interplay between authority (the narrator) and its objects (the characters, the events) is not there. As dramas these texts never simply alight on one *character’s* position as a final resting place for thought —this is true even of Manfred, which scrupulously maintains tension between the title character and the text in which he appears. This chapter,

¹⁸These ironies were first brought to my attention as an undergraduate in Karl Kroeber’s survey course on the Romantic poets at Columbia University, 1988.

then, will describe one way of thinking about each drama's set of issues and conflicts partly seen through the isolated positions of its characters.¹⁹

The questions that burn in Byron's plays are whether they are so fully pessimistic about the human condition, or about modernity, that they advocate in despair the tragic ends of their protagonists; or whether they offer any sort of prescription for heroism in a world and an age that seem so thoroughly to strip the individual—even, or especially the grander, more capaciously conscious individuals—of any real personal power. This chapter will describe the ways in which Byron shows his characters to be without agency just at the moment when they might seem most powerful, when their passions are at their greatest heights. Further, it will show how Byron's dramas, like Shelley's, anticipate some of these problems and thematize them. Recognizing that to thematize a problem is not to offer a solution to it, this chapter will end by suggesting ways in which Byron does, if not offer solutions, entertain the possibility of their emergence.

In Romantic dramas the "others" are not to be trusted, and tend only to deepen a skepticism of both sympathy and reform. The section on Manfred shows that Byron's skepticism, unlike Shelley's, had its limits: Byron's doubt ends at the materiality of the human body; the body's limit is what Manfred knows, to his sorrow, and though he is

¹⁹That is "philosophy" in Byron's writing in general is very often, but not always, a term of ridicule, to the extent that most critics feel the need to apologize for mentioning Byron and "philosophy" in the same breath. The apology usually runs along the lines of pointing out that a term of ridicule is a term of interest, but this study will seek to show a stronger way of anchoring Byron to "philosophy" by reading Byron against Shelley. Though it would take too much space to illustrate, it seems clear enough that given Byron's emphatic anti-philosophical stance, and the purposefully open form of Don Juan, the unfinished qualities to his dramas' metaphysics are strengths in them. Clearest in Cain, this coherence out of confusion is also evident in each of the other plays. In Byron's Dialectic: Skepticism and the Critique of Culture (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1993) 15-16, Hoagwood addresses the issue of the word "philosophy" and Byron's skepticism, saying that Byron's skepticism manifested itself in a thoroughly anti-systematic view of thought.

skeptical of all received human dogma, he cannot seem to escape his physical nature. The subjects of the public, the will, and the possibilities for influencing "History," shall occupy most of the discussion here of the historical tragedy Marino Faliero.²⁰ History in capitals is not what happened but rather our understanding of the patterns, our assertion that occurrences are not just series of events and require a belief in cause and our ability to know cause. Beyond that there is the question of the will's power to cause any event. Byron's characters interact with their societies through shame, an emotion that threatens to curtail the will. Shame is a social impingement upon the self. Pride, shame's seeming opposite, then, is a negative acknowledgment of society's power to shape the will's aspirations. The individual who seeks to avoid shame and defend pride lives in a condition Hegel describes as "Lordship and Bondage" in which "Self-consciousness exists...only in being acknowledged."²¹

The wills of Byron's protagonists are circumscribed by the shame of inadequate agency. Whereas so much writing about Byron claims him as an advocate for monopoly individualism and self-reliance, this study will seek to show how Byron is anxious about these very possibilities. The dramas give us characters whose power of will arises from a consciousness that also acts as their sources of shame. Much of the way shame and agency are understood in this chapter is taken from Bernard Williams's study of ancient Greek literature, Shame and Necessity. Williams presents a full critique of Kantian ethics based on a reevaluation of the Greek shame culture and honor code. Briefly, Williams objects to

²⁰See Daniel Watkins, A Materialist Critique, 137: "The perspective that Byron seems to have been developing at this time [the 1820s] involved a rejection both of the eighteenth-century view of the world as static and fallen as well as the Romantic view of the world as organic and fallen; his position increasingly was grounded instead upon his hard-won belief that human value is historically rather than "naturally" determined, and that it is thus transformable." See also Jerome McGann's seminal Fiery Dust: Byron's Poetic Development (Chicago, London: U of Chicago P, 1968) 251, on Byron's "gloominess."

²¹G.W.F. Hegel Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977) 111.

the categorical imperative's distance from felt experience. Kant posited an abstract, "characterless"²² and disinterested moral self that tells us what we must do. Arguing that this is not an accurate description of actual life, Williams substitutes an internalized other whose ability to see our inadequacies causes us shame, as the motive, not only for right action, but for effectiveness. We wish to live up to ourselves so that we do not feel this shame. Further, since we are not always able to control whether we get to live up to our ideals, shame is (again) a conduit between ourselves and the outside world. In the internalized other it is a conduit between us and all those people we consider important. Shame, then, is a part of sympathy. The intense pride, and equally intense shame, felt by Byron's dramatic characters, are the ways they relate to the limitations imposed on them by their dramatic circumstances. Their shame, the limit of their wills, is their humanity.

By way of introducing the operations of shame, embodiment and desire in Manfred, I shall take a detour through the poem often seen as Manfred's immediate precursor, Shelley's Alastor, or The Spirit of Solitude. The angle at which I read Manfred—as most deeply self-critical—comes in part from the way in which Alastor is, as Shelley explains in the "Preface" to the poem, a tale with a moral, told with an eye to "instruction" for men similarly possessed by the "spirit of solitude." It is the opposite of an adulation of the life of the Poet whose story it narrates, though his tragic figure is drawn to inspire awe. Shelley who felt that awe, constructs it to critique it and not simply to leave as an impressive edifice. This is as true of the Poet's sublimity in Alastor as it is of Victor Frankenstein's scientific prowess in Mary Shelley's novel, or, in a text Shelley did not know, of Rivers' Robespierre-like charismatic rhetorical skills in Wordsworth's The Borderers.

²²Williams, 100.

The "Preface" to Alastor warns us that we are not to think that the Poet's error is an excess of idealism, as if such an excess by itself were responsible for its disappointment.²³ Rather, the Poet fails to mix into his idealism the sufficient sympathy for and from other real, bodily, vibrant human beings. Specifically, the Poet fails to acknowledge the bodily part of his own sexual desires, choosing instead to perceive a vision of a highly sexual female *soul* without a body. In the Poet, Shelley gives character to what he sees as a false solution to the problem of skepticism of the other described in the previous chapter. We cannot truly know if the mind of the other person, even the object of our love, is like our own and able to sympathize with our pains. The Poet seems to solve this problem, not through love, but around love. The Poet's dream of the ideal female conceives her synaesthetically. She is a metaphysical being whose "voice" has "hues," and whose every seemingly physical attribute is really an intellectual (spiritual) one. The Poet thereby avoids the difficulty of having to trust a real external body whose soul or self he might only perceive indirectly, through the senses, language, and physiognomy. The poem gives us bits of the desires of "youthful maidens" whose hearts the Poet breaks, giving up the bodily satisfaction against which compromise he does not even struggle. Shelley's poem instead acknowledges that the wages of repression is death by ironizing the Poet's mistaken claim to have transcended his body. The Poet's quest for the vision of the veiled maid yields only emptiness: "His wan eyes/ Gaze on the empty scene as vacantly/ As ocean's moon looks on the moon in heaven" (200-02).

We should not admire the ethics of someone who thus attempts to achieve this sort of transcendence: "The spirit of sweet human love has sent/ A vision of sleep to him who spurned/ Her choicest gifts' (203-05). This spirit of love is like a fury, an image that controls much of Manfred. Briefly, the idea of a fury is part of a cosmos (the word means

²³All references to Shelley are from Shelley's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Criticism, ed. Donald Reiman, Sharon Powers (New York, London: W.W. Norton, 1977).

"order" in Greek), an optimistic view in which the universe is ordered and our mental processes are aligned to a describable moral system. Manfred seems to subscribe to this view, though lines that refer to "Remorse without the fear of hell" may be read in several ways. Marino Faliero, on the other hand, seems written specifically to reject what I shall define later as the typical "remorse-plot," substituting questions about historical change for belief in a cosmos. Byron re-wrote Shelley's ideal of the fury of love as an even more malevolent innate characteristic of the body and self.

Shelley, in making love a fury in his poem, transposes sin into the *refusal* of bodily sex. The Poet then, who otherwise is no orthodox Christian, becomes strangely allied with a repressiveness that Shelley sees as a trap of idealism but which the orthodox share. Turning Miltonic language on its head, Shelley writes that the Poet

...eagerly pursues

Beyond the realms of dream that fleeting Shade;

He overleaps the bounds. Alas! Alas!

Were limbs, and breath, and being intertwined

Thus treacherously? Lost, lost, for ever lost,

In the wide pathless desert of dim sleep,

That beautiful shape! (205-11)

This condenses several episodes of Satan's quest in Paradise Lost, from the journey through Chaos, to the arrival at Eden's wall, where Satan "At one slight bound high overleaped all bound" (IV.181). Satan does so only to find, to his anguish, the sexual paradise enjoyed by Adam and Eve before their fall. The Poet of *Alastor*, in Satan's place, ironically finds only a mental "desart" *because* "limbs, and breath, and being" are physiognomically "intertwined." Byron too will find the physiognomic intertwining "treacherous," a forceful relation not to be ignored.

Alastor's warning about untempered, inhuman transcendence bears on Manfred in another crucial area: the possibility for reform and the formation of a "public." While neither poem might seem at first to have much to do with the public realm, both are troubled by it. Manfred, as we shall see, like Byron, worries terribly about what he might have accomplished in politics. Similarly, the Poet in Alastor ruins a chance to make a strong political, moral, and sexual alliance with the poem's Arab maiden. This general initial quest might have led him to love another person. The Arab maiden preceded the Poet's vision of the veiled maid and is similarly alienated. She brings him food "from her father's tent," (130) "and stole/ From duties and repose to tend his steps:—/ Enamoured," (131-2). At dawn, "to her cold home,/ Wildered, and wan, and panting, she returned" (138-9). The Poet seems to ignore the Arab maid the way a movie star would ignore a groupie who adores him, with the same kind of condescension. There is no reason to suppose that the Poet ever finds out that they both come from oppressive homes, though the poem suggests that he might have known it since the alienated home seems a universal. If so, the Poet is actively uninterested in the Arab maid, probably because he doubts that she has sufficient depth to shed any light on his own experiences. In many ways, however, she is his moral superior. She "watched his nightly sleep,/ Sleepless herself" (134-5); indicating devotion but also a wakeful consciousness independent of his. The Poet, meanwhile, has "innocent dreams" (137), which are presumably non-sexual (for when he has a sexual dream it ruins his life). She starts out, therefore, more self-conscious, mature, and certainly more generous than he is. His failure to notice her in his condescending narcissism is the first tragedy of the poem, and it is a tragedy with political consequences. The Poet will never join with others who suffer as he does under modernity's power hierarchies. In The Cenci Shelley will explore further the domestically isolating consequences of the public's failure to form any resistance to patriarchy, as the Poet fails here. In Manfred the central character's narcissistic love for Astarte, though

abortively love for another, is part of Manfred's condescending inability to engage with the world of other humans.

The Poet's quest, really a condemnation to wander, places him a category of wanderers with Caleb Williams, the Ancient Mariner, Wordsworth's Rivers and Mortimer from The Borderers, Frankenstein and his monster, Don Juan, Blake's narrator in "London," or Rintrah in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, and Byron himself as Blake describes him in the dedication to the dramatic fragment "The Ghost of Abel." If Milton, as we have seen, associates wandering with error or sin, and Shelley with the price of condescension in idealism, Byron turns it into a metaphor for doubt. One aspect of the Poet's moral failure in Alastor not discussed is how his intellectual achievement in youth leads him to a skepticism that might in some measure lift from him the guilt of condescension, as if becoming a thinker and an idealist, for Shelley, meant becoming susceptible to just that sort of skepticism of love.

In Shelley, in other words, the poetry is an attempt to negotiate back towards optimism. The love-fury in Alastor is one such sign of optimism, similar in effect to Coleridge's ideal of innate remorse. In Byron skepticism stops at the body, which is to say that he refuses to credit doubt of his body or abstraction away from materiality.²⁴ He

²⁴The issue of whether or not Byron's skepticism "stops" is a matter of debate. Here Terence Hoagwood discusses a passage by Michael Cooke:

Cooke's statement is especially interesting in this regard because he states so lucidly the conventional supposition, held tenaciously by almost every critic, that skepticism *must* be overcome somehow, *must* be displaced somewhere by a belief; Cooke puts that antiskeptical presupposition this way:

"In actuality few philosophical skeptics have failed in one way or another to transcend the paralysis such a position implies, to come to terms with [quoting Santayana] the 'vital compulsions to posit and believe something.'" See Hoagwood, Byron's Dialectic, 28, and Michael Cooke, The Blind Man Traces the Circle: On the Patterns and Philosophy of Byron's Poetry (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1969) 176, on "the Byronic affirmation." Other

distinguished himself from Shelley by calling Shelley "a visionary," and though we can call Byron one too, he did not do so. In each case--Shelley's skepticism and Byron's belief--the poet's position is a source of pain, though Prometheus Unbound seems at times paradoxically to celebrate doubt. In Manfred and in Marino Faliero we shall see how Byron's belief in the unavoidable body is the deep source of shame for each of its characters. The knowledge of self and the world, which in Manfred is sorrow, and the knowledge of politics and public affairs, which in Marino Faliero is hopelessness, are both based on the surest knowledge of all: the shame of being merely human; "half dust, half deity."

Manfred's Shame

I know where I will wear this dagger then;
 Cassius from bondage will deliver Cassius.
 Therein, ye gods, you make the weak most strong;
 Therein, ye gods, you tyrants do defeat.
 Nor stony tower, nor walls of beaten brass,
 Nor airless dungeon, nor strong links of iron,
 Can be retentive to the strength of spirit;
 But life, being weary of these worldly bars,
 Never lacks power to dismiss itself. (Julius Caesar, I.iii.89-97)

examples of this debate occur in discussions of the "pessimism" of Marino Faliero. The attitude Hoagwood spends much time dismantling is shared by critics who see the play as dark to the point of nihilism as well as those who find some hope in it; both assume that its skepticism is its darkness and if that skepticism is complete, then the play is completely negative. In Fiery Dust (214), Jerome McGann defends the play against what he identifies as its "maze of skepticisms" by trying to show that it affirms self-awareness in the end.

Shame is Prides Cloke

(Blake, from "Proverbs of Hell," The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, plate 7, 1793)²⁵

The paradoxes of Cassius's suicidal speech equivocate between the claims of the strong self and the despair enabling Cassius final self-assertion. Shakespeare's Christianity saw Cassius's heroic selfhood as sinful destruction of God's Image, a trope that removes even one's own body from one's possession; we are not made in our image, but the Deity's. Byron's Manfred, as an investigation of human agency, is less certain of Cassius's claim for the power of life to dismiss itself. In Byron, pride, the impetus to suicide, also prevents such action. Blake's dialectical proverb on pride and shame testifies to the same issue within the self. At first Blake seems to exult in pride at shame's expense, for he figures shame as covering for what, in another proverb, Blake calls "the glory of God." Yet placing shame and pride in this opposition--making them contraries--means that both are needed for true progression. The pride/shame binary, then, is a Romantic trope for the problem of subjectivity's power to exult in itself but also to punish itself.

The opening lines of Manfred: a Dramatic Poem testify to the inwardness of a prisoner of consciousness:

My slumbers--if I slumber--are not sleep,
But a continuance of enduring thought,
Which then I can resist not: in my heart
There is a vigil, and these eyes but close
To look within; and yet I live, and bear

²⁵The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake, ed. David V. Erdman, commentary Harold Bloom, rev. ed. (Berkeley, Los Angeles: U. of California P., 1982) 33.

