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"THE LINE INVISIBLE":
INTERTEXTUALITY AND THE MEN AND WOMEN POETS
OF BRITISH ROMANTICISM

by

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ABSTRACT

"The Line Invisible":
Intertextuality and the Men and Women Poets
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John George Pipkin

This dissertation challenges the canon in British
Romantic Poetry by establishing an interpretive methodology
to account for the intertextual relationships that Charlotte
Smith, Joanna Baillie, and Mary Tighe maintain with William
Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Keats. The
interpretive model that I develop in the opening chapter
builds upon the "rhizome" theory of Gilles Deleuze and Felix
Guattari, in order to replace the "influence" of Harold
Bloom's Oedipal model with a complex network of root-like
intertextual relationships. By subsuming Bloom's linear
structure under a non-hierarchical discourse network, this
model encourages us to look at literary history as an
intricate "root-system," extending in multiple directions
from a plurality of disparate nodes. The resulting paradigm
shift enables this dissertation to re-examine one of the
dominant aesthetic concepts of the Romantic Period -- the
sublime -- in order to show how the figurative construction
of women as signifiers of materiality effects their cultural
exclusion from commercial engagement with the Romantic
aesthetic of transcendental sublimity. The "material sublime" is the term I use to denote those moments either when the physical world disruptively announces itself within the textual gesture toward transcendence, or when the text itself foregrounds the materiality upon which the sublime experience is based.

After developing these two theoretical constructs, this dissertation then argues that Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets* engages in the discourse of the material sublime by expressing the terror and alienation she encounters upon leaving her spendthrift husband in order to raise their ten children on her own. The chapter examining Baillie's 1798 "Introductory Discourse" to *A Series of Plays* argues that her aesthetic theory anticipates Wordsworth's valorization of powerful emotions, natural language, and rustic themes, and that it is her methodical formulation of the "sympathetic curiosity" that compels Wordsworth to codify his own theories in the "Preface" of 1800. The final chapter explores the thematic and stylistic concerns of Tighe's *Psyche*, a rare example of an extended narrative poem by a woman during the Romantic period, in order to map her recuperation of beauty as an aesthetic category.
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INTRODUCTION

The title of this dissertation, "The Line Invisible," comes from a passage in Wordsworth's "Home at Grasmere," (The Recluse I:1) where he proclaims that the solitary poet is least alone when immersed in nature, because it is in nature that the poet finds himself surrounded by the universal imagery of creation. At such moments of epistemological clarity, he insists, the line is invisible that divides the image from reality.

See yonder the same pageant, and again
Behold the universal imagery
Inverted, all its sun-bright features touched
As with the varnish, and the gloss of dreams;
Dreamlike the blending also of the whole
Harmonious landscape; all along the shore
The boundary lost, the line invisible
That parts the image from reality;
And the clear hills, as high as they ascend
Heavenward, so piercing deep the lake below.
(The Recluse I:1, 570-79)

According to Wordsworth, the poet loses hold of the conceptual limits and boundaries of classical epistemology when he perceives the Absolute through its particularization in the natural phenomena of the physical world. Like a lake seamlessly reflecting the image of the world above its surface, poetry, Wordsworth believes, has the power to reflect the world and blur the distinction between art and reality. This elision intimates that the line dividing the image from reality is itself an illusion, a discursive and
epistemological construct of the rational mind that actually distorts and obscures the perceptions it attempts to clarify. Although the Romantic ideology is, in part, predicated upon the supposedly universal desire to transcend the division between the real and ideal worlds, the all-male composition of the Romantic canon itself is symptomatic of the failure of the critical discourse in Romantic studies to transcend another division: the illusory line drawn between male and female poets by socially constructed gender paradigms.

The belief that Romanticism is a unified masculine ideology is a myth perpetuated as much by traditional patriarchal criticism, as it is by many revisionist critics who rely upon this illusion to serve as the antithesis of their own paradigms. Mainstream Romantic criticism finds its touchstone in the monumental works of M.H. Abrams, who solidifies for the twentieth century the major paradigms that define Romanticism: the subordination of rational discourse to a language of expression, the valorization of the poetic imagination, the dialectical struggle between poet and nature, and the emphasis on the sublime as the experiential path to transcendence. Beginning with Abrams, Romantic criticism subsumes much of the ideological disparity among the male Romantic poets under the aesthetic
goals of one poet, Wordsworth, whose voice has since been universalized to speak for the entire Romantic movement.

In *The Mirror and the Lamp*, Abrams identifies Wordsworth's "Preface" as the fountainhead of Romantic aesthetics because "the year 1800 is a good round number" and "Wordsworth's Preface a convenient document, by which to signalize the displacement of the mimetic and pragmatic by the expressive view of art in English criticism." Although Abrams seems to imply that Wordsworth's "Preface" is a paradigm of convenience, time and reverence have nonetheless affirmed it as the sole manifesto initiating the Romantic period. Similarly, Wordsworth's "Prospectus" to *The Excursion*, with its "high argument" proclaiming "How exquisitely the individual Mind . . . to the external World / Is fitted:-- and how exquisitely too -- . . . The external World is fitted to the Mind," has come to represent the Romantic "spirit of the age," and Wordsworthian poet theory has remained the authoritative index of Romantic aesthetics.

In *Natural Supernaturalism*, Abrams insists that his study "does not undertake to be an inclusive survey of thought and literature in the early nineteenth century"; yet he outlines a poetic agenda, drawing primarily on

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Wordsworth, that dictates the criteria for the entire period.

Even in the writers who are my primary concern, I deal largely with selected works written in the prime of their powers, while some major writers of the age are marginal to my focus. . . . My rationale is that Wordsworth (as his English contemporaries acknowledged, with whatever qualifications) was the great and exemplary poet of the age, and his Prospectus stands as the manifesto of a central Romantic enterprise against which we can conveniently measure the consonance and divergences in the writings of his contemporaries.  

Convenience is again an important quality in Abrams's theory. In this highly selective reading of the Romantic canon, Wordsworth's vision comes to represent, for Abrams and his followers, the aesthetic criteria by which the rest of the period should be judged. Following in the wake of Abrams's work, critics have measured the "consonance" and "divergences" of Romantic period texts against the Wordsworthian norm -- the "central Romantic enterprise." Maintaining this kind of homogeneity in the Romantic canon has often required sweeping generalizations and arbitrary exclusions. Harold Bloom's attempt to attribute a single characteristic to the entire Romantic period is marked by the kind of ambiguity that one would expect from such a comprehensive summation: "What allies six great poets so different in their reactions to the common theme of imagination is a quality of passion and largeness, in speech

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and in response to life."\(^3\) Vague qualities like "passion" and "largeness," elevated to the level of verifiable critical terms, thinly veil the lack of unity beneath such totalizing theories of Romanticism.

Contemporary feminist literary critics and revisionist literary historians face a number of unique dilemmas in re-evaluating the British Romantic Period and the role that women writers played in that literary movement. On the one hand, taken in their own historical context, many of these women writers enjoyed great success, often surpassing their male contemporaries in sales, popularity, and critical acclaim, while on the other hand, given our inherited understanding in the late-twentieth century of what "Romanticism" means, some of these same writers now hardly seem to have belonged to the Romantic period as it is canonically represented by Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Keats, and Shelley. There is also the paradox regarding the male writers, poets, philosophers, and literary critics of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries who were complicit in their culture’s dismissal of female intellectual accomplishments, but who then went to great lengths to praise and support the efforts of individual women writers. Two challenges, therefore, have

directed the flow of my argument in the following pages: 1) the need for an interpretive model that will give us the freedom to rethink what we mean by “Romanticism” and who we should include in our discussions of “Romantic” poets, and 2) the need to generate a discourse about women writers of the period that is viable pedagogically in its explanation of Romanticism as a dynamic and complex discourse in which writers of both sexes participated, cooperated, and conflicted.