The aspect and the form of breathing men. (I.3-8)

Like Satan on the burning lake, and yet so unlike him because so human, Manfred begins the drama surprised by his own physical presence. The plot of the drama is that Manfred, a powerful magician, has lost his sister and incestuous lover Astarte, because of the shame that their union created in society. Though what he desires is forgiveness from Astarte (and himself), in despair of these his quest changes to a search for forgetfulness in true oblivion. He wishes first to prove to himself that death will provide an end to his mind and soul, not merely its transformation.

But insofar as the plot of Manfred: A Poem is an allegory of the non-conformist set at the margins of a surveillant world, Manfred's desire for utter self-determination is stymied. His anguish in the play comes from Astarte's death-by-scandal. Not just Byron the celebrity, but Manfred the potential spirit in every human, are permanent actors in a public theater. As Byron would write regarding the staging of Marino Faliero:

I have had no view to the stage; in its present state it is, perhaps, not a very exalted object of ambition; besides I have been too much behind the scenes to have thought it so at any time. And I cannot conceive any man of irritable feeling putting himself at the mercies of an audience:—the sneering reader, and the loud critic, and the tart review, are scattered and distant calamities; but the trampling of an intelligent or of an ignorant audience on a production which, be it good or bad, has been a mental labour to the writer, is a palpable and immediate grievance, heightened by a man's doubt of their competency to judge, and his certainty of his own imprudence in electing them his judges. (from the "Preface")²⁶

²⁶Byron's CPW, IV, 305.

This claim has elicited a history of criticism either defending Byron's straightforward aversion to the degraded state of English theater or alleging coyness in him. That debate aside, we may note that Byron justifies his aversion to the theater in an uneasy opposition between the reactions of reviewers and the mass public. For the author of English Bards and Scotch Reviewers to say that, compared to reviews, a public audience is insupportable, is to reveal a deeper anxiety of mass society *per se*. Reviewers, even sneering readers, are individuals. Manfred, written five years earlier, expresses this anxiety as a quest for certainty in oblivion, for if death is sure to come, Byron wishes it to avoid being at the hands of the crowd, or any external force. Marino Faliero was staged even though Byron went to court to stop it, and even though Byron should have known it would be staged. As in the case of that play, Manfred's assertions of self-determination against the crowd's force are self-consciously equivocal.

What is Manfred's "self" if the union with Astarte, the ultimate consummation of narcissism available to a real human body, has turned into a public fiasco? Manfred internalizes these questions by, for example, representing Astarte as Manfred's "star," or epipsyche, a lost part of himself.²⁷ This reading illustrates the way in which it fragments Manfred's self into separate agents. The poem is often interpreted as a triumph of the will which makes "death a victory," in an impressive show of Promethean resistance to the powers that hem us in.²⁸ But so much of the poem questions the solidity of the identity of its main character, who never does gain the certainty he seeks, that his "victory" deserves much more qualification than it usually receives. Manfred dramatizes modern man's pride despite his lack of valuable power, and not a victory over the demons within and without.

Manfred also says in the opening speech, that:

²⁷This is the reading suggested by Jerome McGann as editor of Byron's text. See Byron's CPW, IV, 467.

²⁸Byron admits that the Prometheus of Aeschylus probably influenced Manfred, but only in a general way. See BLJ, V, 268.

Sorrow is knowledge; they who know the most
 Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal truth,
 The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life. (L.10-12)

To a great extent, the plot's assault on the supposed fruits of the modernity of Enlightenment—knowledge both scientific and of the human mind itself—might seem to support the kind of postmodern interpretations that we have seen in the chapter on Shelley's dramas. The chief of these interpreters, Jerome Christensen, writes succinctly that "The Romantic poet is after virtue, not truth."²⁹ But though hardly naïve about truth, its internal sources, and its variations, Byron shows that the truth is after him, in the sense that it is "fatal," meaning deadly but also unavoidable.

Knowledge is sorrow partly because the knowledge of which Manfred speaks is partly what he resists most: that he is not a complete agent of his own destiny. He knows, and resists knowing, that, in the absence of any Jovean tormentor in which to believe, his Promethean resistance has itself only been instigated by his sufferings. The object of Manfred's quest is to fill in that last piece of knowledge about the true fatality of the soul. But that object is a fact; something beyond the influence of any will, and Manfred merely seeks to know the fact, not to alter it or to suggest that it may be altered in history. The interpretations of the poem that see it as an egoistic, individualistic pose of Hamlet in suicidal angst at life's slings and arrows miss the obvious paradox at the heart of all that passes: Manfred can only achieve his goal of certainty by ending his will. His goal, in effect, is to become absolutely passive.

Passivity is the goal, then, despite all of Manfred's powerful activity. The next occurrence of the opening scene is that Manfred first calls upon the "Spirits of the unbounded universe," whom he introduces as "Mysterious agency." They ignore him.

²⁹Lord Byron's Strength , xix.

But when he calls upon them again in the name of “the strong curse which is upon my Soul/ The thought which is within me and around me./ I do compel ye to my will.—Appear!“(I.47-9), they appear. Each tells him that he commands them: “Thy will be my guide!” (I.99). It is perhaps easiest to think that Manfred frightens the elements into appearance with a bigger shout. But it is also possible to read this conjuration somewhat allegorically: Manfred summons the presence of the physical universe before him—its essences—by remembering his own sorrows, his disappointed idealism, his loss of love. Like the powers of the Poet of Alastor, Manfred’s powers are always double-edged. In summoning physicality as such in the name of his “will, he again acknowledges his incapacity to control his own history, his own self. Quickly, Manfred learns that those whom he commands cannot help him achieve the forgetfulness for which he called them.

The spirits, especially the seventh spirit, which is of Manfred’s “star” or destiny (but also “Astarte”) all boast of their powers, complain about being called and deride the person who called them. Their boastful, defiant tone is even more obvious than their individual physical characteristics. The second spirit of the mountains, for example, boasts that he “Could make the mountain bow” (I.73). Even the two-line speech of the sixth spirit (Night) expresses a craggy annoyance:

My dwelling is the shadow of the Night

Why doth thy magic torture me with light? (I.108-9)

As a collection of separate wills or selves, the spirits form a deistic or pagan sentience in nature. In the allegorical psychomachia of the drama the spirits have at least two other functions. Their defiance marks them, simply, as selves. To be a self in this poem, no matter what one’s position in any hierarchy may be, is to resist others. The other function is to embody limitation; we see the end of their powers. Manfred calls the spirits in order to help him achieve self-destruction, but since they are all physical (including, in a special

sense, Manfred's "star"), they cannot give him the specifically metaphysical certainty he seeks. The physical spirits answer him almost as Locke or Hume might, by telling him repeatedly that he is a "Child of Clay" (I.131, 133), and that they know nothing more. In other words, the knowledge Manfred seeks cannot be found through science, or empirical questionings of the physical universe.

Manfred, embittered by their answer, asserts his will again:

Slaves, scoff not at my will!

The Mind—the Spirit—the Promethean spark,

The lightening of my being is as bright,

Pervading, as far darting as your own,

And shall not yield to yours, though cooped in clay! (I.153-57)

We may take this passionate outburst at face value, or we may question it because it is within a drama; to do the latter would be to place it in the context of what it seems to respond. Very much like the miscommunication between the earth and Prometheus in the first scene of Shelley's Prometheus Unbound (Shelley shows Byron's influence there), Manfred and the physical spirits continually misunderstand each other.³⁰ Manfred's outburst here is pointless, since the spirits already obey his will as they said they would. They just cannot give him answers about his soul. Nature by itself cannot (in Shelley's words from Alastor) "render up the tale/ Of what we are." On the contrary, the natural spirits imply a skepticism about the possibility of such knowledge from any source:

If, as thou say'st, thine essence be as ours,

³⁰The best account of this misunderstanding is Susan H. Brisman's "Unsaying His High Language: The Problem of Voice in Prometheus Unbound," Studies In Romanticism, 16 (1977): 51-86.

We have replied in telling thee, the thing

Mortals call death hath nought to do with us. (I.162-64)

Only then does Manfred realize that “I then have called ye from your realms in vain...” (I.164). In the interim the spirits received the “Slaves!” drubbing which shows something Byron will make much of in Marino Faliero: passionate characters let “their” wills run away from them.³¹

In what follows, the spirits show that they are even more specifically the “mind” of nature relevant to this man who called them. Manfred asks that the one “who is most powerful of ye, take such as aspect/ As unto him may seem most fitting—Come!” (I.186-87). The most powerful, it turns out, is Manfred’s star, who appears as a “beautiful female figure.” Manfred tries to “clasp” her but finds nothing in his arms, and the “figure vanishes.” Manfred faints. In this moment Manfred merges with Alastor but with a different dynamic. In Alastor the female figure is pure projection, the Poet alone in his narcissism; here, in the dramatic situation, there are more forces at play. In one sense the spirit of Manfred’s “star,” who claims most vociferously to dominate Manfred, in fact prostrates itself before him by embodying the object of his sexual desires. The struggle of wills to dominate has become overtly what it already was in allegory: a lesson in how Manfred’s “resistance” is resistance to himself, and his “star” or destiny is to become subservient to himself.

The paradox of Manfred, then, is that despite so much of its rhetoric, its dramatic ironies are about subservience before the self. This turns out to be a hard idea to hold, pointing beyond the facts that Manfred is at once willful and ineffectual, proud yet filled

³¹This is part of the purpose of setting Manfred within an overtly gothic environment. As in Baillie’s gothic dramas Orra and De Monfort, the gothic is often the place where men and women are driven to enact passions they would elsewhere be able to control.

with shame, and a conjurer who unintentionally conjures only reminders of that shame.

When Manfred conjures the spirit of his Star, it warns him,

Thou worm! whom I obey and scorn—
Forced by a Power (which is not thine,
And lent thee but to make thee mine) (I.124-26)

Manfred's momentary control over his destiny is a temporary ability to repress his body's memory of desire. When the ability collapses, Manfred faints and the spirits sing the "incantation."³² They sing that

By the perfection of thine art
Which pass'd for human thine own heart;
By thy delight in others' pain,
And by thy brotherhood of Cain,
I call upon thee! and compel
Thyself to be thy proper Hell! (I.245-51)

This lyric distills several themes of the whole drama, including the care with which every metaphysical statement points in two directions. For example, is Manfred his own proper hell, then perhaps an eschatological one does not exist. But then, Satan admits that "which way I fly is Hell," even though, in Paradise Lost, there really is a Hell and death is just a painful change of place. One of the more interesting problems of the "incantation" is, dramatically, that it has no speaker. It is merely heard. Manfred is unconscious during it, implying that the incantation is what Manfred hears in his unconscious stupor. Manfred is

³²Byron wrote this earlier and published it separately in The Prisoner of Chillon and Other Poems in 1816. See Byron's CPW, IV, 463, for textual notes.

speaking to himself, and all of the poem's "spirits" are ways of describing the growth of a poet's self-consciousness. The passage suggests as much because it sounds like remorse, self-generated in the conscience.

And yet, Manfred is not autonomous in the sense of being an intentional point-source. Autonomy, after all, would seem to require wholeness, a unity that acts for itself, but Byron's characters are significant if for nothing else than for their divisions. Standing on the cliff, Manfred asks,

...wherefore do I pause?

I feel the impulse, yet I do not plunge;
 I see the peril—yet do not recede;
 And my brain reels—and yet my foot is firm:
 There is a power upon me which withholds,
 And makes it my fatality to live,—
 If it be life to wear within myself
 This barrenness of Spirit, and to be
 My own Soul's sepulchre,... (I.ii.19-27)

The knife-edge paradox of "fatality to live" and the death-in-life image of the last line come from a self-division which defies the power of self-consciousness. It seems to Manfred as if parts of himself were acting like external agents, like some perhaps magical "power." What is at issue here is the possibility of an innate desire to live, an unavoidable morality like the one proposed by sentimental philosophy in search of an ordering force, a moral God within. But it would be hard to find many scenes like this one that so distance self from self, making Manfred into a helpless observer of himself, like David Hume's utterly skeptical description of the "self": it is "nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in perpetual

flux and movement."³³ If, then, Byron wishes to re-assert the existence of an innate moral reflex, he does not do so sentimentally, but only after absorbing Hume's critique of self. Hume regards this cinematic progression of images as the human condition, but Byron seems to indicate that it is only one mode, the one which has forgotten or which seeks to deny the body's power to anchor the self. Manfred is full of these sorts of equivocations between skepticism and belief, and each of them operates dialectically to avoid belief's sentimentalities.

The paradoxical "fatality to live" undercuts Manfred's claims of autonomy. Another undercutting occurs when Manfred is surprised by the Chamois Hunter. Upon the mountain top, supposedly alone with Nature and his Selfhood, Manfred is interrupted by this dogmatic representative of ordinary humanity. The Hunter's dogma against suicide is standard: "stain not our pure vales with thy guilty blood" (I.ii.111). The orthodox dogma against suicide, so unquestioned by the Hunter that he need not re-tell it, is based upon the authority of Genesis's tale that the human body is made in God's image. Manfred, seeing himself as "half dust, half deity" (I.ii.40), can neither deny nor fully assert his *body's* divinity. But when he tries to jump to his death, he finds that his body has a say. Though the Hunter's dogma is untested by the rigors of skeptical critique, Manfred finds its dictate difficult (though ultimately not impossible) to ignore. Not only is Manfred not alone even when and where he thinks he is, but he cannot escape the internal power of what would seem to be an external prescriptive creed.

The origins of Manfred's claims to have separated from society come to us in the second act. In a kind of confession by Manfred to the Witch of the Alps, we learn how the history of his mental torture began with his early separation from the human world with its untenable fictions; "From my youth upwards/ My spirit walk'd not with the souls of men"

³³A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1978) 252.

(II.ii.50-51). Manfred's ethics are not socially constructed; yet they exist to dog him no matter what he does to avoid them. They are not *his* assertions of the good.

The scene with the Witch is marked by Manfred's vulnerabilities, as any true confession would be. We see here how his actions have always been guided by his desires and fears. These, in turn, seem to come from somewhere between his mind and his body. He conjures the Witch of the Alps, a female vision of natural beauty, in a moment in which he seeks rest. He calls her seemingly just to look at her (see II.ii.38). He does not call her with the idea of confessing to her; the witch implores him to speak, though he sees little purpose in it: "Well, though it torture me, 'tis but the same;/ My pang shall find a voice" (II.ii.49-50). Verbalizing one's sorrow seems almost pointless to Manfred. Doing so gives him no respite. In Marino Faliero the value of publicizing one's experiences becomes more explicitly important to the failed revolutionaries, but this note of resignation in Manfred should caution us against taking Faliero's claims at face value. Manfred tells the Witch:

From my youth upwards
 My Spirit walked not with the souls of men,
 Nor looked upon the earth with human eyes;
 The thirst of their ambition was not mine,
 The aim of their existence was not mine;
 My joys--my griefs--my passions--and my powers,
 Made me a stranger; though I wore the form,
 I had no sympathy with breathing flesh,
 Nor midst the Creatures of Clay that girded me,
 Was there but One who--but of her anon.
 I said with men, and with the thoughts of men,
 I held but slight communion; but instead,

My joy was in the wilderness,... (II.ii.50-62)

For if the beings, of whom I was one,—
 Hating to be so,—crossed me in my path,
 I felt myself degraded back to them
 And was all clay again. And then I dived,
 In my lone wanderings, to the causes of Death,
 Searching for its cause in its effects; and drew
 Conclusions most forbidden. (II.ii. 76-84)

The chapters on Wordsworth and Shelley presented Stanley Cavell's descriptions of the avoidance of humanness in others as a useful way of comprehending how, for example, Beatrice Cenci could order her father's death. She no longer saw that he had the same kind of humanity that she possessed. Manfred's dilemma is the opposite; he sees the humanity of others, but disrespects it because he does not feel fully human himself. His problem is like that of Wordsworth's Rivers, whom Wordsworth created as a warning about the dangers of violence from those men who think themselves superior to other men. Manfred is a sympathetic expression of the alienation that feelings of superiority cause.

Other people, rather than causing sympathy in Manfred, give him only self-loathing. For alone, Manfred can imagine himself to have transcended his materiality, even though he knows that he has not done so. Other people remind him of his error, and of the disappointment that any idealism based on such a transcendence must endure. Alastor's Poet simply ignored other people, rising above them in his intellectual quests; in Manfred others have the power to cause self-loathing, undermining the sublimity of his infinite researches. Astarte is not the *Alastor* Poet's "veiled maid," an ideal arising from the imagination; she is Manfred's failure to imagine the worth of anyone but himself. Manfred explains that Astarte was "like me in lineaments... But softened all, and tempered into

beauty" (105, 108).³⁴ He tells the Witch, "I loved her, and destroyed her!" (117), but Manfred's act of shouldering responsibility for what society has done to her seems magnanimous, but not entirely right. Manfred did not kill Astarte himself. Nor could he save her. Nor could he choose but to desire her, after his renunciation of society and his egotistically sublime researches; she is his "star." Manfred's "science," like all science, is a matter of skepticism, disbelieving the taboos that block empirical study. But his skepticism has run over into a skepticism of the humanness of other people, generated by a desire to think that they are, in fact, *not* like him. Such a skepticism born of self-loathing can allow him, paradoxically, to love only himself. His grandeur in this speech is a product of self-avoidance, not a noble transcendence of pettiness but its apotheosis.

³⁴One of the more interesting readings of what happens to Manfred after losing Astarte is in Caroline Franklin, Byron's Heroines (Oxford: Clarendon P, New York: Oxford UP, 1992) 222ff. Franklin concludes that Manfred's desire for Astarte is acquisitive: "...since Astarte is not dramatized as a separate character in the play, but can only be glimpsed through her recreation via the mind of Manfred, it could be said that the concept of androgyny is rendered here less as an image of wholeness than as the male hero's wish for the appropriation of the feminine quality of sentiment...In Manfred's opening soliloquy he refers to 'that all-nameless hour'(I.i.24) when he and Astarte were separated. Since then his search for knowledge of philosophy and science has been dissociated from humanitarian values...The play hinges on the dualism created by linking intellectual aspiration with masculinity, and goodness with femininity...The 'feminine' virtues, whilst revered, must be rejected by the heroes...This way, the feminine is validated yet also subsumed by heroic masculinity." (224, 225, 227). I have taken much from Franklin's map of the effect of Astarte's exit and Manfred's subsequent inadequacies, but I disagree with this conclusion. Heroic masculinity, according to Franklin's own observation, is very much at issue in Manfred, just as it is in Alastor. My quarrel with Franklin is in the way she treats Manfred flatly as a hero. Franklin's assumption is outlined on her first page: "My study will show that, whereas the various manifestations of the famous 'Byronic hero' remain fairly consistent in outline, Byron's female characters range from the eroticized passive victim of patriarchal force to the masculinized woman-warrior..." Franklin should not, in my opinion, stabilize the masculine in order to interrogate the feminine in Byron.

Thus at the heart of Manfred there is disappointed idealism, but mostly there is shame. All that Manfred retains in his now augmented self-disgust is his will, and a dignity that comes from a resistance to “serve.” When the Witch tries to tempt Manfred, offering to help him if he will “swear obedience to my will” (156), he responds in anger,

I will not swear.--Obey! and whom? the Spirits
Whose presence I command, and be the slave
Of those who served me--Never! (II.ii.158-60)

This, and Manfred’s other refusals to submit, are usually counted among his heroics. Had he sworn to obey the Witch of the Alps—a manifestation of Manfred’s aesthetic appreciation of nature—we may imagine him becoming a hedonist like Byron’s Sardanapalus (or like Byron himself in a few years). In less absolute terms, Manfred’s refusal to submit to anyone or anything is inherent in his incestuous desire, as if loving one’s image were to avoid the relinquishment of control that loving a true other entails. Manfred’s angry refusal to follow the Witch, then, is double-edged, like all of his other acts of will in the drama. His sudden anger at the Witch’s proposal is a sign of Manfred’s passionate nature, and again we do not have a case of disappointed ideals, for he did not summon her to help him in the first place. His anger shows that he is steadfast in maintaining the integrity of his self, but it also shows that he is human, because subject to his passions.

The terrifying speech that follows Manfred’s dismissal of the Witch is written with the existential logic of powerlessness. Its emotional center is the line, “In life there is no present” (173), only the inescapable past and the indeterminate future. But that statement is hard to accept, considering that every moment for Manfred is an exquisitely felt torture, as it is when he ruminates uselessly over Astarte’s fate:

If I had never lived, that which I love

Had still been living; had I never loved,
 That which I love would still be beautiful--
 Happy and giving happiness. What is she?
 What is she now?--a sufferer for my sins--
 A thing I dare not think upon--or nothing. (II.ii.193-96)

Manfred is now at his lowest level of helplessness and submission to uncertainty he wishes to end. He tells us here that his science had only brought him "another kind of ignorance," which was the ignorance of things human, in their denial. Manfred ends the speech heroically, vowing to challenge the spirits of the dead, whom he dreads: "But I can act even what I most abhor,/ And champion human fears" (II.ii.204-5). Manfred's heroism here is ordinary because it is courage in the face of powers greater than oneself.

The problems posed by the drama--the fate of a woman who dies of shame, and of a man who wishes to follow her--are themselves not global. The third act, especially in Byron's substantial revisions, provides examples of how Byron understood the drama to be about the strength skepticism requires and the temptations of dogma to individuals facing personal demons. Byron sent the first version of the play to John Murray in March of 1817. He rewrote the third act between then and May of 1817, when he sent it along with corrected proofs of the play back to Murray. The original third act pits a greedy corrupt Abbot against a fiercely defiant, supremely powerful Manfred. The Abbot threatens Manfred vaguely and demands the "gift of all thy lands/ To the Monastery" (III.12-13),³⁵ as a purchase of indulgence for Manfred's witchcraft. The outrage that this original Abbot's corruption inflames is close to the effect Shelley would find in the various representatives of the corrupt patriarchal church in The Cenci. Byron gives Manfred a

³⁵For the text of the original third act, and for textual notes, see Byron's CPW, IV, 468ff.

sarcastic revenge over the Abbot, by having him call the demon Ashtaroth to fly the Abbot to a high mountain:

Convey this man to the Shreckhorn, to its peak--
 To its extremest peak--watch with him there
 From now 'till sunrise, let him gaze and know
 He ne'er again will be so near to Heaven.
 But harm him not--and when the morrow breaks
 Set him down safe in his cell. (Original III.35-40).

Making their conflict a mere question of wills and power, Byron makes the mistake of abandoning the skeptical metaphysics of the previous two acts. The flaw is precisely in giving Manfred too much power, power too explicitly magical without meaning allegorical of the felt wants of Manfred and his kind. Worse, Manfred becomes a mere punisher, right only because more mighty, powerful because he can assert his will over another. If non-conformity were that simply accomplished, Manfred would not have any basis for his deeper anguish. If he were such a powerful magician of this world's physical being, why could he not save Astarte? The original ending, as a simple celebration of a powerful will, is the flatter caricature so often read into the final version of the play.

But the final version completely changes the Abbot and Manfred's interaction with him. The Abbot is now a sophisticated continuation of the Chamois Hunter, with the added challenge to Manfred's skepticism in the form of a resolute theological optimism that seems to be well thought through. Manfred gives his refutation of the Abbot's position here:

Old man! there is no power in holy men,
 Nor charm in prayer--no purifying form

Of penitence--nor outward look--nor fast--
 Nor agony--nor, greater than all these,
 The innate torture of that deep despair,
 Which is remorse without the fear of hell,
 But all in all sufficient to itself
 Would make a hell of heaven--can exorcise
 From out the unbounded spirit; the quick sense
 Of its own sins, wrongs, sufferance, and revenge
 Upon itself; there is no future pang
 Can deal that justice on the self-condemn'd
 He deals on his own soul. (III.i.66-78)

Manfred's skeptical claim of autonomy from all exterior agency—from any god or agent of a god on earth—comes at the price of acknowledging that he is helpless before his own passions. He is self-sufficient, and self-tortured, because self-alienated; he denies, in effect, both external control and internal control. The echo of Paradise Lost is a curious paradox in itself; it seems pointedly not that of Satan's boast that he can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven, for there seems no chance for such mental Heaven-making here. The speech seems closer to Satan's moral resignation upon Niphates' top, twisting his body in despair. But in that moment, Satan fully acknowledges God's claims to absolute agency, and resigns himself to a guerrilla war which he has no chance of winning. Manfred here seems to graft the claims of autonomy of the just-fallen Satan to the admission of despair of Satan in soliloquized confession. He claims to be both the prisoner and the jail-keeper of his own consciousness. Yet, significantly, he tells his entire revelation to the abbot.

Manfred lives within a culture of shame. As Bernard Williams explains about Greek culture, the member of the shame culture imposes much of his punishment upon

himself, not with reference to formal rules, but because of the inadequacies he or she perceives within--inadequacies with reference to socially constructed ideals.³⁶ Williams's examples include Oedipus, who blinds himself:

"I have done it with my own hand," he says of his blinding. In the later play, he says that he afterwards came to think that what he had inflicted on himself was excessive. He also, at Colonus, says that he did not really *do* the things for which he blinded himself--and in a notably compacted expression: "I suffered those deeds more than I acted them." ...[but] there are two sides to action, that of deliberation and that of result, and there is a necessary gap between them. Regret must be governed, in good part, by results that go beyond intention.³⁷

Williams's startling conclusion about Oedipus is this: "*What has happened to him, in fact, is that he has brought it about*" (70, his emphasis). What Manfred has done to Astarte has equally *been done to* Manfred and Astarte because Manfred did not intend for Astarte to suffer. Yet he must accept the shame that she did suffer because of him. This is not moral autonomy because Manfred's intentions are irrelevant. Manfred's actions *happened to* Manfred. The Abbot, hearing Manfred, and living not in a shame culture but in a world governed by authoritative bodies, does not understand him:

All this is well;
For this will pass away, and be succeeded
By an auspicious hope, which shall look up
With calm assurance to that blessed place,

³⁶And thus not just a matter of Nietzschean self-assertion, as Christensen in postmodern mode maintains.

³⁷Shame and Necessity, 68,69.

Which all who seek may win, whatever be
 Their earthly errors, so they be atoned:
 And the commencement of atonement is
 The sense of its necessity. (III.i.78-85)

It turns out that the Abbot's religion is the same as that of Nemesis and the demons from whom he has come to save Manfred: the belief in prostration before necessity. Manfred does acknowledge necessity—this poem contains no utopian imagining of the fall of God and necessity from Heaven that makes up the dramatic climax of Prometheus Unbound. Manfred will not serve, for he is proud. But this pride has *not* made Manfred stronger. Indeed, it has gotten between himself and his visions:

I have had those early visions,
 And noble aspirations in my youth,
 To make my own the mind of other men,
 The enlightener of nations...
 I could not tame my nature down; for he
 Must serve who fain would sway; and soothe, and sue,
 And watch all time, and pry into all place,
 And be a living Lie, who would become
 A mighty thing amongst the mean—and such
 The mass are; I disdained to mingle with
 A herd, though to be their leader—and of wolves.
 The lion is alone, and so am I. (III.i.104-107, 116-123)

In the equation between Manfred and Byron, this passage may be called partly a rationalization of Byron's failure in English political life, but there is also the way in which

this speech marks Byron's difference from Manfred, a difference which leads him to imagine another drama about a leader who does stoop to join a revolution. For Byron has tamed his nature down to write, among other things, this autobiographical drama. Manfred's self-denied dream of leadership is lost upon the sacrifice he makes to a much more utopian dream of absolute autonomy. There must be some reproach in Byron, some measure of disdain for the high-toned autonomy claimed by Manfred for not entering the public sphere, while Byron has not only become a celebrity, but continues to court fame, and the influence that comes with it through publication (but even here, Byron is deeply equivocal).³⁸ When Manfred fends off the spirits that come to claim him at the drama's end, his cry is "I was my own destroyer!" (III.iv.139). This cry certainly fits into Byron's self-characterizations in the letters and other poems,³⁹ though in March of 1817 Byron wrote to Murray that

The thing I have sent you you will see at a glimpse—could never be attempted or thought of for the stage—I much doubt it for publication even...[I] must leave off—but what could I do? without exertion of some kind—I should have sunk under my imagination and reality.⁴⁰

³⁸This is not to deny that the disdain rebounds back onto Byron himself. In discussing Marino Faliero, Christensen calls the substitution of representation for actual political action "poisoned at its heart, since it would merely replay the ironic relation between sovereignty and theatricality that Byron had already exposed in the Bonaparte stanzas of Childe Harold III...Byron's irresolute management of Marino Faliero dramatizes the ironic thesis...[that] sovereignty can exert its authority only through a self-imaging, but such staging submits that authority to potential humiliation" (Lord Byron's Strength, 265-66). My claim is merely that Byron's ambivalence about representation, loathing its inadequacy while still engaging in it prolifically, is not respected by Manfred, and that therefore Manfred represents an ideal unfit to live in the world as Byron knows he must.

³⁹See Byron's CPW, IV, 467, for examples. McGann cites Childe Harold's Pilgrimage III, stanza 113, in which the hero says he had "filed his own mind."

⁴⁰BLJ, V, 185.

This and the following suggest that only in conceiving of his own split self, in fictionalizing and describing his state of alienation, can Byron find the respite that Manfred, because he never truly communicates *with human beings not himself*, cannot. It is a form of escapism that Byron had long required:

To withdraw myself from myself (oh! that cursed selfishness!) has ever been my sole, my entire, my sincere motive in scribbling at all; and publishing is also the continuance of the same object, by the action it affords to the mind, which else recoils upon itself.⁴¹

...to die
Is nothing; but to wither thus—to tame
My mind down from its own infinity—
To live in narrow ways with little men,...
To feel in me the solitude of kings,
Without the power that makes them bear a crown...
hath taught
A bitter lesson, but it leaves me free...

(The Prophecy of Dante, I.158-61, 166-67, 175-76

Published together with Marino Faliero, 1821)

Byron subtitled Manfred "A Mystery", and grouped it together with Cain in a category he called his "metaphysical style." He wrote Marino Faliero, An Historical

⁴¹BLJ, III, 225.

Tragedy in Five Acts, on the other hand, in an experiment that meant to resurrect the “classical” unities in a play that seemed even more rigorously conventional than the dramas performed regularly on London’s stages. One purpose in crossing Byron’s own categories of drama is to see what is common in Byronic drama in general. Marino Faliero, for example, is not just based upon history; it is about the use and creation of history, and Byron obsessed over the defensibility of its historical claims. He insisted upon publishing appendices containing his primary sources in original and translated versions, even though the play itself insists that history is a lie told by the victors of conflicts. The historiography of Marino Faliero, then, is a dialectic between history as fabrication and history as necessity, or between autonomy and necessity as such, just as Manfred is a dialectic between the autonomy of absolute freedom and the necessity of shame.