Nearly twenty years have passed since Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar first critiqued the gender blindness of Harold Bloom's The Anxiety of Influence; yet, the structural limitations of this interpretive model continue to shape contemporary Romantic criticism, and many revisionist readings of the women poets of the Romantic Period ultimately reduplicate Bloom's essentialist gender divisions. The ground breaking studies by Anne Mellor and Marlon Ross initially disrupt Bloom's rigid genealogy, but their oppositional paradigms fail to interrogate the multiple discursive intersections between the men and women writers of the period. This dissertation establishes an interpretive methodology to account for the intertextual relationships that three women poets, Charlotte Smith, Joanna Baillie, and Mary Tighe, maintain with what has come to be called canonical Romanticism. Smith, Baillie, and
Tighe do not always embrace the same aesthetic and ideological concerns addressed by the male Romantics, but they also do not align themselves with the paradigms of "feminine" Romanticism described by Mellor and other feminist critics. Thus, they disrupt the gender boundaries established by both canonical and revisionist Romantic criticism, and they necessitate a reevaluation of the traditional assumptions regarding literary influence and periodization.

I have chosen these three poets because their works make use of several different genres and thus give us the opportunity to examine some of the various strands of intersecting discourses that constitute the Romantic period. Smith, who today is remembered as a novelist, first achieved fame as a writer of sonnets at a time when many male writers were supposedly disdainful of the sonnet tradition in English. Baillie, who established her reputation as a dramatist, provides us with a rare example of an extensive aesthetic manifesto by a woman writer. And Tighe, who was relatively unknown until the posthumous publication of *Psyche*, remains one of the few women writers to have achieved the Romantic goal of composing an epic poem.

This dissertation falls into two parts: the first two chapters establish the theoretical context in which the final three chapters conduct close readings of Smith,
Baillie, and Tighe. The first chapter of this dissertation develops an interpretive model that builds upon the "rhizome" theory developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in A Thousand Plateaus. The rhizomic model replaces the "influence" of Bloom's Oedipal model with Kristeva's concept of "intertextuality" in order to identify the polyvocality of Romantic poetry. By subsuming Bloom's linear structure under a non-hierarchical discourse network, this model encourages us to look at literary history as an intricate "root-system" of reciprocal relationships, extending in multiple directions from a plurality of disparate nodes. In a later essay, Deleuze explains that the rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots. Unlike the graphic arts, drawing, or photography, unlike tracings, the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight.¹

Deleuze's description of the rhizome highlights the fact that the rhizomic model presents not only a different description of literary history, but also a different methodology of writing that history. If the rhizomic model represents the network in which literary history expands, then the critical discourse which attempts to interpret and

assign meaning to this history must be connected to this network as well. Mapping this relationship is essential to my project in order prevent it from reduplicating the historical dialectic of subject and object that Jerome McGann, Marjorie Levinson, Catherine Gallagher, and other New Historicists have identified as the relationship in which traditional humanist criticism attempts to universalize its own historically specific readings of texts and events. By turning to the tripartite semiotic model devised by C.S. Peirce -- which takes into account the idea that every interpretation produced by an act of reading shapes future readings of the same object -- this chapter establishes an interpretive methodology that remains open to the possibility of infinite intertextual connections while avoiding the ahistorical reduplication of the same Romantic ideologies that are under examination here.

The second chapter takes up one of the dominant aesthetic theories in Romantic criticism and maps the pervasive sexual and reproductive metaphors that link discourses of the sublime (in Longinus, Addison, Burke, and Kant) to the discursive containment and suppression of the female body. In so doing, this chapter shows how the figurative construction of women as signifiers of materiality effects their cultural exclusion from commercial engagement with the Romantic aesthetic of transcendental
sublimity. I use the concept of the "material sublime" to denote those moments either when the physical world disruptively announces itself within the textual gesture toward transcendence, or when the text itself foregrounds the materiality upon which the sublime experience is based. Through the deployment of the "material sublime" many women writers of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries participate in the discourse of Romantic pathos by internalizing cultural inscriptions of female bodiliness and hyperbolizing their own encounters with the limitations of the physical world.

Chapter Three focuses on Smith's Elegiac Sonnets and analyzes her deployment of the material sublime. Although Smith's sonnets address many of the same tropes of violent storms and expansive vistas that populate the poetry of her male contemporaries, Smith does not describe these scenes of terror and alienation in order to represent the power of the transcendent poet-ego. Instead, Smith's encounters with the initiating tropes of the transcendental sublime lead her to underscore, poetically, her own rootedness in the material world. This chapter then turns to the rhizomic model to explore the overlooked relationship between Smith and Wordsworth and argues that Wordsworth denies Smith's influence on his own sonnets in order to claim Milton as his paternal precursor. Finally, an examination of the
responses published by late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century critics and reviewers forms an important component of the chapters discussing Smith, Baillie, and Tighe. Examining the critical responses of their contemporaries helps to show how the intervening critical discourses of the twentieth century have distorted our perspectives on the accomplishments of these women.

The fourth chapter maps the intertextual relationship between Baillie's "Introductory Discourse" to *A Series of Plays* (1798) and Wordsworth's "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). This chapter argues that Baillie's aesthetic theory anticipates Wordsworth's valorization of powerful emotions, natural language, and rustic themes, and, more importantly, that it is her methodical formulation of these ideas that drives Wordsworth to codify his own theories in the "Preface" two years later. Baillie's concept of the "sympathetic curiosity" is a direct response to Burke's writings on the sublime, in which he argues that spectators take direct pleasure in viewing the sufferings of others. Baillie shifts the locus of this pleasure to the spectator's feeling of admiration for another's fortitude. By reading Wordsworth through Baillie, this chapter not only shows the "Preface" to be Wordsworth's belated defense of theoretical territory already claimed by Baillie, but also identifies Wordsworth's connectedness to pre-transcendental theories of
the sublime formulated by eighteenth-century sentimental writers.

Chapter Five examines the thematic and stylistic structure of Tighe's *Psyche* in order to argue that Tighe's retelling of Apuleius's original story responds to the early Romantic aesthetic discourse that subordinated feminized beauty to the masculine experiences of the transcendental sublime. Tighe recuperates beauty as the agent necessary for resolving the dialectic of self and other; in *Psyche*, images of the sublime lead only to confusion and self-betrayal. Tighe ostensibly wrote for her domestic circle, but her poems also explore the difficulties and dangers that sexual relationships posed for women in the Romantic period. This chapter concludes by returning to Bloom's model in order to underscore its inability to triangulate the intervention of a female poet, such as Tighe, in the relationship between a poetic father and son, such as Wordsworth and Keats.
CHAPTER 1
RETRACING (REMAPPING) ROMANTICISM

Writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come. . . . A map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which always comes back "to the same."

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus

Writing . . . is always rooted in something beyond language, it develops like a seed, not like a line, It manifests an essence and holds the threat of a secret, it is an anti-communication, it is intimidating.

Roland Barthes, Writing Degree Zero

In the Summer of 1994, The Wordsworth Museum at Dove Cottage opened a special exhibit on the Women Writers of the Romantic Period. At the entrance to the impressive collection of first editions, manuscripts, letters and portraits, a large plaque informed visitors that the women who produced these works labored "under great circumstances," in contrast to the male writers of the period, who "had few such problems."

Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats, none of them took jobs. None of them had to have children or look after families. The achievements of women writers were attained against all the odds. It is so common to find their poetry and novels emerging from backgrounds of suffering, incompatibility, chronic overwork, that it almost seems as if their creativity was strengthened by the need to fight. Writing was an assertion of self in an unjust and often unhappy world.1

Although this exhibition was designed to appeal to a wide audience, including those members of the general public who

may have been unfamiliar with academic battles over the Romantic canon’s boundaries, its over-simplified division between the men and women writers of early nineteenth-century England remains indicative of a current trend in Romantic criticism. In their efforts to acknowledge the participation of women writers in a literary tradition that has historically denied and ignored their contributions, a number of contemporary critics have oversimplified the complex relationships between the men and women writers of the Romantic period, depicting them as symmetrically opposed in terms of their social privileges, domestic responsibilities, and aesthetic, philosophical, and political ideologies. Critics such as Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Margaret Homans, Anne Mellor, and Marlon Ross have carefully and convincingly described Romanticism as a male-dominated movement designating poetry as a masculine genre, but their arguments often confuse the historical representations of what we call “Romanticism” with something that they take to be an ideology indigenous to the period itself, as if we could ever know such an ideology independent of its intervening historical mutations. This fundamental error leads them to mistake the discursive gendering of Romantic tropes and ideologies, as they are formulated and discussed over time by specific critics in specific historical contexts, for an essentialist aesthetics
that dictates the way that men and women write. Such a reductive approach creates a false unity among the women writers of the period by assuming that their texts necessarily represent what male-authored texts do not; in the critical discourse of the late-twentieth century, women Romantic poets enjoy the dubious privilege of being ensconced in their own canon, isolated from the concerns and ideologies of their male contemporaries.