It is this historiographic quality to Marino Faliero that will be explored in this section, and it will be done by way of looking into a corner of the literary history that Byron suggests formed part of his procedural model. That is, after looking briefly at some of Byron’s stated intentions for the drama in its “Preface” and some of his letters, we will proceed to the drama. Byron argues in the “Preface” that “so great an effect” can occur “from so slight a cause.” In the voluminous list that Byron publishes in the “Preface” of such small causes and great effects, nearly all are cases of personal passion leveraging massive movements of people and resources. That is, Byron conceives of the story of Marino Faliero as typical of the way in which history’s inevitability, if it has any, comes not from massive movements, but from the way the concentrations of power conspire with personal passions to subvert all intention. He wonders that an historian would be surprised, given that:

...Helen lost Troy—that Lucretia expelled the Tarquins from Rome...that an insulted husband led the Gauls to Clusium, and thence to Rome—that a single verse of Frederick II of Prussia on the Abbe de Bernis, and a jest on Madame de

Pompadour, led to the battle of Rosbach...that a personal pique between Maria Antoinette and the Duke of Orleans precipitated the first expulsion of the Bourbons--and, not to multiply instances, that Commodus, Domitian, and Caligula fell victims not to their public tyranny, but to private vengeance--and that an order to make Cromwell disembark from the ship in which he would have sailed to America destroyed both King and Commonwealth.⁴²

The movement of power here is bi-directional (at least): individuals count for more than they might seem, but they are not able to direct the effects they cause. Further, in the arbitrariness of Byron's lists, cause itself seems suspect. Helen and Marie Antoinette, the individuals through whom power flows, neither fully control themselves, nor avoid being guided by their own passions. It is ironic that, in the specific case of the French Revolution, Byron would attribute its initiation to the annoyances of the Queen. Byron argues that irony is one of history's primary features--the way that recorded history lies in direct contradiction to a less dogmatic, more internalized memoir. Byron's ironies of history are born of a skepticism of received accounts, of empiricist historians' organizing principles, and even of the possibility for really understanding history, let alone deriving meaning from it. On the other hand, the list, as in the cases of the killed Roman tyrants and Cromwell, shows that sometimes history is in the hands of individuals who know what they are doing. Sometimes.⁴³

⁴²Byron's CPW, IV, 302.

⁴³Terry Eagleton describes the postmodern view of history as essentially random, though inescapable in each of its moments: "Postmodernism is not delivering another narrative about history, just denying that history is in any sense story-shaped...But there are problems with this objection [to narrative history]. For one thing, it is not easy to see how we can *know* that history is no way in particular...The political differences which matter, surely, are not between those who historicize and those who do not, but between different conceptions of history. There are those who believe that history is on the whole a tale of progress; those who consider that it is by and large a story of scarcity, struggle, and

The interaction between the agents' intentions and the sweeping historical event, however, becomes even more complex in the drama than in the "Preface's" list. In Marino Faliero the protagonist is an old man, determined by his own past. His selfhood is encrusted with experiences already fitted into his identity and the way he comprehends the world. Disjuncts between that identity and new realities cause him shame because the gaps destabilize an identity unable to incorporate changes into itself. His shame, however, is more than a foolish consistency with an antiquated self, for at the drama's end, Faliero becomes prophetic, foreseeing changes to come. The drama seems divided between envisioning Faliero's rigidity as a personal fault, a product of his ossifying culture, and a strength putting him in contact with oracular sources. In any of these cases, Faliero seems to have an unavoidable core self.

The politics of the self in Marino Faliero are complex because Byron foregrounds the tensions that a more orthodox drama would submerge. In Marino Faliero, the onus of modernity shifts from the individual to an ambiguous site between the individual and the forces that control him. Marino Faliero, as we have been noticing through the discussion of Joanna Baillie's dramatic theory and practice earlier in this chapter, shares much of Baillie's psychology while rejecting her ambiguous (yet still religious) optimism. Marino Faliero, like The Cenci, presents what Shelley called a "sad reality," constructing a system of political and spiritual oppression that seems total to those inside of it. The Cenci operates upon the audience by giving it a false choice, a "pernicious casuistry" it is supposed to reject, realizing that the society in which they live and which they daily help to

exploitation; and those who hold that, like many a postmodern text, there is no plot to it at all (Illusions, 31,34). Byron's historical *drama*, while not a narrative, does tell a story, but a skeptical story, so that it falls between Eagleton and his postmodern foes: Byron's historiography is an anxiety about what it means to enter history. It therefore does not assert, with postmodernism, that there are no Histories, nor does it lay one out with a narrator's unequivocal authority. But it is closer in spirit to Eagleton because Byron's sorrowful knowledge is, nevertheless, knowledge.

Any drama that ignores or denies the force of these lines is necessarily sentimental, but for Shelley, unlike Beatrice, hope was equivocal. Shelley mistrusted hope because the hopeful mind passively accepts the present model of conflicts. Prometheus states in his opening speech that human beings are full of “fear and self-contempt and barren hope”(I.8). But Prometheus learns that “Most vain all hope *but love*” (I. 808), leaving space for Demogorgon to give the play’s dialectical formula of hope:

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From its own wreck the thing it contemplates... (IV.570-574)

Shelley shows there that hope is the last refuge of the mentally crushed. Then Shelley goes on to re-establish hope in Prometheus Unbound on a more solid footing than orthodox dogma's hope that creates "hecatombs of broken hearts." Shelley's alternative is being able to imagine the (provisional) end of thinking hierarchy.

Byron, in writing Marino Faliero, is responding to Shelley's dialectical vision of hope, at the same time that he extracts Baillie's psychology of alienation from her conservative exclusion of social forces. The question of hope in Byron's play is a matter of history and History, or whether there is any way to understand, and even influence, how historical processes operate while living within their grasp. Marino Faliero is the re-written history of a man and a rebellion—the vanquished—which received the negative stamp of the victors' interpretation of what they did. The resurrection of this figure and these events, then, is partly Byron's victory as a kind of unacknowledged historian to Shelley's unacknowledged legislators. Faliero himself figures forth Byron's action in the last two acts of the play, where Faliero becomes a prophet, foretelling, and thus determining, Byron's own age. In becoming a prophet, however, Faliero must first lose all chance of victory from himself and his followers. His double-edged process, losing in order to gain, suggests that we cannot control the effects of our actions in the present. Byron couples this historical lack of agency with the psychology of shame to present a devastating image of a man who can only stew in his own frustrations until he begins a transcendence through acquiescence to historical forces he had tried to influence. Faliero's prophetic mode in the last act, and the emphasis on the inescapable power of stories to circulate despite the desires of Power, suggest that the actions of the imaginative are always effective, if only in the very long run.

Marino Faliero recounts a tale of an elderly Venetian Doge of the fourteenth century (1355), who led a popular revolt against his own aristocratic government. The revolt fails,

and the Doge and his lower-class conspirators are executed. The Doge's name is stricken from the official roles of honor, and his portrait in the Doge's palace is covered. Faliero's motive for joining the revolt is the light punishment given to a young aristocrat, Michael Steno, who had defaced the Ducal throne with a slander against the sexual fidelity of the Doge's young wife Angiolina. Faliero feels that the mercy shown this man by the legislative and judicial body of rulers is a shameful slap at his own standing as the city-state's executive and as a man of honor. He knows that the ruling parliament, called "The Forty," is corrupt and self-serving, exploiting the lower classes. But until he perceives a personal injury, Faliero never plotted revolt. His revolution, then, is an inextricable combination of public and private interests.

As we have seen, Byron initially thought to base the drama on the Faliero's jealousy, then changed his mind. In the play's "Preface," he justifies this choice in the sources: "Sismondi attributes the conspiracy to his *jealousy*; but I find this nowhere asserted by the national historians."⁴⁴ Instead of jealousy, Byron chose in 1820 to base

⁴⁴It is of the highest importance that Byron mentions J.C.L. Simonde de Sismondi, even negatively, in his preface. Along with Madame de Stael, whom Byron knew personally and admired as a writer, Sismondi wrote in a new form of anti-imperialistic, nationalist history. Sismondi's Histoire des Republiques Italiennes du moyen age (Zurich 1807, Paris, 1815) and de Stael's De l'Allemagne (English translation pub. by Murray, 1814) both argued that the then disparate and disputatious princedoms of their respective territories constituted "natural" cultural unities. The political purpose was to counter an ideology which would permit Napoleon and the Austrians to impose foreign rule over lands that would naturally cohere otherwise. Sismondi and De Stael both made broad historiographic claims and assumptions, the effects of which are felt in Byron's plot. For example, De Stael wrote the "Individuals ought to submit to destiny, but nations never; for they alone can command destiny: with a little more exertion of the will, misfortune would be conquered." Germany, ed. O.W. Wright (New York: Hurd & Houghton, 1871) 19. Byron may have felt this of the Italians, and later of the Greeks, but he denies the *certainty* of inefficacy of the individual that de Stael asserts.

In Sismondi there is also much in the way of "Histories" that Byron would dismantle in his dramas. For example, recounting a battle in which the Genoese "destroyed

the drama on pride and shame. The difference is instructive: jealousy is a private emotion, but pride and shame always exist before an actual or internalized public. Further, Byron did not give pride only to his protagonist, Faliero. Faliero's flaw is to feel more excessively what is the common, even universal value in Byron's Venice. That Faliero is unusually hot is a difference of degree and of control; the other characters are able to keep their pride in check. But shame is almost the only motive for action in Marino Faliero. Only fear (of violence from those one has shamed) matches shame for moving characters in this play, and fear only moves those the play's ethical world considers corrupt. Shame is the glue that connects each character to every other, the force of creation of subjectivity, and the way each identity understands itself within the larger world. As Williams notes, shame is an interaction between the self and its concept of the social: "Even if shame and its motivations always involve in some way or other the idea of a gaze of another, it is important that for many of its operations the imagined gaze of an imagined other will do" (81-82). This formula does not refute Prometheus Unbound's dialectical assertion that we create our own deeper forms of oppression. Nor does Byron, but the shame culture that Byron creates in Marino Faliero is meant as an argument that, in the political arena, none of us can become full agents, even though we may achieve heroic status in resistance. This limit exists because shame is an element of the self that is paradoxically beyond the control of the will, especially in an old man whose temperament, whether innate or learned, is now too ingrained to be altered.

the Venetian fleet in the Gulf of Sapienza, in the Morena, on the 3d of November, 1354....," Sismondi explains how the Genoese then squandered their victory: "Genoa had sacrificed her liberty to her thirst for vengeance..." (1832 English edition, abridged by Sismondi; rpt. Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1966). Byron knew this passage, since he has Faliero include the destruction of the Venetian fleet as one more reason for the popular unrest (I.ii.469-72). Sismondi's comment assumes a sort of moral agent of collective retribution, something that seems to have influenced Byron's fifth act, as well as The Prophecy of Dante.

In Marino Faliero, Byron does not give us characters who are overtly helpless like Beatrice Cenci or Prometheus tied to the rock, and he shows us a world in which Shelley's vision of Christ-like turning of the cheek is all but forgotten. Rather, Byron gives us an individual with choices, each of which is bad, and in this sense undermines the feelings of agency among those society usually considers agents. All of us, especially those at the top, are without real structural power. In relation to Aeschylus's Agamemnon, Williams explains that Agamemnon's decision as the Greek leader of whether or not to kill Iphigenia was a crux for critics because they "could not understand how someone might have to choose between two courses of action both of which involved a grave wrong, so that whatever he does will be bad" (133). The temptation to dismiss Agamemnon's choice and say he simply ought not to have killed his daughter is the same lack of sympathy for the shame culture entailed in saying Faliero should just have swallowed Steno's insult. Given either his temperament or his society's honor code, Faliero could not let the insult lie. Within the honor code, Faliero could simply have murdered the offender, as Faliero's nephew assumes he will do. Faliero does not take that personal course because he has an instinct for generalizing the personal event into its social causes. He sees that to derive satisfaction by avenging himself upon Steno, he would have to believe that his society largely still follows the honor code. In light of his circumstances at the center of his society, such a belief would be sentimental wishing.

For similar reasons, Faliero cannot heed Angiolina when she advises self-reliance, suggesting that Faliero simply ignore Steno's insult, baseless and ineffectual as it was. But Angiolina, the character who voices Shelley's position in Marino Faliero with regard to the self's moral autonomy is young, haughty and innocent of how her older male husband has been formed within a militaristic society. Byron's play, then, refutes the moral example of The Cenci by claiming that reality (for men) in the world is not the way that Shelley makes it appear. Byron's Venice is a place where there can be neither real autonomy nor true

abjectness. One of the main problems of the drama for its readers, then, becomes whether or not it is fully pessimistic, or even nihilistic in the political defeat it dramatizes.

This problem has been at the center of critical controversy.⁴⁵ Jerome McGann, in Fiery Dust, understood every event in the drama to undermine the power of each character's individual will, and that Faliero is a modern hero because he is at least fully aware of how his will becomes subverted. McGann saw the play as expanding to exemplify "human corruption in general" (208). As such, it operates by emasculation: "The tragic irony in the play springs from the fact that neither the conspirators nor the oppressors are masters of their own wills" (209). "Men do what they would not do and they shape thereby their own fatality" (213). McGann, however, saw a ray of hope in the drama:

...the conscious defiance of the [Doge's] speech suggests something more; indeed, dramatizes the values which the play upholds despite the maze of its skepticisms. The first, and most important, is consciousness itself, which if it does not save life, at least redeems man from its immediate evils and enables him to affirm its larger designs. Secondly, when he denounces the hollow men of Venice we are given our

⁴⁵Peter Manning, for example, writing ten years later than McGann, does not see it: "His ordeal brings Faliero no self-awareness, and despite the exhortations of Angiolina he remains incapable of pardon. The sensitivity that initially ennoble him is eroded by the pressure of his psychic imperatives until he, like Macbeth, for whom Byron's affinity is frequent, almost reflexive, echoes in the drama and throughout his writings, can only 'bear-like, fight the course.'" Byron and his Fictions, 120. Thomas Ashton, "Marino Faliero: Byron's 'Poetry of Politics,'" Studies in Romanticism 13 (1974): 1-13, correctly saw that the play itself places much more upon a compensatory ideal in the value of speech, or truth, if not immediate justice. Ashton concentrates on the ruling aristocrats' inability to squelch the memory of the rebellion of Faliero and his comrades. See also A.B. England, "Byron's Marino Faliero and the Force of Individual Agency," Keats-Shelley Journal 39 (1990): 95-122. England's analysis focuses on individualism as idiosyncrasy.

last sight of his outraged humanity, and the expression of that vital passion which has been at once his human doom and his human redemption.⁴⁶

McGann's view of the play's destruction of the self leads into all of the play's secrets. However, the value of consciousness McGann found at the end is based upon a model of Romanticism, centered around Wordsworth, and epitomized in the criticism of M.H. Abrams and Harold Bloom, that McGann has since repudiated.⁴⁷ In McGann's later social criticism of Byron he emphasizes biographical analogies rather than valorizations of consciousness. In this vein, McGann has sought to explain the shift in Byron's poetry from the period before 1817 to that of the 1820s. This study, in tracing the interrelations between the Romantic playwrights, has explored the influence of Shelley's dramatic theory and practice on Byron. Taking Byron's career as a whole, however, McGann sees a shift from such works derided as wildly "romantic," such as Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, A Romaunt, the oriental tales, and Manfred, to the Horatian satirical pose of Don Juan, and the overt classicism of Marino Faliero, The Two Foscari, and Sardanapalus. McGann sees Byron reacting against a sense that his former supposedly "univocal" style, evident in Manfred, had betrayed his own political ideals. This univocal style, with less distance between Byron and his public, left his poetry open to the "Age of Cant," to be misunderstood and twisted for political ends Byron opposed. Against this model, according to McGann, Byron developed a style McGann calls "historical ventriloquism" in Don Juan, the later plays, and elsewhere, in which competing voices prevent simplifications by his readers. Here McGann analyzes Byron's lyric "The Isles of Greece" where Byron

⁴⁶Fiery Dust, 214.

⁴⁷See The Romantic Ideology, Towards a Literature of Knowledge (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1989), and "Rethinking Romanticism," ELH 59:3 (1992): 735-54.

manages to compose, in 1820, a song on behalf of human freedom which escapes incorporation by the Age of Cant. The crowning wit of the poem is that the song is offered to the reader as a familiar Byronic *tour de force* in which his identity is submerged in a network of competing voices...the man who finds his mixed identity and equivocal freedom when he acknowledges the constellation of his social determinants, the man who discovers his voice in a conscious and dialectical act of poetic ventriloquism.⁴⁸

McGann's sweeping re-evaluation of Byron's career does not agree with the evidence this study has presented from Manfred, for to see that play as "univocal" is to miss its own dialectics. Further, it would seem a problem that Byron self-consciously reiterated the style of Manfred when he wrote Cain in 1821. Leaving those objections aside, however, McGann's poetics of ventriloquism would seem to work well in Marino Faliero. In that play (*pace* the earlier McGann), Faliero is not a hero of consciousness because the play dialectically undermines his claims even as it presents them. Thus, when Faliero says at the end, "I stand with eternity, and see/ Into Eternity" (V.ii.89-90), he has come to understand his prophetic role, not in despairing self-consciousness, but in an historical consciousness of great events of which he will take no part.

For a character who ends the drama with "Eternity," Faliero begins unable to see out of his own particularity. When Faliero hears of the decision of The Forty to punish Steno with only a month's house arrest, his overreaction may be measured by the response of his nephew, Bertuccio Faliero. The nephew asks Faliero "to repress such gusts of passion" (I.ii.225) so that the two of them might more effectively plot revenge. The Doge, in his fit, questions whether his nephew possesses the interiority of a true (male) human:

⁴⁸"Byron, Mobility, and the Poetics of Historical Ventriloquism," Romanticism Past and Present 9:1 (1985): 81-82.

Faliero. Hast thou no feeling save the external sense
 Of torture from the touch? has thou no soul—
 No pride—no passion—no deep sense of honour?
 Bertuccio Faliero. 'Tis the first time that honour has been doubted,
 And were the last, from any other sceptic. (I.ii.150-54)

This exchange establishes that, in Marino Faliero, you acknowledge my humanity if you assume that I feel the same sort of honor, the same defensive pride that you feel. If you dare openly question my honor, I may choose to force you to acknowledge it. But then what is acknowledgment worth if it is gained through combat? Honor, in this context, is the privilege of subjectivity itself, but the sort of subjectivity described by Hegel, as we have seen, as the dependence of the Lord on his Bondsman:

it is only through staking one's life that freedom is won; only thus it is proved that for self-consciousness, its essential being is not [just] being, not the immediate form in which it appears [i.e., its body], not its submergence in the expanse of life, but rather that there is nothing present in it which could not be regarded as a vanishing moment, that it is only pure being-for-self...[However,] the lord achieves his recognition through another consciousness...(Hegel, 115,117)

In Byron's two-class society, unlike the one Hegel describes, the lower classes claim as much subjective life as the lords. But Hegel's structure of the dominant agent's dependence upon the dominated remains true for Marino Faliero. Hegel recognizes this structure as flawed, superseded in history by attempts for more truly independent self-consciousness. Similarly Faliero, during the course of the play, comes to understand himself as caught in a web of dependent relations in which he merely seems to be the master. At the play's end, he too will seek a way out of his trapped consciousness and

sudden bondsmanship through envisioning History. Along the way, however, he must come to see that his former sense of honor was itself ultimately corrupt, implicating him in the deepest causes of his society's degeneration.

Before then, however, he identifies himself through the sort of self-divided, self-betraying passions that unravel Baillie's De Monfort. When Bertuccio finally succeeds at calming Faliero down, Faliero says, "I am ashamed of my own anger now;/ I pray you, pardon me" (I.ii.237-38). Like those of De Monfort, Faliero's passions make him feel the shame of his lack of self-control, which, by extension, he knows will lead to a loss of control over external conditions. The equation that Faliero and everyone else makes between shame and humanity in this play means that only from within the honor code can a legitimate motive spring, even for calming oneself down from a prideful tantrum. Shame is a means, then, for self-manipulation, as Bertuccio indicates in his reply,

Why that's my uncle!

The leader, and the statesman, and the chief

Of commonwealths, and sovereign of himself! (I.ii.238-40)

Bertuccio's flattering way of "handling" his uncle, using the metaphor of the self as a state, connects the individual to the society of which he is a part, just as the emotion of shame does. But there is foreboding in these lines, since neither Faliero nor anyone else seems able to lead Venice as a true sovereign. As Faliero comments later of the aristocrats, "To me, then these men have no *private* life" (III.ii.382); but neither does he, since he tries so hard to conceive of sovereignty over the self in terms of shame before society at large. History for such a character seems like fate because he so ardently intertwines his intimate feelings with the operations of the vast public sphere.

When Faliero's nephew suggests that Faliero become calm to prepare to murder Steno, Faliero dismisses the idea, shifting his private feeling toward a public principle.

Like the lucky mental stroke that occurs to Prometheus at the beginning of Shelley's drama, Faliero's move from personal to public revenge is the beginning of his journey to a prophetic state. After his nephew leaves, Faliero has a soliloquy in which he debates the next course of action. When Israel Bertuccio, a commoner, is announced to him by a herald, Faliero hits upon "the people" as a means for his revenge:

This patron may be sounded; I will try him.
 I know the people to be discontented:
 They have cause, ...
 Since they are nothing in the state, and in
 The city worse than nothing--mere machines,
 To serve the nobles' most patrician pleasure...
 Could I free Venice, and avenge my wrongs,
 I had lived too long, and willingly would sleep
 Next moment with my sires... (I.ii.297-303,316-318)

Public and private are mixed here, but suspiciously, since the private wrong done to Faliero precedes the idea to "sound" the person come to see him. The idea itself seems to arise from a mixture of internal and external sources: Faliero's injured pride, no less than the commoner who comes to complain, may be thought of as external, contingent upon the nobles. But he is not all contingency: as Byron stresses in the play's "Preface," the most consequential events come from "slight" causes, personal circumstances and tiny acts. As Bernard Williams comments on Sophocles's character of Ajax, all motives stem from identity conceived of publicly. After Ajax has in madness slaughtered a herd of sheep instead of Odysseus and the other leaders he planned to kill, he awakens to shame:

he has made himself, apart from anything else, utterly absurd. It becomes increasingly clear to him that he can only kill himself. He knows that he cannot change his *ethos*, his character, and he knows that after what he has done, this grotesque humiliation, he cannot live the only kind of life his *ethos* demands. (72-73)

The Kantian alternative to the shame culture in which Ajax lives is that of the abstracted characterless judge who imposes the categorical imperative:

The conception of the moral self as characterless leaves only a limited positive role to other people in one's moral life. Their reactions should not influence one's moral conclusions, except by assisting reason or illumination. (95)

In Marino Faliero, seeking a way out of the culture of shame, Byron remains too skeptical to rely upon Kant's categorical self-reliance. Faliero does not, like Ajax, commit suicide, because his shame, unlike Ajax's, is too deeply connected to his whole society's corruption.

Only the completely internal, ideal motive would resemble a kind of Kantian categorical imperative in which Faliero, alone, would come to realize that the ideal citizen, in his place, must join a revolution. This process sounds like what happens to Shelley's Prometheus, except that Prometheus allegorizes a collective, and that he decides that the revolution is over. In Byron's Venice, there does not seem to be a true example of an ideal, self-generated turn. Israel Bertuccio, who happens to come to Faliero at this moment, turns out to be the leader of a nascent popular revolution, an event that can only point to chance as an important element in Faliero's decision to join that revolution. It matters what appears before us and when it does so; we are not pure disinterested minds, but bodies living in time. The appearance of the conspiracy's leader at this moment in

Faliero's subjective condition seems random. None of Byron's sources suggests anything like it. In making the history a drama, Byron means to imply that all categorical ethics based upon objective universals must be suspect, since all history is contingency perceived subjectively. In the end Faliero escapes contingency and orders history, not into abstract necessity, but into visionary prophecy.

Before then, however, Faliero stubbornly clings to his selfhood. In the second act, arguing with his wife, Faliero promises that "I will be what I should be, or nothing" (II.i.453). Ironically, Faliero speaks with two meanings here—one for himself and one for Angiolina. He knows that she will interpret what he "should be" differently from what he, now that he has joined with the popular insurrection, must do. In thus lying to his wife Faliero seems to need to speak the truth, to reveal his secrets, to re-establish a moral self. Unlike De Monfort, who eventually gives in to Jane's sympathetic implorements, Faliero remains pragmatic, keeping his political secrets but, in doing so, giving up some of the ideals with which he forms his identity, the basis for keeping his secrets in the first place. Thus begins Faliero's slide into an abyss of becoming what he beholds.

Byron may be trying to say that for any modern person fully engaged mentally with the society in which he lives, Faliero's pragmatic turn away from his ideals is necessary. The counter-example, the character who is complete within herself, is Angiolina, the one to whom Faliero lies, leaving her unaware of his most important public act. Essentially, Faliero has created in Angiolina a world of repression that is also a repository of his ideals.⁴⁹ She lives, like Desdemona, in ideality, except that she does not have love.⁵⁰ In

⁴⁹The best treatment of Angiolina is Caroline Franklin's in *Byron's Heroines*, 182-191. Franklin writes that "Angiolina's abstract virtue is a function of her complete ignorance and separation from the public sphere" (187). But Franklin blames Byron for Angiolina's ignorance: "Byron prefers her to remain a frozen symbol of purity. It is the Doge, not Angiolina, who makes the quixotic attempt to implement his ideals in society" (187). What Franklin misses, I think, is the way in which Byron designs Angiolina's purity to be a reason to question everything she says. Franklin writes that "Byron has

a previous scene, Angiolina reveals that she is unable to conceive of the sins that her maid embraces, paralleling the relationship of Desdemona and Emilia. We learn that Angiolina was the daughter of Faliero's friend, who, on his deathbed, asked Faliero to marry Angiolina to protect her. Later we find out that Faliero had given her the choice of marrying someone else, with Faliero as the source for her dowry. Angiolina married him anyway. The "choice" was none because Faliero's offer was too noble to be accepted. Marianna, the maidservant, asks Angiolina whether she ever felt desires for others, and whether there is a possibility for Steno's accusations to hold some mental truth:

Marianna. Yet this strange disproportion in your years,
 And, let me add, disparity of tempers,
 Might make the world doubt whether such an union
 Could make you wisely, permanently happy.

Angiolina speak in the Doge's defense at the tribunal, to enact the role of chorus and bring out the contemporary significance of this historical play to the audience...Because of her rigorous separation from public affairs, she has been established as the voice of independent moral integrity, so her discourse is privileged...Byron makes woman morally superior, as a condition of her powerlessness, and thus gives Angiolina the privileged discourse of the most lofty character in the play"(188). But Byron makes Angiolina's "discourse" suspect by thus cutting her off. Her rebuke to Steno, who asks for forgiveness, is a Kant-like claim that she never cared what he said, since her "sense/ Of virtue, looking not to what is call'd/ A good name for reward, but to itself" (V.i.417-419). Her ethic of self-sufficiency did not suffice to protect those for whom she cares. Her disinterestedness is her powerlessness, and further, since, as a woman in patriarchal society she is powerless first, disinterested after, her pure moral self-reliance is in fact merely a product of her pragmatic situation. We may think only of Byron's wife and what he says of her in the first Canto of Don Juan to get a sense of what misogynistic thoughts he must have had about any woman claiming religiously sanctioned moral superiority.

⁵⁰See Byron's CPW, IV, notes: "In her indifference to conventional Venetian matches, as well as her incredulity about married women's infidelity, Angiolina suggests Desdemona...her hauteur is her own" (553).

Or aught save their past choice. (II.i.126-129)

The ethic that has been imposed upon Angiolina by patriarchy produces an anti-imaginative knee-worship before the necessity of the past. That is not to say that an adulterer is automatically a poet. Rather, in Angiolina's Desdemona-like inability to conceive of adultery, she remains untested in her fidelity.⁵²

The next scene is Angiolina's "Portia" scene. Angiolina now reveals more about the non-choice that she had upon her father's death:

I have not forgotten
The nobleness with which you bade me speak
If any young heart held any preference
Which would have made me happier... (II.i.303-306)

There is a suggestion that Angiolina, being sheltered, had no one else in mind. Patriarchy has left her loveless. Faliero too believes in a morality of repression, but his, as opposed to Angiolina's, seems self-imposed:

For love, romantic love, which in my youth
I knew to be illusion, and ne'er saw
Lasting, but often fatal, it had been
No lure for me, in my most passionate days,

⁵²It is a measure of the irony with which Byron writes her lines that in describing Faliero to Marianna she says, "And then he has been rash from his youth upwards," (II.i.111) echoing Genesis 8:21, "And the Lord said...for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." Angiolina condemns him even as she seeks to apologize for him. Quoted in Travis Looper, Byron and the Bible: A Compendium of Biblical Usage in the Poetry of Lord Byron (Metuchen, NJ, London: Scarecrow P, 1978) 130.

And could not be now, did such exist. (II.ii.349-353)

Faliero masochistically wishes for pains to prove his ability to withstand them, rather than for pleasures which might later command him. This wish makes Faliero unlike McGann's earlier understanding of him as a model of self-consciousness, but fits well into a dialectical reading of the strengths and weaknesses of the honor code Faliero represents. Faliero knows his desires and how to crush them, but his self-knowledge ends where his active repression begins. He has spent his life repressing his life because of honor, his moral absolute. Honor is Faliero's Jupiter, a mental tyrant outlining his picture of the universe, as he explains to Angiolina:

Where is honour,
 Innate and precept-strengthen'd, 'tis the rock
 Of faith connubial: where it is not—where
 Light thoughts are lurking, or the vanities
 Of worldly pleasure rankle in the heart,
 Or sensual throbs convulse it, well I know
 'Twere hopeless for humanity to dream
 Of honesty in such infected blood...
 It is consistency which proves it:
 Vice cannot fix, and virtue cannot change.
 The once fall'n woman must for ever fall;
 For vice must have variety, while virtue
 Stands like the sun, and all which rolls around
 Drinks life, and light, and glory from her aspect. (II.ii.379-398)

The pre-Copernican image, by distancing us from Faliero's historical consciousness, casts a heavy irony on the rigidity of this speech, and marks Faliero as a subject of history, not an agent of its change. He seems almost to have forgotten for a moment that he, not a "woman," is the one who has decided to become faithless to his class, to murder his lifelong friends out of that same sense of honour and disgust at sexuality that he reiterates rather pointlessly to Angiolina, who does not need to hear it. Faliero is least self-conscious in this scene in which Angiolina, ironically, implores him to be satisfied with his own self-esteem.

In this fidelity scene between Angiolina and Faliero (it is not a love scene), Angiolina tries to resist Faliero's theology of revenge, but to no great effect:

Doge. Does not the law of Heaven say blood for blood?
 And he who *taints* kills more than he who sheds it.
 Is it the pain of blows, or the shame of blows,
 That makes such deadly to the sense of man?
 Do not the laws of man say blood for honour,—
 And, less than honour, for a little gold?
 Say not the laws of nations blood for treason?
 Is't nothing to have fill'd these veins with poison
 For their once healthful current? is it nothing
 To have stain'd your name and mine—the noblest names?
 Is't nothing to have brought into contempt
 A prince before his people? to have fail'd
 In the respect accorded by mankind
 To youth in woman, and old age in man?
 To virtue in your sex, and dignity
 In ours?—But let them look to it who have saved him.