In addition to being factually inaccurate in its zeal for symmetrical opposition, the inherent binarism of this kind of revisionist criticism precludes any investigation into the active and productive involvement of these women in the same literary discourse in which male writers of the period are engaged. If canonical criticism, which has found its major paradigms in the poetic and critical expressions of the male Romantics themselves, can be blamed for uncritically perpetuating the masculine ideology of the period, then recent revisionist and feminist approaches to

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2The reductive generalizations that characterize contemporary revisionist criticism often distort historical facts and, in bringing attention to the very real disadvantages facing women writers of the Romantic period, often exaggerate the advantages or dismiss the difficulties experienced by the male writers. For example, it is simply not true that male writers never took jobs and lived lives free of suffering: Wordsworth worked as the Distributor of Stamps during a period of financial hardship; Coleridge delivered lectures to meet expenses; Keats studied medicine and worked as an apprentice to an apothecary; Shelley lived most of his life estranged from his family and continuously borrowed money against his expected inheritance; and Byron died in exile, a social pariah. Blake, of course, is not included in the opening list of male Romantics since he worked steadily his entire life as a printer and engraver.
Romanticism can be accused of uncovering the misogynist discourse of the movement, only to allow its oppositional structure to remain in place. What critics have left unexamined is how the women writers of the period, in spite of the prohibitions of many (though not all) male writers and critics, make use of a supposedly masculine rhetoric that includes the metaphysical trope of the sublime, the dialectic of poet and nature, and the poeticizing of rustic settings and common language to achieve poetic goals that often diverge from those of their male contemporaries.

It is easier to recuperate one or two poems written by a woman writer during the Romantic period than it is to reorient our thinking about the culturally constructed notions of gender responsible for the critical distinctions that continue to be made between male- and female-authored texts. In this way, many contemporary revisionists are not too different from their canonical predecessors. In fact, it is not difficult to find male writers of the Romantic period who are supportive of women writers in selective ways. For example, Leigh Hunt's *Men, Women, and Books* calls for a re-evaluation of the British women poets whose works, he acknowledges, have gone neglected and unappreciated. After a vague reference to two collections of women's writing, Hunt laments the "paucity" of such publications over the past one hundred years.
These, we believe, are the only two publications of the kind ever known in England; a circumstance hardly to the credit of the public, when it is considered what stuff it has put up with in collections of "British Poets," and how far superior such verse-writers as Lady Winchelsea, Mrs. Barbauld, and Charlotte Smith were to the Sprats, and Halifaxes, and Stephys, and Wattses . . . to say nothing of the women of genius that have since appeared. ³

Hunt’s praise of women poets is underscored by his disdainful reference to the inferior “stuff” produced by male writers in the past, but he does not extend his critical re-evaluation of women’s writing to include a reappraisal of the wider cultural views governing the place of women writers in society. It is against the aesthetic priorities established by male writers (qualities ambiguously referred to by Hunt and others as “manly”) that Hunt judges women’s writing without bringing those priorities themselves into question. A few lines later in this same essay, Hunt reveals his allegiance to the dominant male literary tradition when he adopts its condescending attitude to qualify his appreciation for women writers as a whole.

It is not pretended . . . that women have ever written poetry equal to that of men, any more than they have been their equals in painting and in music. Content with conquering them in other respects, with furnishing them the most charming of their inspirations, and dividing with them the sweet praise of singing, they have left to the more practical sense the glories of pen and pencil. They have been muses who set the poets writing; the goddesses to whom their altars flamed. ⁴

³Leigh Hunt, Men, Women, and Books (London: Smith, Elder and Co. 1847), 110.
⁴Ibid., 111.
Hunt poses messy problems for twentieth-century critics bent on establishing a uniform pattern of ideological opposition between male and female Romantic writers. What a successful revision of Romanticism requires is not only a careful study of the aesthetics proposed by women writers themselves, but also an investigation into the methods of interpretation that have led us to the ambiguous gender-division (what I have referred to in my title, borrowing a phrase from Wordsworth, as "the line invisible") in the canon of Romantic literature.

In an attempt to make explicit the critical approaches to Romanticism that have obfuscated the complex relationships between the men and women poets of the period, this dissertation traces the influence of three poets, Charlotte Smith, Joanna Baillie, and Mary Tighe, on the early development of British Romantic poetry and criticism. But even in my own thesis statement, simple as it is, I have already encountered semantic problems that are embedded in our current discourse on Romanticism. The comfortable terms "influence" and "development" really do not provide us with a satisfying conceptual framework within which to formulate an explanation of the relationship between these women poets and the canonical male poets; rather, the interpretive structure represented by these terms actually stands as one of the most persistent obstacles to a study of non-canonical
writers of both sexes. Before looking at the work of Smith, Baillie and Tighe, we must first cut through some of the debris left by previous interpretive approaches in order to clear a path by which to re-visit those texts that twentieth-century critics have ignored and, subsequently, prevented from contributing to the interpretive paradigms against which they are now read and judged.

From our historical position at the end of the twentieth-century, it is impossible for us to trace the critical discourses extending from the British Romantic Period without finding ourselves directed, or diverted, by the master paradigms of Western literary criticism. Even some of the most recent feminist and revisionist attempts to create alternative paradigms for women writers have become entangled in the interpretive methodologies of previous discourses, and so it is to these fundamental ideas that we must first turn our attention. The widely-assumed relationships that quietly govern the way that we look at intertextual relationships find their most succinct expression in Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*. Bloom's theory occupies the gravitational center amidst the universe of ideas characterizing the Humanist orientation of Romantic studies as professed by Angus Fletcher, Rene Wellek, M.H. Abrams, and W. J. Bate during the first six decades of this century. *The Anxiety of Influence* is itself
as much a product as it is a description of the literary tradition that it claims to have uncovered, describing not the evolution of poetry as poetry (Bloom's emphasis) but rather the way that many male poets and critics have historically perceived the literary enterprise in which they are engaged. Within this descriptive framework, Smith, Baillie, and Tighe, whose aesthetic and epistemological ideologies often anticipate and intersect with canonical Romanticism in subtle and complex ways, cannot claim a position for themselves because their works do not directly oppose, challenge, influence, or rewrite the works of the major male writers of the period in the terms outlined by Bloom.

Although its theories are now over twenty-years old, the residual force of The Anxiety of Influence is still strong. The fundamental concepts behind Bloom's theory have so permeated Anglo-American culture, even beyond academic circles (take, for example, the widespread popular references to watered-down versions of Freud's Oedipal theory) that most readers, regardless of whether or not they have actually read Bloom, have some familiarity with the process of influence that he describes. An explication of The Anxiety of Influence may hardly seem necessary, but I want to run through a quick summary to ensure that my criticisms of the Bloomian legacy are clear. Using Oedipal
anxiety as its compass, Bloom's map of literary history traces the transmission of ideas from father ("precursor") to son ("ephebe") through the aggressive misreadings and rewritings performed by the latter. Bloom is concerned only with "strong" poets, "major figures with the persistence to wrestle with their strong precursors, even to the death."

His logic, on this point, is circular. Only strong poets are worth our attention because only they shape poetic history through their revisionary struggles with their precursors. By definition, strong poets are those poets who wrestle successfully with their precursors because only the strong are capable of emerging victorious from this Oedipal struggle. Lesser poets fail, or turn away from the struggle altogether, content to write insignificant poems in a non-combative fashion.