Ang. Heaven bids us forgive our enemies.

Doge. Doth Heaven forgive her own? Is there not Hell
For wrath eternal?

Ang. Do no speak thus wildly--
Heaven will alike forgive you and your foes.

Doge. Amen! May Heaven forgive them!

Ang. And will you?

Doge. Yes, when they are in Heaven!

Ang. And not till then?

Doge. What matters my forgiveness? (II.244-265)

Again we meet an inextricable mixture of personal feeling and abstract principle, here in the name of vengeance. The degree to which the play itself does not agree with Faliero is the degree to which it makes his argument partial; and yet, since the play seems to be arguing that all arguments are partial, that formula may not work. Faliero, incredibly bitter, sounds too much like Byron's Satan in Cain to say that Faliero is merely rationalizing what he thinks he is about to do. His theology of retribution makes sense in this shame culture, since there can be no forgiveness once one has humiliated oneself before one's sense of one's proper place in society.

These claims of necessity are rehearsals for the play's great moment, the point where Faliero stops wavering before his conscience and decides that he must kill all of his childhood friends. It is then that the Doge, when meeting with the plebeian conspirators who name him their leader, has open doubts about the morality of what he thinks he must do. Bertram, the conspirator whose sympathy for the human value of his patrician sponsor leads him to betray the rebellion, asks here whether any of the nobles should be spared. They refer the question to Faliero. It is the first test of his revolutionary leadership, and it exemplifies the drawbacks Byron perceived in violent revolutions. There is always the

possibility of an indiscriminate massacre like the Terror, because the revolutionaries feel compelled to violence in the name of a greater good. Faliero wonders whether it is right to order such an event, given his history and the honor code he says he needs to suspend in order to uphold:

All these men were my friends: I loved them, they
 Requited, honourably my regards:
 We served and fought; we smiled and wept in concert;
 We revell'd or we sorrow'd side by side:
 We made alliances of blood and marriage;
 We grew in years and honours fairly,—till
 Their own desire, not my ambition, made
 Them choose me for their prince, and then farewell!
 Farewell all social memory!...
 Oime! Oime!--and must I do this deed? (III.ii.319-327, 341)

Faliero seems to go into a passionate trance re-telling this story. He defines himself as the one who performed these acts with these men. Israel Bertuccio warns him, "My lord, you are much moved" (342), but he continues:

From the hour they made me Doge, the *Doge* **THEY** made me--
 Farewell the past! I died to all that had been,
 Or rather they to me: no friends, no kindness,
 No privacy of life--all were cut off:
 They came not near me, such approach gave umbrage;
 They could not love me, such was not the law;
 They thwarted me, 'twas the state's policy;

They baffled me, 'twas a patrician's duty;
 They wrong'd, for such was the right of the state;
 They could not right me, that would give suspicion;
 So that I was a slave to my own subjects;
 So that I was a foe to my own friends;
 Begirt with spies for guards, with robes for power,
 With pomp for freedom, gaolers for a council,
 Inquisitors for friends, and hell for life! (III.ii.346-360)

Faliero complains that his former friends treat him according to their institutional positions, not their selves. His complaint is like that of Emerson against the hired preacher: "I hear a preacher announce for his text and topic the expediency of one of the institutions of his church...Do I not know that he is pledged himself not to look but at one side, the permitted side, not as a man, but as a parish minister?"⁵³ Like Byron's Faliero, Emerson expresses an ideal of true masculine self-reliance unfettered by any external considerations. Only then can we achieve what Stanley Cavell describes as acknowledgment. But Faliero finds that because the patricians are not self-reliant, he cannot be. This entrapping circle infuriates Faliero into denying to the patricians what he most claims for himself: "To me, then, these men have no *private* life./ Nor claim to ties they have cut off from others" (III.ii.382-3, emphasis in original). Faliero's complaint carries two charges: he critiques all inhumanly selfish and partisan bureaucracy, meanwhile exhibiting his own further transformation into an overt, purposeful servant of historical forces.

As we have seen, Faliero's insistence upon "privacy" and personal, non-public honor is a chimera, since his vision of honor is dependent upon the internalized social spectator. Faliero's claims of a purely public motive are always partly false because his

⁵³The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Alfred Ferguson, Jean Ferguson Carr, II (Cambridge, MA, London: Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1979) 32.

personal motives are always obvious. But as the play progresses, we are meant to see Faliero more and more as possessing historical consciousness. By submitting to history, Faliero may begin to understand the ways in which his honor code, and the hopelessly flawed consciousness it represents, will not last forever. In front of the conspirators he repeats his rejection of personal revenge against Steno:

Doge. You would but lop the hand, and I the head;
 You would but smite the scholar, I the master;
 You would but punish Steno, I the senate.
 I cannot pause on individual hate,
 In the absorbing, sweeping, whole revenge,
 Which, like the sheeted fire from heaven, must blast
 Without distinction, as it fell of yore,
 Where the Dead Sea hath quench'd two cities' ashes. (III.ii.416-23)

As in the destructive prophecies that end the play, here Faliero suggests that his revolution will be apocalyptic, bringing a new civilization in its wake. His personal passion is still at full boil. As when he theocratized revenge to Angiolina, Faliero rationalizes his passions by projecting them onto the heavens, since honor, which includes revenge, is his Jupiter. Since his image of the destruction of Sodom implies that he, too, will be among the pillars of salt, his ultimate motive seems to be to extinguish his selfhood in this apocalypse. Though without the self-consciousness of Shelley's Prometheus, Faliero implies that only by relinquishing the passionate, violent self may he escape the mental circles that bind him. But before his revolution fails, Faliero cannot become conscious of his own contradictions. He seems steeled for "sweeping, whole revenge," but wavers in front of the chief plebeian conspirator, Israel Bertuccio:

you ne'er spake with them;
 You never broke their bread, nor shared their salt;
 You never had their wine-cup at your lips;
 You grew not up with them, nor laugh'd, nor wept,
 Nor held a revel in their company;
 Ne'er smiled to see them smile, nor claim'd their smile
 In social interchange for yours, nor trusted
 Nor wore them in your heart of hearts, as I have. (III.ii.458-65)

Faliero is fully aware of how he is to abandon and dehumanize the patricians with whom he identifies, indeed, with whom his own identity had been formed. Upon the evidence of physiognomy, they embody his idea of the human. But as he assures Israel Bertuccio, he conceives his own conscience to be merely an aspect of a larger necessity:

Bear with me! Step by step, and blow on blow,
 I will divide with you; think not I waver:
 Ah! no: it is the *certainty* of all
 Which I must do doth make me tremble thus. (III.ii.485-488)

McGann found Faliero's tragic quality in his self-consciousness: the way in which he did what he knew not to do. Though this model of what happens in the play is persuasive, in another sense Faliero sacrifices self-consciousness for historical consciousness. Just before the meeting with the conspirators, for example, he renounces his own agency:

Yes, proud city!
 Thou must be cleansed of the black blood which makes thee
 A lazar-house of tyranny: the task

drive him both for and against the revolution. His feelings are themselves determined and determining.

After the revolution fails, Faliero submits to the prevailing patricians, as he must. But he denies their power to enchain his identity, newly constructed around the idea of transcending the self through history. In his curse, Faliero claims:

I speak to Time and Eternity,
 Of which I grow a portion, not to man.
 Ye elements! in which to be resolved
 I hasten, let my voice be as a spirit
 Upon you! Ye blue waves, which bore my banner,
 Ye winds...Thou, my native earth...Ye stones...Ye skies...Attest!
 I am not innocent—but are these guiltless?
 I perish, but not unavenged: for ages
 Float up from the abyss of time to be
 And show these eyes, before they close, the doom
 Of this proud city, and I leave my curse
 On her and hers for ever!...

She shall be bought
 And sold, and be an appanage to those
 Who shall despise her! (V.iii.26-54)

Lest we dismiss Faliero's curse too readily, it will be remembered that he describes a Venice in Byron's day. Whatever contingent, personal and ineffectual motives exist in Faliero, his curse nevertheless turns out to be prophetic. His curse is still vengeful, and still comes from within the culture of shame, but it is a curse that extends the scope of the tragedy to the social body. In the end, Faliero comes to speak for the collective that

repudiated him. He is therefore like Shelley's Prometheus, a collective voice; but unlike the prophecies in Prometheus Unbound, Faliero's predictions of Venice and Italy are too specific to make sense as generalized distopianisms. Faliero does not predict, say, a vision of doom like Byron's "Darkness," metaphysically transcendent and imaginative. Rather, Faliero predicts the specific Italian situation in Byron's day, when Venice

shall be bought

And sold, and be an appenage to those

Who shall despise her!--She shall stoop to be

A province for an empire, petty town

In lieu of capital, with slaves for senates,

Beggars for nobles, pandars for a people! (V.iii.52-57)

This passage accurately, if passionately, describes Venice under the Austrians. It is deliberately incendiary, a hurtful shot coming from Venice's repressed shame. Faliero's curse is ridicule meant to call readers to action, both in Italy, and allegorically in England (and all of Europe), against the reactionary regimes then in power.

Faliero's curse allies the play closely to The Prophecy of Dante, a poem in four cantos Byron instructed Murray to publish along with Marino Faliero.⁵⁴ Like Byron's Faliero, his Dante only begins prophesying after he realizes he has no political power, but still feels the weight of leadership: "To feel me in the solitude of kings/ Without the power that makes them bear a crown" (I.166-67). Political and poetic power, in the Prophecy, are opposed, the one inevitably corrupting the other:

Oh, Power that rulest and inspirest! how

⁵⁴They were published together in 1821. See Byron's CPW, IV, 499 and 522-24 for publication history.

Is it that they on earth, whose earthly power
Is likest thine in heaven in outward show,

...

And how is it that they, the sons of fame,
Whose inspiration seems to them to shine
From high, they whom the nations ofttest name,
Must pass their days in penury or pain,
Or step to grandeur through the paths of shame,
And wear a deeper brand, and gaudier chain? (IV.95-98, 101-106)

Using Southey's example (but anxious about his own shameful grandeur, as McGann suggests), Byron invokes the now-commonplace trope of the artist's necessity for alienation. The path of shame is, to generalize, that of anyone not self-reliant, or who merely represents Power instead of the human self, such as the patricians in Marino Faliero. Dante's lamenting prophecy thematizes the society's unconsciousness toward its debt to its alienated artists:

Many are poets without the name,
For what is poesy but to create
From overfeeling good or ill; and aim
At an external life beyond our fate,
And be the new Prometheus of new men,
Bestowing fire from heaven, and then, too late,
Finding the pleasure given repaid with pain,
And vultures to the heart of the bestower.,
Who, having lavish'd his high gift in vain,
Lies chain'd to the rock by the sea-shore? (IV.10-19)

Poetic prophecy, then, is transcendence of fate both in the artist and in the audience, who will become “new men” because of the poet’s fire. This Prometheanism is not Shelley’s notion of presenting “beautiful idealisms,” however. Dante’s prophecies, like Faliero’s, are specific predictions. How can such earth-bound predictions usher in the “new man,” especially if that man is not envisioned in the poem? Byron’s answer is to go beyond the text, to let it incite you to action:

Thou [Italy]--Thou must wither to each tyrant’s will:
 The Goth hath been,--the German, Frank, and Hun
 Are yet to come,--and on the imperial hill
 Ruin, already proud of the deeds done
 By the old barbarians, there awaits the new,
 Throned on the Palatine... (II.70-75)

Dante implores the listener that Italy could “make the Alps impassable; and we/ Her sons, may do this with *one* deed--Unite!” (II.144-45, emphasis original).

The threat of The Prophecy of Dante to stir trouble against the ruling Austrian in Italy was not lost on one Royal Commissioner of Volterra. This place-man wrote a private letter, Leslie Marchand reports, to the Buongoverno at Florence:

some copies of *The Prophecy of Dante*, a poem by Lord Byron, have reached this city. It is most decidedly not written in the spirit of our Government, or of any of the Italian Governments. To me it appears designed to augment popular agitation,

already sufficiently aroused. Lord Byron makes Dante advocate democracy and the independence of Italy for the salvation and good of the country.⁵⁵

The Prophecy's political punch is not all that seems to agitate the Commissioner. He also seems perturbed that Byron makes Dante over into an anachronistic nationalist republican. The prophetic force of the Prophecy lies in the way Dante's specific predictions are both tied to inevitable history and suggest an alternative future. Its force is the harsh satire of a man with nothing to lose, which Byron argues is the universal modern condition. Each of us, Dante cries, must come to "own the Prophet in his tomb" (IV.154). As William Jewett remarks on Faliero's prophecies:

Marino Faliero functions as a mise en abîme of historical reflection, with Byron gazing back into the mirror of Venetian history with the anticipatory hope of constructing an adequate image of his own condition as political agent, only to discover the Doge of Venice likewise gazing into the mirror of history in order to anticipate his own recovery of political agency.⁵⁶

This mise en abîme also highlights the fictive quality of Dante's and Faliero's predictions, pointing further to the fictiveness of all ideas of fate. "Fate" is internal, as Faliero tells Angiolina: "I find a comfort in/ The thought that these things are the work of Fate;/ For I would rather yield to gods than men" (V.ii.65-67). Faliero's prophecies announce Marino

⁵⁵Quoted in Leslie Marchand, Byron: A Biography, III (New York: Knopf, 1957) 949.

⁵⁶Jewett continues: "Marino Faliero thus marks a renewed insistence on a strategy this study has placed at the heart of romantic drama: the conception of dramatic form as a distorting mirror by means of which knowledge can be transposed into action." "Romanticism, Tragedy, and the Politics of Agency," diss., Yale U, 1991, 248. Jewett, then, sees the mise en abîme as leading out of itself.

Faliero's significance as a text. The drama transcends a skepticism of the individual's agency within history, and pulls from Faliero's despair the basis of a combative hope. As McGann writes in The Romantic Ideology: "Byronic Despair is the reflex of an Ideal attachment in precisely the same way that Shelleyan Hope is the reflex of his Idealism" (127). In each case, the dialectic arrives at hope, though Byron has tried to redirect his hope away from idealism and toward real actions. When Faliero cries to the elements, recalling the way both his own Manfred and Shelley's Prometheus do the same, Faliero affirms a nature of retributive corrective to naked oppression. Faliero is Byron's answer to both Shelley's Prometheus and his Demogorgon. As an individual, Faliero displays a predictive power that defies understanding. But as a self-announcing, almost Brechtian wedge between the audience and its fictions, Faliero's prophesying power is prescriptive for the future of Byron's own time.

In another sense, Faliero's prophecies respond to Shelley's split between a drama of the past leading to despair and a drama of the future, in which the Spirit of the Hour will arrive in a triumphal car like that described in the Book of Revelation. Shelley's apocalyptic vision fits a strain of the tradition handed down from Revelation, which features what M. H. Abrams calls an "apocalyptic paradigm" that "has also contributed toward a mode of thinking in which all process, whether historical, logical, or empirical, is attributed to the dynamic generated by polar opposites."⁵⁷ Shelley's dual dramatic vision performs the dialectical apocalyptic Abrams identifies with Blake's "contraries" and with Hegel's historical process, since recognition of the critique in The Cenci is necessary before coming to understand the hopes expressed in Prometheus Unbound. Shelley's plays follow a teleology (though not a necessity) that resembles what Abrams calls "a paradigm of history which is radically distinctive...[with] a single and sharply defined plot"

⁵⁷"Apocalypse: theme and variations," in The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature: Patterns, Antecedents, and Repercussions, eds. C. A. Patrides, Joseph Wittreich (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1984) 346.

(343) that includes a genesis, a fall, a crisis, and a new world, though in Shelley's dramas the renovation of human society is brought on by a collective change in consciousness and is by no means an end-point. There is always the possibility of falling back into Beatrice Cenci's false reliance upon her own individual human agency to arrange a secret, isolating stand-off with a corrupt world. In these senses Shelley revises the apocalyptic tradition, but in a more fundamental manner Shelley follows the form of the apocalypse simply by placing despair in the past and hope in the future.

By placing his apocalyptic prophecies into a past leading only up to his present, Byron rejects Shelley's historical teleology as well as any other teleology seeking to envision beyond the empirical evidence. In Cain, Byron would perform the same sort of past-prophecy, much like that which Milton's Michael performs at the end of Paradise Lost, with the key exception of failing to provide a vision of the "paradise within thee, happier far." (XII.587). Though Blake would "correct" Byron's failure to imagine the redemptive future, Byron, as Shelley's respondent, seems to have chosen not to do so (see the Afterword). As we have seen in Manfred, self-consciousness is the plight of modernity, not a cure for its ills. And yet, in its call to action, Marino Faliero is far more hopeful than Wordsworth's The Borderers, written in the despair of 1797. Wordsworth came to see any action in the world as at best equivocal, at worst evil, and can be seen as retreating into a mental, personal apocalypse. Though Wordsworth's internalizations inspired and complicated Shelley's thought immensely, they are susceptible to being cast along with Beatrice Cenci's acts as falsely despairing efforts at self-reliance. Faliero's call to arms, then, is, like Prometheus Unbound, a rejection of Wordsworthian isolation. In Faliero's withering, despairing curse, "Thus I devote thee to the infernal gods!/ Thee and thy serpent seed!" (V.iii.100-101), there is a cause for hope in the actions it may engender.

Afterword

Skepticism in the Wilderness: Byron's Cain and Blake's Response in The Ghost of Abel

The purpose of this study has been to establish the dialogic nature of Romantic drama. We have seen how the playwrights interacted with each other to produce a textual theater. Taking full advantage of the potential for drama to float varying viewpoints without providing an overriding moral voice, these playwrights fashioned their responses to the political theater of the French Revolution. They gave us characters facing the modern dilemma: how to act against overwhelming forces, and whether the actor is merely a theatrical mental construct himself or herself. In the following pages will generalize about the Romantic dramatic genre's tropes, foci, and disparities through a brief look at Byron's Cain and Blake's response to Cain, The Ghost of Abel.

Byron wrote Cain: A Mystery in 1821 and published it along with Sardanapalus and The Two Foscari in 1821. Just as Marino Faliero responds to Shelley's The Cenci and Prometheus Unbound, so Cain answers both of Shelley's dramas. To Shelley's qualified skeptical idealism dialectically achieved, Byron replies with a thoroughgoing metaphysical realism, a brutally honest confession of the entrapped state of the modern man. In 1821-22, the range of readers' responses to Cain were so varied that, as Jerome McGann notes, both the radical Percy Shelley and the bourgeois Sir Walter Scott (to whom the poem was inscribed) defended the poem. Indeed, Scott defended Cain on the grounds of poetic justice: "The fiend-like reasoning and bold blasphemy of the fiend and his pupil lead exactly to the point which was expected,—the commission of the first murder, and the ruin and despair of the perpetrator."¹

The occasion for Scott's defense was a barrage of attacks from the conservative press accusing the play and playwright of blasphemy, refusing to distinguish between

¹Byron's Letters and Journals, VI, 3. Sentence quoted in CPW, VI, 648.

author and text as Scott so delicately does. Byron similarly defends himself by falling back on the dialogic nature of drama: “Cain is nothing more than a drama—not a piece of argument—if Lucifer and Cain speak as the first Murderer and the first Rebel may be supposed to speak—surely the rest of the personages talk also according to their characters.”² This defense might seem coy in light of Byron’s hyper-awareness that every statement of every character inevitably would be read as Byron’s own, since Byron himself had trained his audience well in biographical criticism. And yet it shows how much Byron, consciously employing drama’s dialectical powers, slipped his elusive cultural critique past the orthodox gate-keepers and censors. Like other Romantic dramas, Cain turns rational reductions of the world into complex dialogues in which no character can be said to dominate. Byron’s claim that he was not arguing, then, fits perfectly the very blasphemous philosophy from which he seems to distance himself. Cain’s very undecidability and uncertainty, like Byron’s, makes the drama, like all Romantic drama, as disturbing as it is. To claim the drama is autobiographical and that therefore Cain is its privileged character is not only to re-insert the ethical subject back into a text and a genre that seems bent on questioning the subject’s existence. It is also to ignore the intensity of Cain’s self-critique. Instead of seeking Cain’s “hero,” then, we need to recognize, in what follows and from the preceding chapters, that Romantic drama is generically dialectical in its struggle to find an ethical response to modernity.

Cain allows for no *complacent* hope in that search. In Cain Byron presents the independent, essentially modern spirit unable to find recently lost happiness either within or without. Adam represents patriarchal orthodoxy, both servile in his appeals to God and tyrannical in the way he seeks to reign in his wife. Eve tells Cain to “Behold thy father cheerful and resigned—/ And do as he doth” (I.51-2), even though she is not fully cheerful or resigned herself. Adam at least mourns for the loss of Eden and holds in his past a single instance of resistance, but Abel is the most fiercely dogmatic of the lot, not merely

²BLJ, IX,103: quoted in CW, VI, 650-51.

admonishing Cain to pray, but ignoring Cain's pride and inciting Cain to martyr him. None of these others (nor Zillah, Abel's wife, a minor character) offers Cain any answer to the skeptical doubt he entertains about God's essential goodness:

And this is
 Life?--Toil! and wherefore should I toil?--because
 My father could not keep his place in Eden?
 What had *I* done in this?--I was unborn:
 I sought not to be born; nor love the state
 To which that birth has brought me. Why did he
 Yield to the Serpent and the woman? or
 Yielding--why suffer? What was there in this?
 The tree was planted, and why not for him?
 If not, why place him near it, where it grew
 The fairest in the centre? They have but
 One answer to all questions, "'Twas *his* will,
 And *he* is good." How know I that? Because
 He is all-powerful, must all-good, too, follow?
 I judge but by the fruits--and they are bitter--
 Which I must feed on for a fault not mine. (I.64-79)

Like a disinherited Englishman, Cain critiques his patriarch's metaphysical complacency, but his questions reach further to the general complaint against anything but complete agency to control one's fate. This more general question--why am I not an agent?--implies that Cain could not have been happy in Eden either, and further that no one can be happy without actively avoiding the plain fact of one's subjection to circumstance.

Adah, Lucifer's only critic in Cain, takes the position that the knowledge Lucifer offers Cain is not worth having insofar as it prevents Cain from using love to escape consciousness of his insignificance. Adah is often read to offer the equivalent of Blake's Beulah, a "state" of "soft sexual delusions" that resembles highest visionary enlightenment, but which is ultimately inadequate, a trap. But Adah's alternative to Lucifer is fully coherent. Readers of Cain have traditionally overlooked Adah because Adah does not follow Lucifer into the flights of reason. Adah is considered to lack the modern man's (read: male's) problem of skeptical consciousness. Her solution—love, which is also Shelley's in Prometheus Unbound—is therefore metaphysically separate from a real solution for the dilemma of modern consciousness. Cain is Byron's metaphysical answer to Prometheus Unbound. There is no other text, and certainly no other drama, in which Byron conceptualizes the utopia. But Byron admits that when Adah offers Cain sympathy and love, she also offers the only serious challenge to Lucifer's damaging skepticism. Lucifer himself tells Cain to "Choose betwixt Love and Knowledge—since there is/ No other choice" (I.429-30).³ In Cain Byron seems to invent the definitive Romantic dramatic statement: the characters face ethical choices with deep political consequences arising from their specific perceptual modes. Romantic dramatic characters are, even in Prometheus

³My reading of Adah in Cain is largely based upon the way Caroline Franklin insists that we must not overlook her. See Byron's Heroines (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1992) 232-246. For example, Franklin writes: "Adah is one of Byron's most conventional heroines: a passive, gentle, and nurturing wife and mother. It is therefore often overlooked that she functions, in the structure of the play, as the antithesis of the evil spirit. Modern readers tend either to ignore the character or censure the sentimentalism of her portrayal" (232-33). But "the female counterpart is fully dramatized as a character in her own right" (232). The tradition of overlooking Adah places Byron's critics in Cain's own flawed position: "because Cain only sees Lucifer's superior debating skill in attacking Jehovah through proving Adah wrong, he fails to realize the significance of Adah's moral superiority to both Jehovah and Lucifer" (238).

Unbound, only partially able to understand these choices. The result, often tragic as in Cain, prove how partial their rational and emotional comprehensions are.

Adah alone seems have made the choice of love, but for Cain there does not seem to be even this choice. Cain cannot find true sympathy that might have saved him. Here he denigrates Adah's mental power to comprehend him:

...my Adah--my
Own and beloved--she, too, understands not
The mind which overwhelms me: never till
Now met I aught to sympathise with me.
'Tis well--I rather would consort with spirits. (I.187-91)

There is a pathetic suggestion that women are metaphysically ill-equipped to understand and counter male angst, a possibility nowhere refuted in Cain (nor in Blake's response). In Eve's suppressed discontent there is the suggestion that the female subject's angst (at least in Byron's day) cannot be expressed as easily, though it does exist. If we read Cain as an imperfect judge of Adah, we may conclude that her choice against knowledge and skepticism makes her the stronger of the pair. Adah, meeting Lucifer, calls him sublime:

I cannot abhor him;
I look upon him with a pleasing fear,
And yet I fly not from him: in his eye
There is a fastening attraction which
Fixes my fluttering eyes on his; my heart
Beats quick; he awes me, and yet draws me near,
Nearer and nearer:--Cain--Cain--save me from him! (I.407-413)

Though she calls to her man to help her, Adah in fact saves herself. Hers is not Abel's dishonest denial of the appeal of reason and skeptical knowledge, but rather a visceral, and powerful, understanding that what Lucifer offers is worse than what she already possesses. As an object of Cain's love Adah prevents Lucifer from gaining Cain's complete respect. When Lucifer calls Cain's love for Adah a "delusion," and comments that he can only love a "vast and general purpose" (II.272, 313), he condescends to Cain by saying: "I pity thee who lovest what must perish." But Cain avoids this temptation of the Enlightenment to love only abstractions and generalities by responding, "And I thee who lov'st nothing" (II.337-8). Immediately following this exchange, Lucifer tries to lead Cain into jealousy for Jehovah's supposed favor for Abel, but Cain does not buy into Lucifer's plot. Contradicting the Genesis text, which explains Cain's motive as jealousy, Byron's play suggests rather that Cain's only hope was in love, but he could not accede to the loss of independence that love (or jealousy) demand.

Lucifer encourages Cain's desire for mental independence paradoxically by showing Cain wonders of the universe, including the afterlife. But Lucifer himself is not completely independent. Lucifer's request, for Cain to "fall down and worship me--thy Lord" (I.303), reveals him to be hypocritical very much like Wordsworth's Rivers. He preaches mental self-reliance, but spends all of his energy seeking a follower.⁴ Seen this way, Lucifer's drive for power is not a product of strength, but of insecurity. Again, it is Adah who understands Cain better than he understands himself when she tells him that his new pessimism is a form of servility to Lucifer. When Cain confronts her nihilistically, suggesting that Adam and Eve should die, she replies: "Thou hast not spoken well, nor is that thought/ Thy own, but of the Spirit who was with thee" (III.i.76-77).

Given the choice between Lucifer's knowledge and Adah's love, Cain chooses wrongly, though the choice is something that happens to him as much as it is his act. One

⁴ He exists in Hegel's false ideology of Lordship and Bondage, in which "Self-consciousness exists...only in being acknowledged." Phenomenology of Spirit, 111.

of the agent's powers Cain lacks is the ability to choose not to be skeptical. Just after the above soliloquy, Lucifer appears, strongly suggesting that Lucifer merely responds to Cain's questionings. As in Manfred, the metaphysical beings in Cain function both as external beings and as players in a psychomachia. When Cain refuses to worship Lucifer but agrees for a while to "follow" him, Cain is resisting a tendency toward absolute adherence to reason within himself. He merely agrees to see where reason alone may take him. Thus far he may choose, but to ignore the appeal of reason entirely is beyond his temperament. As Lucifer confirms in Cain, "Nothing can/ Quench the mind" (I.213-14).

Cain chooses incorrectly not because he is too skeptical, but because he is not skeptical enough. I have been calling Lucifer "skeptical knowledge" up to now because he appears at the first moment of Cain's skepticism and because one of his key moves is relentlessly to question God's authority. Lucifer's critique of God implies a general disorder to the universe, as in his line "how beautiful/ Your works, or accidents" (II.i.111-112). But Lucifer, who does not see himself as "skepticism" per se, but "knowledge," has his own dogmas, one of which is his unexamined adoration of power. In trying to make Cain jealous of Abel, for example, Lucifer attempts to enlist Cain in a power struggle where none need exist. Lucifer observes a strict hierarchical separation between spirit and matter that Cain suggests is a mistake. Cain's disdain for his own embodiment leads him to follow Lucifer instead of Adah: "I rather would consort with spirits," Cain tells her. This supremacy of the spirit leads Lucifer to worship knowledge itself. In the speech that makes Lucifer appear, Cain says, "knowledge is good" (I.37). Byron has shifted dramatic strategy from Manfred, which opens by acknowledging that

Sorrow is knowledge: they who know the most
Must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal truth,
The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life. (I.i.10-12)

Though Manfred is not a univocal speaker free of undermining irony, Cain can only be understood as ironized by the drama when he praises knowledge out of ignorance. Here Cain weakly responds to Adah:

Cain. He is a God.

Adah. How knowest thou?

Cain. He speaks like

 A God.

Adah. So did the Serpent, and it lied.

Lucifer. Thou errest, Adah! --was not the Tree that
 Of Knowledge?

Adah. Aye--to our eternal sorrow.

Lucifer. And yet the grief is knowledge--so he lied not:

 And if he did betray you, 'twas with Truth;

And Truth in its own essence cannot be

But good.

(I.350-357, my emphasis)

In this exchange, *Adah* is the most skeptical, denying Lucifer's bald and unsupported claims of the good of knowledge. Adah denies Cain's grounds for worshipping knowledge, suggesting that her faith in love is at least as reasonable. If there is no final ground for choosing knowledge over love, and further if neither choice is the more skeptical, then why not choose love? The only answer can be temperament. In fact, there is no choice: for we "choose" what our natures desire. Cain murders Abel over the issue of letting Abel's dogmatic altar stand. Abel is dogmatic to call the altar holy, and Cain is just as dogmatic in his passionate insistence upon destroying the altar. An ideal, truly self-reliant skeptic could not care about the altar's existence, but Cain, like Marino Faliero, is

subject to his temperament. Skepticism in Cain ends where acquiescence to temperament begins. In this feature Cain resembles all Romantic drama.

So too does Cain exemplify Romantic dramatic conflict. The purpose of Cain, like all Romantic drama, is to make sense, somehow, of revolutionary violence. Byron places the singular action from Genesis--the murder--at his drama's end, just as Shelley places Prometheus's apocalyptic alteration at the start. Their procedures mirror each other, suggesting that the spontaneous, almost unmotivated action rules both otherwise so dissimilar universes. Violence, and action in general, always remains inexplicable for Romantic drama, not finally regarding the pseudo-choices individuals seem to possess. Since these choices are not substantial, the ethical dialogues these dramas enact indict nature as, paradoxically, both chaotic and deterministic. We seek the right action, the freedom to perform it, and a way of identifying ourselves through our actions, but we are usually thwarted, and our actions are give us remorse.