The strong poet, while still an ephebe, struggles with the father in order to usurp his authority and gain the exclusive attentions of the Muse. Over the course of his struggle to deny his indebtedness to his poetic father, the strong poet moves through the six stages of "clinamen," "tessera," "kenosis," "daemonization," "askesis," and "apophrades," in which he develops from an imitator to a misreader who rewrites his precursor's work in order first to purge himself of it, and then to correct it, complete it,

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and finally reappropriate it as his own. This revisionary process takes place along a linear continuum of reciprocal influence with the process repeating itself between subsequent generations. At this point I want to make an important clarification regarding the terms in which I am describing the underlying structure of Bloom's model, in order to be able to distinguish this structure from that of the interpretive model that I am going to propose later in this chapter. I am using the term "linear" to denote a type of influence that is both dialogic, involving only two participants at any given time, and generational, occurring between an older and a younger poet. This influence is also reciprocal because, according to Bloom, in the final revisionary ratio ("apophrades") the creative power of the later poet gives us the uncanny feeling, upon returning to the text of that poet's precursor, that we can actually see the influence of the later poet in the work of the earlier poet. Not all strong poets reach this final stage. The mark of a truly great poet, for Bloom, is the accomplishment of having appropriated the precursor's voice so thoroughly that the poetry of the precursor appears to be an imitation of the later poet's mature work.

But despite the complicated nuances of Bloom's theory, it does little to explain the formative relationships between poets who are contemporaries, aside from providing
us with the basis for making a comparative evaluation of their individual efforts to rewrite the work of a dominant precursor for whom they both feel Oedipal anxieties. The major contribution of Bloom's theory is its revaluation of influence; the fact that a poet's work is influenced by an earlier poet is not to be considered a sign of weakness, in Bloom's reading, if the younger poet struggles with this influence to make the voice of the precursor his own. Imitation and appropriation, therefore, can make a poet "more original." In fact, this heightened originality is available only to those poets who are strong enough to struggle with the influence of established literary tradition. As Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein have pointed out, in Bloom's model, texts are "non-referential" insofar as "every text is about influence."

Bloom openly argues that literary interpretation has essentially become the study of textual influence, which, by Bloom's definition, occurs only between strong poets locked in Oedipal conflict. These qualifications deligitimize other subjects in the discourse of literary history and enable Bloom to establish rigid boundaries for a narrow and easily defensible canon.

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Poets who are perceived as operating outside the dominant literary tradition, those who do not engage in Oedipal struggles and those whose works respond primarily to "influences not poetical," (i.e. historical, political, domestic) are not worthy of inclusion in the narrative of poetic history as Bloom has restructured it.

Given the explicit gendering of this Oedipal matrix, the obvious imperative in Bloom's theory is that poetic history is necessarily written by male poets: sons competing with fathers for the love of the maternal Muse. Only male poets, therefore, can be the strong poets coveted by historians of poetry, although Bloom eventually discusses Emily Dickinson, in *A Map of Misreading*, as a kind of curious exception. (In much the same way we will see how nineteenth-century critics marveled over the "masculine" ability of successful women writers to produce the "manly" verse that grabbed the attention and admiration of their male contemporaries.) But Bloom's model is not totally void of images depicting female poets. In the course of finding historical support for his model, Bloom appropriates the dominant mythologies of Western Civilization, from Greek Classicism to Judaism and Christianity, in what might at first seem to be an open-armed gesture of inclusivity.

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\*Bloom, 11.*
However, one mythical figure, after being powerfully invoked, quickly disappears from this model: the Sphinx. In Bloom's model the specter of the female poet appears only once, taking on the enigmatic form of the Sphinx, a creature who "riddles and strangles," embodies "sexual anxiety" and represents for the male poet the "Primal Scene . . . the Poetic Father's coitus with the Muse." The Sphinx concisely represents the strategies that Bloom deploys throughout his model to identify women writers as the site of those anxieties, creative and sexual, which seem to fall outside the linearity of the homosocial father-son relationship.

Although Bloom presents his model as a theory of how male poets attempt to suppress the influence of their literary fathers, he is equally as concerned with the threat to male authority posed by the influence of literary mothers. This is exactly the kind of relationship against which The Anxiety of Influence attempts to defend the male Romantic canon.

An implied anguish throughout this book is that Romanticism, for all its glories, may have been a vast visionary tragedy, the self-baffled enterprise not of Prometheus but of blinded Oedipus, who did not know that the Sphinx was his Muse. The "anguish" and "tragedy" plaguing Bloom's efforts resides in the possibility that the strong, male poets of

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Romanticism were inspired or influenced not by the supernatural Muse but by mortal women, presumably women poets such as the ones who are the focus of this dissertation. In Bloom's model, the inescapable influence of maternal procreation is deflected onto the more controllable poetic influence of a paternal precursor. It is the question of textual influence, and its containable threat to poetic identity and self-creation, that constitutes the only anxiety recognized within the patriarchal lineage of this model; all other anxieties are displaced onto critically expendable relationships.

According to Bloom, the denial of female influence is only one part of the male Romantic poet's creative strategy; the poet also crafts an audience for himself that participates in this denial as well. Similarly, Romantic criticism has cooperated in preserving this illusion.

The riddle of the Sphinx, for poets, is not just the riddle of the Primal Scene and the mystery of human origins, but the darker riddle of imaginative priority. It is not enough for the poet to answer the riddle; he must persuade himself (and his idealized reader) that the riddle could not have been formulated without him.10

10Ibid., 72.
In traditional Romantic criticism, women poets haunt the edges of the canon, banished to a "no-man's land" where they circumscribe the limits of the male discourse of Romanticism by embodying all that is un-Romantic. Like the sign of the Sphinx in Bloom's text, the women poets of the Romantic period have become, in literary criticism, the signifiers of that which must be forgotten. However, the gender bias in Bloom's Oedipal model is not itself responsible for the continued marginalization of women writers in Romantic criticism. The inherent misogyny of this model is just one manifestation of the structural bias in Western thinking that prevents this and other interpretive models from encompassing the wider scope of textual interrelationships that proliferate beneath the surfaces of literary periods. Gilbert and Gubar identified the gender limitations of Bloom's model almost two decades ago; yet, the mode of critical thinking that this model represents continues to underlie contemporary Romantic criticism. This is not only because Bloom's Oedipal structure still draws support from a dominantly masculine critical discourse, but also because this model prescribes and adheres to epistemic parameters

"Throughout this work I use the phrase "traditional Romantic criticism" to refer to the male-dominated, humanist discourses that culminates in The Anxiety of Influence. Gilbert and Gubar construct just such a heritage for Bloom when they argue that his model belongs to a theoretical tradition including T.S. Eliot, M.H. Abrams, Erich Auerbach, Frank Kermode, and J. Hillis Miller, and therefore "helps identify and define the patriarchal psychosexual context in which so much Western literature was authored." The Madwoman in the Attic (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 48."
within which Western literary criticism functions most comfortably. These parameters include the concepts of
direct textual influence and historical linear development.

The parameters of Bloom’s argument are so narrowly
defined that it may seem unfair to attack his theory for not
accounting for aspects of literary history with which it is
professedly unconcerned. As I stress throughout this
dissertation, my argument is directed not so much against
Bloom’s theory directly, as against the literary tradition
that has uncritically adopted his model as a universally
applicable mode of interpretation. In fact, there are
moments at which I find Bloom’s theory quite useful for
explaining limited literary relationships. However, there
is at least one point at which my argument runs directly
counter to Bloom’s. Early in The Anxiety of Influence, he
explains:

Poetic history, in this book’s argument, is held to be
indistinguishable from poetic influence, since strong
poets make that history by misreading one another, so
as to clear imaginative space for themselves. (5)

This definition of poetic history is misguided. In the
context of late-twentieth-century materialist and new
historicist approaches to literature, the assertion that
literary history is produced by more that just the sanitary
clash of titanic minds is commonplace, but what I want to
underscore in this post-Foucauldian understanding is that
poetic history is also the product of numerous voices, engaged in complex dialogues, implicit and explicit. This is a simple idea, but it is one that is easily erased by theories such as Bloom’s.

What Bloom’s model has codified for literary criticism is not only the paradigmatic influence that strong male poets exert upon one another, but also the influence of "influence" itself as a dynamic, transhistorical force. For evidence of the strength of "influence" as an interpretive theory, within the confines of a linear conception of literary history, we need only to look to the anxiety with which canonical Romantic criticism has tirelessly sought out sources and origins, from among a narrowly defined list of strong male poets (such as Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton), in order to anchor Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Byron, and Shelley firmly within a male lineage of literary inheritance. In effect, *The Anxiety of Influence* unproblematically adopts, as its central paradigm, the desire expressed by the male Romantic poets who present themselves as the inheritors of a masculine literary tradition; thus, Bloom grounds his own conceptual framework in the same critical discourse that he claims to explain. It should appear ironic to Bloom’s inheritors that he cites Nietzsche as one of his direct precursors when his own revisionism apparently blinds him to the fact that *The
Anxiety of Influence, in its conflation of origin and purpose, runs counter to the explicit critique posed by Nietzschean genealogy. It is in the spirit of Nietzsche's approach that Foucault and the New Historicists have approached history from a very different angle. Notice, for example, how Naomi Schor's definition of historical genealogy contrasts markedly with Bloom's assumptions:

'to approach the history of an idea from a genealogical perspective is to reject the linear model and instead to give full play to discontinuities, overlaps, the disordered ebb and flow of intellectual events.'

By contrast, Bloom's desire to preserve an all-male literary tradition predetermines the poetic heritage that his narrow genealogy pretends to uncover. This conflation of origin and purpose makes it impossible to adapt The Anxiety of Influence for the study of women writers, because the underlying structure denies revisionist criticism the freedom and flexibility to discover intertextual relationships between texts that do not adhere to the linear tradition that the canon favors. Bloom's model, therefore, is the linchpin that must be disengaged by any revisionist project seeking to open the canon to marginalized poets.

As we work toward a developing new interpretive model that will help us to make sense of the wealth of texts by women writers during the Romantic period, we must keep in

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12 Naomi Schor, Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine (New York: Methuen, 1987), 64.
mind three specific methodological shortcomings in Bloom's model so as not to reduplicate these same problems as other corrective attempts have. First, as we have already seen, Bloom's model emphasizes influence itself as the dominant, if not the only, mode of intertextual relationships, and this assumption has remained a powerful force in contemporary criticism. "Poetic history," Bloom argues, "is held to be indistinguishable from poetic influence, since strong poets make that history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves."\textsuperscript{13} By acknowledging and denying the debt of influence, the male poet can define his relationship to a literary tradition through the claims of fraternity as well as autonomy. Although Bloom asserts that "the profundities of poetic influence cannot be reduced to source study, to the history of ideas, to the patterning of images," influence theory as source study has nonetheless come to dominate traditional criticism as its primary interpretive tool.\textsuperscript{14} We can see the extent to which "influence" overshadows other textual relationships in Julia Kristeva's complaint that her own concept of "intertextuality," as a description of the Bakhtinian polyvocality of any text, has been absorbed and redefined by mainstream criticism as representing just

\textsuperscript{13} Bloom, 5.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 7.
another form of textual influence.\textsuperscript{15} Preserving Kristeva's definition will be important to a revisionist model since her concept of "intertextuality" does not reduce textual relationships to oppositional struggles between separate, individual texts, but instead provides a wider interpretive space in which to approach literary history as a dynamic field of exchange:

If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an inter-textuality), one then understands that its "place" of enunciation and its denoted "object" are never single, complete, and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated.\textsuperscript{16}

A delimited model of intertextuality, including but not limited to relationships of influence, provides the most productive framework in which to examine the diversity of thought and reciprocal exchange of ideas, between what Kristeva refers to as "signifying systems," as yet unaccounted for in critical discussions on Romanticism.

The second underlying problem that a new model of literary history must be careful to avoid is the strict linearity of Bloom's model, which establishes narrow limits

\textsuperscript{15}For Kristeva, the term "intertextuality" denotes the transposition of one or more sign systems into another, but in Revolution in Poetic Language she argues that "since this term has often been understood in the banal sense of 'study of sources,' we prefer the term 'transposition' because it specifies that the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation of the thetic -- of enunciative and denotative personality." Revolution in Poetic Language, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 59.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 59.
that rule out relationships of influence tangential to, or simultaneous with, other influences. As a result, when confronted by a text from beyond these limits, such as Baillie's "Introductory Discourse" -- which predates Wordsworth's "Preface" by two years and advocates the use of common language and rustic themes in poetry and drama -- the Bloomian model requires the litmus test of influence to determine whether this work is itself worthy of study or of inclusion in the canon. The dialectic nature of The Anxiety of Influence ignores those textual relationships in which ideas may be adopted or echoed, wholly or partially, in a non-combative fashion, because it aims "to de-idealize our accepted accounts of how one poet helps to form another." But this de-idealization of literary tradition is purchased by narrowing of the textual field. Bloom presents his model as a "corrective" to those previous theories of poetic influence that are based upon a benign, cooperative relationship between poets. In turn, revisionist models of Romanticism that attempt to "correct" Bloom's exclusion of women, reconstruct the exclusivity and linearity of Bloom's genealogy in the form of an all-women's canon where cooperation is supposedly the norm. The persistence of Bloom's interpretive structures in feminist and revisionist studies of Romanticism, where they buttress the very ideals
that they were designed to dismantle, should convince us that any attempt to study the far-ranging intertextual relationships in Romanticism must replace the limiting structures of influence and linearity with a more expansive field of inquiry. The many "correctives" to Bloom's model preserve too much theoretical baggage, cluttering our critical vocabulary and obscuring our view of the textual field. Before moving on to the third methodological problem with Bloom's model, it will be helpful to look at some important attempts to correct his model in order to see how these attempts inadvertently reincorporate the two structural limitations just outlined.

The first major feminist critique of Bloom's methodology, as well as most of the critiques that follow, reaffirms the gender binaries produced by the ideology of the male Romantics and actually does more to strengthen the canonical position of Bloom's model than to displace it. Gilbert and Gubar begin their study of women writers in the nineteenth-century by admitting that their critical project is "based on the Bloomian premise that literary history consists of strong action and inevitable reaction." This is an enormous assumption, and they treat it as "a central fact of literary history." By adopting this interpretive paradigm, Gilbert and Gubar commit themselves to

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18 Gilbert and Gubar, xiii.
19 Ibid., 46.
reduplicating some of the same structural problems of Bloom's model, despite their awareness that his "male-oriented theory of the 'anxiety of influence' cannot be simply reversed or inverted in order to account for the situation of the woman writer."\(^{20}\) Caught in the structures of developmental linearity and embattled influence, Gilbert and Gubar retain and feminize Bloom's model by replacing the "anxiety of influence" with "an even more primary anxiety of authorship" [emphasis mine] characterized by a fear directed not toward female precursors but toward the patriarchal institutions that threaten women's writing. This shift of emphasis from the abstraction of "influence" to the subjectivity of the "author" re-emphasizes the role of the self in this model. Ironically, then, the feminist strategy for correcting a patriarchal interpretive model that valorizes the self in a self/other dialectic is to place even more emphasis on the subject position, while identifying it as female.

The operative parameters of Bloom's model are powerful, and once a critical discourse accepts them, it becomes impossible to avoid reduplicating the structural rigidity that constitutes the machinery of marginalization. Thus, in Gilbert and Gubar, the Bloomian dialectic remains intact and the exclusive relationships between male authored texts

\(^{20}\)Ibid., 48.
maintain their integrity, distinct from female-authored texts; since the "battle" of a woman writer "is not against her (male) precursor's reading of the world but against his reading of her, . . . she can begin such a struggle only by actively seeking a female precursor who, far from representing a threatening force to be denied or killed, proves by example that a revolt against patriarchal literary authority is possible." 21 By appropriating Bloom's model to express the relationship between women writers and patriarchy, Gilbert and Gubar do not provide a context in which to examine how the ideologies of male- and female-authored texts intersect, conflict with, and parallel each other. Instead, female-authored texts receive the dubious honor of being confined to their own newly-ordained canon, isolated from the canon of male writers.

More recent revisions of canonical Romanticism begin from a shared assumption: Romanticism is gendered, and it is gendered male. Marlon Ross begins his study of the "rise of women's poetry" in the Romantic Period with this understanding:

As critics have pointed out, romantic poets write from a position and a perspective that it would be impossible for a woman living during the time to take. This is not just because of the cultural stereotypes of gender roles during the period -- though such roles are crucial determinants -- but also because romanticism is historically a masculine phenomenon. 22

21 Ibid, 49.
Ross's use of the word "historically" is telling in this context; Romanticism is, in fact, historically a masculine phenomenon in the sense that our perception of it has been constructed as such through the historical development of a masculine critical discourse. Although cultural stereotypes of gender roles during the period did in fact discourage women from writing poetry -- which it defined as a male vocation -- this did not prevent them from writing more poetry than they had written during previous historical periods or from receiving an unprecedented amount of critical praise. The challenge we now face, as critics, is to explain this paradox. But the contemporary critical approaches developing in the wake of Anne Mellor's work only reifies the masculine paradigms of the Romantic period when they attempt to identify a "Feminine Romanticism" as a set of operations that are wholly distinct from, and opposed to, those of the male writers.