Cain, like Prometheus Unbound, suggests that perhaps our perception of what constitutes action needs reconsideration. Altering the Genesis text, Adah chooses to go with Cain into exile. Before the Angel appears, Cain tells her to abandon him, and she refuses:

Cain. Leave me!

Adah. Why, after all have left thee.

Cain. And wherefore lingerest thou? Dost thou not fear

 To dwell with one who hath done this?

Adah. I fear

 Nothing except to leave thee, much as I

 Shrink from the deed which leaves me brotherless. (III.460-64)

Though her act is merely to stand by her man, Adah's fierce loyalty is mentally independent of Cain's despair. By accompanying Cain into the wilderness, she makes it less of a wilderness, and she denies Lucifer's logic of power relations. As Caroline Franklin notes, "Most notably of all, of course, only Adah, like Baillie's Jane de Monfort, shows capacity for forgiveness of sin. She is loyal to Cain despite his murder of their brother, whilst Adam banishes and Eve curses him—reflecting the punitive response to be expected of Jehovah" (237). The comparison to Baillie's play is apt because of the way in which Baillie's anti-hero is determined by his individual and innate passions. Near the end of Byron's play, Cain re-states his belief in temperament: "That which I am, I am" (III.509) and receives his rhetorical echo from the Angel: "what is done, is done" (516). Cain's despair for his core selfhood is, then, linked to the same philosophy as the Angel's retributive ethic. Only Adah's active choice to stay with Cain challenges the despairing agreement between Cain and the Angel by suggesting that not all action in the world causes irreparable harm.⁵

Cain is wholly critical, but not necessarily pessimistic because not predictive. An idealist reading Cain could decide to be perturbed by the way it forecloses on so many avenues of escape, but since Cain mostly shuts down *sentimental* escapes, a non-sentimental idealist might read Cain as a necessary first step, the critique that must precede the positive revolution. Blake, I think, understood the Cain this way. Whether The Ghost of Abel is critical or laudatory of Byron's drama is not entirely clear.⁶ Emily Hamblen's

⁵See Franklin, 232: "But the reuniting of Cain and Adah at the end of the play demonstrates at least the possibility of the integration of the principles of liberty and fraternity, in an ideal humanism."

⁶For an extended discussion of this issue as a problem see Milton a Poem and the Final Illuminated Works: The Ghost of Abel, On Homers Poetry [and] On Virgil, Laocoön, eds., intro., notes, Robert N. Essick, Joseph Viscomi (Princeton: Princeton UP, for The Blake Trust, 1993): "Whether Blake wrote to defend or criticize Byron is a matter of debate" (220). The editors undermine any certainty that Blake read Byron's text rather than the 500 or so lines quoted in a nasty attack on Cain in the London Literary Gazette, Dec.

1930 reading of Blake's response is typical: "In Cain, Blake read cruelty and accident as the essence of the universe; finding it a *Wilderness*—a place continuously elemental and

22, 1821, 808-12. They argue that it is just as possible that Blake, unable to afford Byron's text, read the attack in an easily borrowed copy of the Gazette and defended Byron against their common orthodox enemies. However, the editors also note that Blake could have borrowed Cain itself. See 220-227.

Most critics simply take one view or the other, with the majority deciding that Blake was critical of Byron. Among those who see Blake's work as critical, see Truman Guy Steffan, Lord Byron's Cain: Twelve Essays and a Text with Variants and Annotations (Austin, London: U. of Texas P., 1986) 320-24; Geoffrey Keynes, William Blake's Laocoön (London: Trianon Press for The Blake Trust, 1976) 58; Leslie Tannenbaum, "Blake and the Iconography of Cain" in Blake in his Time, eds., Robert N. Essick, Donald Pearce (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1978); and "Lord Byron in the Wilderness: Biblical Traditions in Byron's Cain and Blake's The Ghost of Abel," Modern Philology 72 (1975): 350-64; Michal Davis, William Blake: A New Kind of Man, (Berkeley, Los Angeles: U. of California P., 1977) 151; and Emily S. Hamblen, On the Minor Prophecies of William Blake (London, Ontario: J.M. Dent, New York: E.P. Dutton, 1930) 366-69.

Critics who see Blake as more sympathetic to Byron include Peter Ackroyd in Blake, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996) 348-9; Bernard Blackstone English Blake (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1966), wrote that Blake, "would be entirely in sympathy with Byron's rejection of the false morality and corrupt politics of the age. But as the dedication shows, he considered Byron wrong in fleeing from human society into the wilderness, and rejecting vision" (179). S. Foster Damon, in William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1958) 239-41, sees Blake as condescendingly sympathetic to Byron's efforts: "In the bitterness of his sufferings, the problem of Good and Evil had been forced upon his mind; and The Mystery of Cain [sic] was the expression of his hopelessness at any solution. Byron was frankly 'of the Devil's party,' siding with Lucifer and Cain against the Evil Creator. But Byron's analysis of the situation hardly went farther....In short, Byron was only in the kindergarten of the School of Experience, where Blake had become a master...he dedicated his Ghost of Abel 'to Lord Byron in the Wilderness,' hoping that the younger man, and perhaps even the public, might find in the two pages of Blake's play an answer to the questions posed so vainly in the three acts of Byron's" (239). Foster's valuable explication is, however, based upon a misreading of Byron.

ruthless. Blake takes him to task as a poet. A poet should be a prophet and have vision” (366).

Hamblen, like all critics who read Blake this way, mentions Blake’s address to Byron at the head of the two-plate scene: “To LORD BYRON in the Wilderness/ What doest thou here Elijah?”⁷ Blake then either admonishes the reader or, he asks: “Can a Poet doubt the visions of Jehovah?”(plate 1; BCW, 270). Blake’s response to Cain centers around the problem of revenge, the focus, in fact of every Romantic drama from The Borderers to Prometheus Unbound (even Manfred may be read as revenge against the self). Typically, Cain is interpreted in Cain’s and Lucifer’s terms, not Adah’s. If Byron is merely “of the devils party” in Cain, confirming and reiterating the Genesis ethic of retribution, then The Ghost of Abel must be read as a strong critique of Byron’s play. Assuming, however, that Blake had the opportunity to read Cain and read it carefully, perhaps he saw a more subtle drama than the one usually perceived to exist. Cain is an imaginative poem that in turn thematizes imagination as much as reason, finding both inadequate for creating happiness. Blake may have disagreed with Byron’s disappointment in the power of imagination, but then the dialogue among Romantic dramas always arises from a disagreement about the right amount of idealism. That being said, to say that Byron resides in a wilderness is equivocal. It might refer, as Hamblen and others suggest, to Byron’s inadequate imagining. Robert Essick and Joseph Viscomi speculate that it alludes to Byron’s exile in Italy. This allusion would only be supported by reading Byron as the Elijah Blake mentions in The Ghost of Abel, since Elijah fled Jezebel to Mount Sinai, just as Byron fled the scandals surrounding his wife’s orthodox idolatries.

⁷In addition to Essick and Viscomi’s edition, two sources of Blake’s works have been consulted, both edited by David V. Erdman: The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake, commentary by Harold Bloom, rev. (Berkeley, Los Angeles: U. of California P., 1982); and The Illuminated Blake (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1974).

I would suggest, however, that calling to Lord Byron “in the Wilderness” places Byron in relation to Blake as John the Baptist stands in relation to Jesus: necessary herald to truly visionary prophet. Near the beginning of all four Gospels John the Baptist calls himself the “voice of one crying in the wilderness” (in all but Mark, these words are attributed first to Elijah) to prepare the way for Jesus.⁸ By asking Byron-as-Elijah, “What doest thou here,” Blake implies that he too is in the wilderness, just as Jesus comes to John baptizing. The hierarchy between Jesus and John is clear enough. John says he is not fit to hold the latchet on Jesus’s shoe or the thong on his sandal.⁹ This relationship is not adversarial. Indeed, Blake cooperates with Byron, improving upon Byron’s critique and beginning where Byron leaves off: in the wilderness, just after Abel’s death. Rather than denigrating Byron’s general skepticism in Cain, Blake, even in calling for faith in the imagination, is saying that Cain is not skeptical enough.¹⁰ In any case the non-adversarial supercession of John by Jesus may serve as an emblem for the dialogue between Romantic dramatists. They do not, in general, disagree about the nature of modernity’s challenges. That overall agreement sponsored Coleridge to rewrite Wordsworth’s play, just as we have seen Byron and Shelley interacting with each other rather than approaching drama anew each time they wrote.

When Blake asks, “Can a Poet doubt the visions of Jehovah?” he counters the way in which Byron’s Cain gives in to a partial skepticism. A fuller skepticism would have acknowledged the basis for nihilism as dogmatic, and would have to acknowledge that all metaphysics is internal, as Blake claims: Nature has no Supernatural & dissolves:

⁸See Matthew 3:1-3, Mark 1:2-4, Luke 3:2-4, and John 1:15-23.

⁹Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:7, Luke 3:16, John 1:27.

¹⁰This reading is not in disagreement with Essick and Viscomi: “Doubt is not incompatible with the prophetic voice, as Elijah [doubting Jezebel’s false idols in I Kings] demonstrates. But Blake’s question is also about perception. Can Byron doubt his own imagination?...Do we perceive like poets and prophets, or like vengeful ghosts and divisive accusers?” (226).

Imagination is Eternity” (plate 1; BCW 270). The poem continues to refute, not skepticism *per se*, but the way in which Cain’s incomplete skepticism fails to transcend the human material condition. Adam and Eve begin Blake’s scene by refusing Jehovah’s vision. In grief Adam exclaims, “I will not hear thee more thou Spiritual Voice,” indicating that he will now refuse to credit his own spirituality, and deify reason in the manner of Byron’s Lucifer. Eve reiterates Adam’s cry: “Is this the Promise of Jehovah! O it is all a vain delusion/ This Death & this Life & this Jehovah!” But Jehovah replies: “Woman! lift thine eyes” (plate 1; BCW 271). Eve’s closed eyes undermine her skepticism of all existence. Her skeptical conclusions are not empirical, but dogmatic, fearful avoidances. Romantic drama does not present a consistent line on the value of skepticism, nor on the degree of skepticism that modernity imposes upon us. The only pattern among Romantic dramas is the insistence that the key to modern ethics is the degree of skepticism one ought to have.

In Blake’s drama, closing one’s eyes causes the will to revenge. The immediate result of Adam and Eve’s damagingly partial skepticism is the appearance of Abel’s ghost, a phantasm calling for revenge: “Life for Life! Life for Life.” As Erdman notes,¹¹ there are deletion marks above some of the “f”s, so that the line also reads “Life for Lie! Lie or Life.” Underneath the Ghost’s call for revenge, then is the equation of causing death by believing in a lie. Adam then begins to entertain the kinds of metaphysical doubts about death that preoccupy Manfred:

Adam— Eve come away & let us not believe these vain delusions

Abel is dead and Cain slew him! We shall also Die a Death

And then! what then? be as poor Abel a Thought: or as

This! O what shall I call thee Form Divine! Father of Mercies

That appearest to my Spiritual Vision: Eve seest thou also.

¹¹ See Erdman, Illuminated Blake, 382.

Adam, the Romantic dramatic character proper, holds metaphysical doubts that instigate these dramas' conflicts. He chooses to know only empirical facts, but immediately finds empiricism inadequate to answer his soul's questionings. Eve, with physical eyes still closed, has refused empiricism, but finds the alternative:

Eve— I see him plainly with my Minds Eye. I also see Abel living:

Tho terribly afflicted as We also are. yet Jehovah sees him

Alive & not Dead: were it not better to believe Vision

With all our might & strength tho we are fallen & lost

Adam— Eve thou has spoken truly. let us kneel before his feet.

They kneel before Jehovah

Adam, like Blake's Byron, is skeptical of spirituality as such, but he fails to question the way his fears and doubts determine his perceptions. In this self-induced fallenness, the first couple still perceive the visions of Imagination, no longer viscerally, but only within the "Minds Eye." Their separation of body and soul leads them to the conclusion of Byron's Lucifer: the spiritual should dominate the physical. Accordingly, they bow down to a Jehovah who never asked for knee-worship.

Eve's question, "were it not better to believe Vision," is Blake's answer to the skepticism of Cain and, through Cain, of the entire Romantic dramatic conversation Cain is following. Blake refuses to pretty-up the picture, but insists nevertheless that we follow "Vision." The idealism of The Ghost of Abel, then, comes from the way Blake assumes that even his ground-level characters, Adam and Eve, can tell a vision when they have one. When Blake asks, "Can a Poet doubt the Visions of Jehovah?" the question answers itself. No one doubts visions; we doubt that our thoughts are visions. But Blake insists upon an ethical imperative to believe that which transcends rationalist calls for human sacrifice.

Each of the Romantic dramas examined in this study, from The Borderers to The Ghost of Abel, enacts a limitation to skepticism and a critique of the Enlightenment's project to map human reality exclusively via reason. Each of them accomplishes this critique by following Hume's reflexive move of turning skepticism's scrutiny back onto itself. Beyond Hume, however, Romantic drama enacts the plight of individuals seeking agency in an overwhelming modern world. Often Romantic dramatic characters find that the only agency available to them is the ability to destroy and harm. Just as often, other characters envision ways of transcending their seemingly necessary partialities. The most idealistic of these transcendent visions are Osorio, Prometheus Unbound, and The Ghost of Abel. Coleridge's drama, as we have seen, asserts its idealism dogmatically, expressing in wishes what Shelley and Blake would describe in more powerful dialectical allegories. But Prometheus Unbound's characters are not human, and the human beings in Blake's scene disappear well before the curtain falls, suggesting that the rigorous honesty Byron, Blake, and Shelley demand of themselves cannot accommodate a human character in the apocalyptic scene.

The reason for this absence of the human individual self from Blake and Shelley's apocalyptic visions, and the exclusion of salvation from Byron's and Wordsworth's dramas of human exile, is that Romantic drama is finally ambivalent about the value of the core self. Only Shelley ever seems to question the self's existence, but only to reaffirm subjectivity tentatively in Prometheus Unbound. Asserting the self's existence was not, for the Romantics, to act in accordance with the philosophy of the age, for Locke had long before eviscerated the self from Western philosophy. It was a rear-guard action, and it held no easy satisfactions for them. The Borderers, for example, dramatizes both the self's inescapable existence and the way in which we may use philosophy to avoid the self's human truths. Wordsworth's play ends by establishing an innateness that modernity innately ignores. Much the same may be said about Marino Faliero and Cain. Following

in the tradition of both Coleridge and Baillie, Cain dramatizes the result of indulging in knowledge at the expense of innate benevolence.

Each of the dramas tries to salvage what subjectivity it can from the sense that modernity destroys, not the self, but its significance. The earlier plays react to events in France. Curiously, Coleridge's play, the more metaphysically complacent, is more politically radical than Wordsworth's reactionary response to French Revolutionary idealism. This study has argued that Romantic drama's philosophical concerns outweigh their political valences, not because they transcend their historical situations, but because their responses to history were abstract, not journalistic (unlike, say, Coleridge and Southey's The Fall of Robespierre). Only Coleridge apologizes for revolutionary violence (unless one reads The Cenci as doing so), but Coleridge does so by ascribing poetic justice to every death in Osorio. Violence thus idealized is not the violence of experience. As the later, more sophisticated dramas enact, the problem of modernity subsists in its utter lack of justice, perhaps even within the human self.

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