In the introduction to Romanticism and Gender, Mellor asks: "What difference does gender make to our understanding of British literary Romanticism? Does Romanticism have a gender?" The answer, for Mellor, is "yes;" Romanticism is masculine and, therefore, any discussion of women writers of the period must take place within the ideological context of

\footnote{Anne Mellor, Romanticism and Gender (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1.}
what she calls "Feminine Romanticism" in opposition to the "Masculine Romanticism" that has traditionally defined the critical discourse. She admits, however, that her dichotomy of masculine and feminine Romanticism is "deeply problematic," as well as "both theoretically dubious and critically confining," and she is also aware that her opposition of two separate canons for men and women dangerously reduplicates the pattern of what she describes as the masculine dialectic of self and nature. Her resulting catalogue of the "thematic concerns, formal practices, and ideological positionings of male and female Romantic writers," characterizes Romantic women writers as exhibiting a preference for domestic scenes instead of epic tales, a rootedness in reason and the pragmatic world as opposed to the lofty experiences of the emotions, and a sense of unity with nature that runs counter to the masculine desire to conquer and transcend a feminized landscape. As with Bloom's model, however, the major problem with Mellor's model is not only the specific limitations of its applicability (her admittedly reductive description of Feminine Romanticism excludes the works of many Romantic women poets) but the underlying methodological assumptions that structure her argument. These assumptions only further isolate the already-marginalized women writers of Romanticism and lead Mellor to duplicate the theoretical
moves in which Gilbert and Gubar recuperate Bloom's model through a substitution of terms.

Whereas Bloom's model looks to "anxiety" for the driving force behind male creativity, Mellor adopts Carol Gilligan's "ethic of care" as the impetus behind women's writing. Mellor argues that:

... the women writers of the Romantic period for the most part foreswore the concern of their male peers with the capacities of the creative imagination, with the limitations of language, with the possibility of transcendence or "unity of being," with the development of an autonomous self, with political (as opposed to social) revolution, with the role of creative writer as political leader or religious savior.\(^{24}\)

According to Mellor, women writers of the Romantic period "celebrate" the "rational mind" and adhere to an ethic that "insists on the primacy of family or the community and their attendant practical responsibilities."

They grounded their notion of community on a cooperative rather than possessive interaction with a Nature troped as a female friend or sister, and promoted a politics of gradual rather than violent social change, a social change that extends the values of domesticity into the public realm.\(^{25}\)

It is easy, however, to find examples of both men and women poets of the period who do not fit neatly into these categories. Charlotte Smith's sonnets were harshly criticized by Anna Seward, but were praised by Wordsworth and other male critics, many of whom complained only that her novels did not contain enough of her poetry. Joanna

\(^{24}\)Ibid., 2
\(^{25}\)Ibid., 3.
Baillie, meanwhile, found enthusiastic approval and advice in Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron, who were quick to condemn the otherwise bleak state of British drama at the time. On the thematic level, Smith's sonnets neither revere maternal duties nor embrace nature as a friend; in fact, her depictions of the destructive power of the natural world emphasize the violent dialectic of self and nature with as much intensity as do her male counterparts. And Tighe's poetry participates in the classical and philosophical traditions that Mellor sees as the domain of male writers.

Mellor's use of oppositional logic, to establish what is unavoidably an essentializing categorization of poetry into male and female spheres, substitutes one set of interpretive limitations for another. This is not to say that women writers do not share certain similar concerns or ideologies, but neither the male nor the female writers of the period can claim to participate in a unified aesthetic or ideological program based on gender. The apparent ideological unity of the male Romantic poets is a relatively recent construct of twentieth-century critics following M.H. Abrams and W.J. Bate, who reacted to the kind of fragmentation attributed to Romanticism by A.O. Lovejoy in the 1930s. Any attempt, therefore, to develop a parallel movement among women writers of the Romantic period can only succeed in duplicating an illusion.
This last observation returns us to the third methodological problem that must be taken into consideration in the search for an alternative to The Anxiety of Influence; Bloom's work fails to acknowledge its own historical construction as the product of the literary narrative that it simultaneously produces. Although he consciously positions his work within the literary tradition of misreading and rewriting that he describes, he does not account for the effects of either his precursors or of his own act of revisionism. As a result, Bloom effectively serves as the mouthpiece for a dominant, male, literary and critical discourse that exists within a larger discursive network and dictates the way it wants that entire network to be read. The fact that such canon-shaping models continue to adopt, as their interpretive criteria, the gender-biased perspectives of the male poets of the Romantic period is symptomatic of the crisis in Romantic studies that Jerome McGann has identified in The Romantic Ideology. In what has become one of the most important (as well as the most frequently quoted) assessments of contemporary Romantic criticism, McGann observes that "today the scholarship and interpretation of Romantic works is dominated by an uncritical absorption in Romanticism's own self-representations."26 Such approaches, McGann points out, only

perpetuate the ideologies that they examine, and maintain the illusion that they participate in the same literary tradition in which the Romantics wrote poetry. In fact, much Romantic criticism seems to want to make itself worthy of the same kind of approval that Wordsworth once bestowed upon John Wilson: "You have studied the poems and prove that you have entered into the spirit of them." As the kind of theoretical self-examination that McGann prescribes for this crisis in Romantic studies requires the radical self-positioning of the interpretive subject, and it exemplifies the critical methodology of the kind of New Historicism that should govern any interpretive approach to Romanticism that intends to avoid the pitfalls of Bloom's model and its successors.

As H. Aram Veeser points out, the term "New Historicism" covers a wide range of critical practices that often seem to conflict with one another. In the midst of this heterogeneity, I am most interested in appropriating the methodology that arises from the New Historicist assumptions that "every act of unmasking, critique, and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes," and that "a critical method and a language adequate to describe culture under capitalism

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participate in the economy they describe." Marjorie Levinson combines these two assumptions and calls for a rigorous, self-reflective methodology that critiques itself in the process of selecting and constructing the very literary texts that it purports to interpret. Such a critical discourse examines how its own interpretive paradigms are the product of the same textual readings that they themselves have generated. The circularity of this critical project productively disrupts the historical dialectic responsible for the illusory objectification of literary history and the codification of the literary canon as representative, not of subjective interests, but of supposedly empirical facts. Such a dialectical disruption is crucial for shifting resilient canon-shaping paradigms such as Bloom's. Levinson identifies the cause of this crisis in Romantic criticism as our failure, as critics, to recognize our complicity in the interpretive models that we critique and deploy.

We are the ones who, by putting the past to a certain use, put it in a certain order. While most of us know this, we seem not to consider that this interest of ours in a certain use might also be an effect of the past which we study, and that our mode of critical

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production could be related to that past as to the absent cause which our practice instantiates.30

Moving one step beyond McGann's critique of Romantic criticism's rootedness in Romantic ideology, Levinson makes a subtle but important point. Although we need to abandon the belief that, as critics of Romanticism, we are somehow part of the Romantic tradition, we can never sever ourselves entirely from the influence of the historical period we are studying. Thus, Levinson does not issue a naive call for increased objectivity; rather, she calls for an increased awareness of our historically constructed subjectivity as critics. To return to McGann's statement, the trouble with Romantic criticism today is not just that it appropriates Romantic paradigms, but that it does so un-critically.

McGann is not alone in his criticism of this careless perpetuation of Romantic ideology. In The Historicity of Romantic Discourse, Clifford Siskin also makes the claim that Romantic criticism bases its own evaluations on the terms dictated by the male Romantic poets and critics. He argues that

30Marjorie Levinson, Marilyn Butler, Jerome McGann, and Paul Hamilton, Rethinking Historicism (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 20-21. Levinson explains that New Historicism enables us to redefine our perception of Romanticism because this critical methodology "means conceiving the epochal distinctiveness of Romantic poetry not, chiefly, as a function of natural and therefore monolithic temporality, but as a result of determinate differences obtaining between the productive formations of the early nineteenth century and the late twentieth century, of the different ideological tasks defined by those formations, and finally, of the diverse kinds or levels of relatedness which those basic differences establish." 22
whenever we designate certain texts as literature or valorize that distinction in terms of creativity, imagination or expressiveness, or analyze those qualities as variables of individual development, we have joined Wordsworth in taking the "mind of Man" to be the "main haunt and region" of our "song." The traditional six-poet, 1798-1832 Romanticism of the anthologies and most criticism is itself a product of that haunting: a transformation of history into a short, and therefore sweet, developmental narrative."

The unstated goal of mainstream Romantic criticism, according to Siskin, is "to make Romantic sense of the canonized poems and the lives of the poets," and thus to reproduce the stated ideologies of those poets. He refuses to "psychologize" this problem of reification "as the fixation of individual critics," arguing instead that this is actually a "formal problem." The trouble does not rest with Romantic ideology, but rather with contemporary critical methodology. The Romantic critical discourse needs to dislocate itself from its canonical foundations; only in this way can it sever its empathic ties to the critical ideologies of six male writers and begin to examine the larger scope of the Romantic period.

The "un-critical absorption" of Romantic ideology is what empowers and perpetuates the Bloomian model, and the history of Romantic criticism offers numerous such examples

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32 Ibid., 8.
that support McGann's statement." In a passage that is itself a product of Romantic thinking, Paul de Man claims that, "from its inception, the history of romanticism has been one of battles, polemics, and misunderstandings: personal misunderstandings between the poets themselves; between the poets, critics, and the public; between successive generations. This is still the case." 

Illustrative of McGann's assessment, de Man smoothly moves from the history of the Romantic poets to the present discourse of literary criticism, conflating the apparently ubiquitous ideological struggles of the two. Despite the lack of cohesion within Romanticism, critics struggle to distill a unified vision (even if competition and anxiety are part of that vision) from among the disparate ideologies of its male poets. All too often, however, these critics view themselves as engaged in the same struggle to embody the universal ideals that they see espoused by the poetry.

The structural dominance of linearity and influence in traditional readings of Romanticism are closely related to literary concerns with origins and originality, creativity.

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3One of the most glaring examples of the way that this "uncritical absorption" in Romantic ideology blurs the line between Romantic criticism and Romanticism appears in Helen Vendler's advice for reading Keats's poetry. "I know no greater help to understanding a poem than writing it out in longhand with the illusion that one is composing it -- deciding on this word rather than another, this arrangement of its masses rather than another, this prolonging, this digression, this cluster of senses, this closure." The Odes of John Keats (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 1.

and self-creation, and the poet's transcendence of the self/nature dialectic through the kind of spiritual and intellectual experience of the sublime that Geoffrey Hartman describes. Not coincidentally, these are the literary concerns that Mellor, Ross, and others identify as the dominant traits of masculine Romanticism. Without the rigid structures of linearity and influence in place, however, we will be able to see the emergence of numerous other relationships between and among the texts written by both men and women in the Romantic period. The model that explains these emerging relationships, therefore, must account for discursive developments extending in potentially infinite directions. With respect to the three methodological problems inherent in the Anxiety of Influence, an interpretive methodology seeking to supplant the Bloomian model and the critical methodology it represents must likewise possess three qualities: 1) the ability to account for complex relationships between texts outside the limits of direct influence, 2) an openness to textual and ideological intersections on numerous discursive planes rather than along a single linear continuum, and 3) a critical self-reflexivity that requires the interpretive subject to remain aware of its own historical position, and thus its own participation in the literary-historical practices it describes.
The intertextual model I propose uses as its dominant image not a line but a complex root-like structure, a rhizome, that extends in multiple directions, mapping not only textual relationships (direct as well as tangential) but also the interpretive subject's involvement in the continuous development of the network. Recognizing the advantages of such a model, Peter de Bolla, Joseph Kittler, and Nancy K. Miller have developed similar intertextual models of literary history that try to maintain an open field of interpretation by structurally prioritizing discourse over ideology, but their interpretive approaches have either remained primarily in the realm of theory or have limited themselves to specific ideological concerns.35 In order to lend the model that I am describing a visual quality that will facilitate its applicability to the study of Romantic texts, I am borrowing the image of the rhizome from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari who, in A Thousand Plateaus, use the rhizome to map the tenuous relationships connecting a wide range of disciplines from psychology and sociology to economy and history. The botanical term "rhizome" designates a root-system whose subterranean stems extend horizontally, in multiple offshoots, sending leaf-

bearing stalks toward the surface and additional root systems deeper underground. Deleuze and Guattari expand this basic definition to develop an interpretive network of infinite expansion without beginning or end. The reciprocal relationships of this system distinguish it from linear systems that leave a traceable paths of origins, purposes, and conclusions:

Unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. . . . It is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overspills.

In the context of literary and historical studies, rhizomic textuality distinguishes itself from linear textuality, or what Deleuze and Guattari call the "root-book." It is the image of the root-book and its concern with origin and purpose that has dominated traditional literary criticism and encouraged the marginalization of texts that do not accord with critical perceptions of that origin and its purpose. In the study of a literary movement such as Romanticism, the rhizomic model allows us to shift our critical focus from a teleological search for an originary text or historical event to the ongoing, dynamic relationship between texts. If we were to trace a path

through a rhizomic network to find the supposed origin of a particular root system, we would eventually arrive at the site of multiple intersections where discourses can be said to be particularly dense. Such sites do not exist in and of themselves, but are the locus of intersection and are connected to other related sites that are part of the same discursive agglomeration.\(^3\) For example, we cannot designate specific dates marking the beginning and end of the Romantic movement without producing a series of qualifications for those dates, but we can identify an increase, or intensification of textual discourses engaging similar ideas, concerns, issues or themes that produce an agglomeration, without specific boundaries, that identify a particular “period” or “movement.” De Bolla refers to the discrete points where multiple discourses intersect as “nodes,” but I am using to term “agglomeration” to designate a group of such nodes, along with its surrounding

\(^3\)This traditional search for textual origins mimics the desire, in Saussurean semiotics, to identify the locus of meaning. However, in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* meaning begins to get conceptualized as an act rather than as an objectified origin, and in the post-structuralism of the rhizomic network, the closest thing to linguistic or textual origins are areas of activity that I call "densities," discursive communities where language usage becomes intensified. As Deleuze and Guattari explain it, "a semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistics, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive: there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialized languages. . . . Language stabilizes around a parish, a bishopric, a capital. It forms a bulb." Romanticism could be identified as one such ambiguous site of discursive intensification or density (Deleuze and Guattari, 7).
discourses, that make up what we usually refer to as an historical/ideological "period" or "movement."

Since the rhizomic network is a dynamic system that emphasizes development and motion, it defines an origin not as an object but as an act. Thus, the origin is a temporal concept, marking the site at which the act of origination is reabsorbed by the rhizomic network. To attempt to identify the origin of a discursive agglomeration -- such as Romanticism -- is to search for the discursive intersection of a number of textual events. Romanticism does not begin with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* or with the composition of Wordsworth's "Preface" any more than it does with Baillie's "Introductory Discourse," Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets*, or Tighe's *Ode to Psyche*. Such a discrete origin is a retrospective conceptualization, an aggregate ideal projected by the texts and ideologies to which it supposedly gave birth. In Romanticism this origin is almost always figured in heterosexual metaphors of conception and birth, and in models such as Bloom's it is posited retrospectively, as a source of anxiety that is implicitly affirmed in order to be explicitly denied.

This aspect of rhizomic model bears some similarity to what Joseph Kittler, in his study of Romantic women writers, calls a "discourse network," in which both the textual
object and interpretive subject are formed by the discursive exchanges, tensions, and intersections that remain fluid and dynamic through time. Kittler's system, however, maintains that Romanticism is discursively produced as masculine. According to David Wellbery, in Kittler's approach "Romanticism is the discursive production of the Mother as the source of discursive production" in which women are subsumed in "the prototype of the one Woman, the infinitely productive silence that is the . . . ideal recipient of male poetic speech" and "essentially a narcissistic prop for male identity formation." Although Kittler's discourse network gives an accurate description of the way in which Romantic male poets and critics define poetry as a male genre in which female self-expression is silenced, it does little to disrupt or challenge this position in any way, thus reduplicating the ideological position represented by the "anxiety of influence" in a different structural format. Kittler is content to describe the Romantic period as a network in which women served as Muse-like inspiration but were denied literary production:

The discourse that the mother in the discourse network of 1800 creates but cannot pronounce is called Poetry. Mother Nature is silent so that others can speak of and for her. She exists as the singular behind the plurality of discourses.  

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David Wellbery, "Foreword" to Joseph Kittler, Discourse Networks, xxii-xxiii.
Kittler, 25.
This may explain the silenced image of woman in the poetry of the male Romantics, but it does so by appropriating the masculine tropes of the period. It does not help us explain how so many women during the period became successful, and respected, poets themselves in spite of this cultural silencing. Women poets do not exist "behind the plurality of discourses," I argue, but within them as active participants.

The rhizomic model also bears some similarity to the intertextual network that Miller characterizes as a spider’s web in *Subject to Change*. Describing her interpretive approach as an “arachnology,” she explains that “the subject in this model is not fixed in time or space but suspended in a continual moment of fabrication” (79). But, like a spider’s web, Miller’s model implies that literary history radiates from a central point, a hidden origin that the critic can ostensibly bring to light, and this orientation returns us to some of the problems of linear models. In addition, her model is an exclusively feminist one, drawing its meaning from the myth of Arachne, the woman whose creativity was punished by the gods who turned her into a spider. While this theory has important limited applications, it doesn’t help to explain intertextual relationship extending across gender-lines.
What distinguishes the rhizomic model from these other models is that it does not project a specific interpretation upon the texts under examination. The rhizomic model is a model for a methodology, not for explication. It does not attempt to predict or dictate the ideological conclusions of an interpretation performed within the network. Where other models exclude and replace, the rhizome is an inclusive model, designed to help us organize a rapidly expanding field of inquiry that includes, among other objects of knowledge, the previous attempts at interpreting that field. The rhizome is, in this sense, an epistemological model.

The rhizome absorbs other interpretive models which have played (and continue to play) an important role in shaping the discursive character of the literary tradition. Here again, Deleuze and Guattari's description of the rhizome is helpful:

Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed, etc., as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees. There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of the rhizome. These lines always tie back to one another. 40

Bloom's model, despite its gender-blind paradigms and strict adherence to canonical texts, is a part of literary history, a line of segmentarity within the rhizomic network. It is one interpretive system within an infinitely larger field.

40Deleuze and Guattari, 9.
The multiple entryways of this system acknowledge that even seemingly incompatible models such as Bloom's are already a part of the critical field that the rhizomic network attempts to map. As Deleuze and Guattari observe, in the development of this system "one will be forced to take dead ends, to work with signifying powers and subjective affectations, to find a foothold in formations that are Oedipal or paranoid or even worse, rigidified territories that open the way for other transformational operations."41 This assertion allows Deleuze and Guattari to make the seemingly paradoxical claim that "there exist tree or root structures in rhizomes; conversely, a tree branch or root division may begin to burgeon into a rhizome."42 The inclusivity of this systems prevents its own interpretive agenda from blinding it to other textual relationships; thus the network includes even those structures to which it is structurally and ideologically opposed. For all of its shortcomings, we cannot simply ignore or reject Bloom's model because of its importance to our understanding of the critical tradition it has come to represent. To borrow de Man's well-known metaphor, it is from the blindness of systems such as Bloom's that we derive the insight that enables us to view the interpretive problems at hand.

41Ibid., 14.
42Ibid., 15.
The final challenge that this new model must face is the necessity of avoiding the kind of uncritical self-absorption in the paradigms of Romanticism, or of any other critical orientation, that would predetermine the interpretive conclusions and subsequently limit this model's applicability to the infinite expanse of textual relationships. Since the ideological neutrality that such an approach seems to require is, in practice, impossible, the solution is the radical self-awareness prescribed by New Historicism methodology discussed earlier. As Levinson and McGann point out, it is through a reciprocal signification that criticism attempts to represent the meaning of literary texts and this meaning both shapes, and is shaped by this critical representation. Criticism thus produces its own meaning, and the two are locked in a triadic relationship with the textual object under interpretation. In order to bring my argument out of the realm of the purely theoretical and into the realm of practice, I want, once again, to turn to the work of another theorist to provide us with a visual image. Charles Peirce's triadic model of the sign is an engagingly appropriate schematic upon which to trace the reciprocal encounter between reader, text, and interpretation that takes place within the rhizomic network.

The structural self-reflexivity of Peirce's semiotic model offers a visible map of critical self-analysis that
facilitates the New Historicist project of tracing the relationship of reciprocal influence between the interpretive subject and its textual object. Peirce's model provides a third position to account for this reciprocity: the Interpretant. For Peirce, the interpretant is the "mental" sign, the interpretation of the sign's representation of the signified object; in our rhizomic model, the interpretant represents the critical discourse in its relationship to the text and the ideologies represented by that text. Peirce's model transcends the theoretical binarism of motivated and unmotivated vocabularies to suggest that the signified object is itself shaped and influenced by its sign through the cognitive process of interpretation and, in the context of the rhizomic model, the interpretant represents the interpretive discourse, which itself constitutes a secondary object of critical study.43 This structure graphically represents Levinson's theoretical assertion that interpretive paradigms shape the literary history that they narrativize through the act of

43 "A sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object. . . . A Sign, or Representamen, is a First which stands in such a genuine triadic relation to a Second, called its Object, as to be capable of determining a Third, called its Interpretant, to assume the same triadic relation to its Object in which it stands itself to the same Object. The triadic relation is genuine, that is its three members are bound together by it in a way that does not consist in any complexus of dyadic relations." Charles Sanders Peirce, Philosophical Writings of Peirce, ed. Justus Buchler (New York: Dover, 1955), 99-100.
interpretation itself. The apparent contradiction generated by merging the closed triadic structure of Peirce's Semiotic model with the principle of unbounded proliferation in Deleuze's rhizomic theory actually represents the strength of this model. If the unbounded rhizomic network of infinite inter-relationships represents the field of potential critical inquiry, then the closed triadic structure represents the reciprocal interpretive relationship between subject and object at each of the multiple sites of intersection within this matrix. The closed structure makes coherent literary historicizing possible, while its unlimited reciprocity keeps it open to the infinite proliferation of textual events. Merging Peirce's structural triad with Deleuze's rhizomic principle offers Romantic criticism a tangible model with which to supplant Bloom's model of influence and dissolve the discursive line dividing the Romantic women poets from the canonical male poets.

The fully-conceptualized rhizomic model is a dynamic, expansive network of literary and critical discourses. Extending from multiple sites of origin, whose temporal and spatial distinctions are reabsorbed in the act of origination, lines of discourse extend in a potentially infinite number of directions. By tracing these discursive paths, we can map and identify literary movements, or
periods, at those areas of discursive density where the
tlines of discourse intersect and intertwine with a greater
intensity than at other places. Since, in this semiotic
system, meaning derives from usage, it is at such places
that signification realizes its highest potential. Critical
approaches to such sites are linked to this process of
signification in a Peircean triad, such that the meaning
produced by an interpretation shapes the perception of the
literary Object, which in turn shapes both the
interpretation and the critical method, in a perpetually
reciprocal process. As we have seen, many interpretive
methodologies commit the error of conflating their own
"interpretant" with what I have defined as the area of
discursive density; this is what happens when a critical
discourse objectifies its own interpretations.

Interpretive systems fixated upon linearity attempt to
assemble a single line of discourse by pruning away the
other intersecting discourses in order to create the
illusion the remaining segments represent, and actually
developed as, a single uninterrupted line. Most revisionist
approaches to Romanticism make the mistake of presuming the
integrity and unity of this line; this leads them either to
graft marginalized texts to this main branch, or to
transplant these texts as an entirely separate, and equally
illusory, line of their own. However, instead of creating a
space for women poets within the rigid genealogy of the male-dominated canon, a rhizomic model of literary criticism unearths the complex root systems through which these poets are already directly and indirectly connected. This model avoids the danger of assimilating women writers of the Romantic period into the canon by forcing them into the reductive positions of obscure literary influences or marginalized voices of resistance. Among the many reasons for re-structuring the interpretive methodologies and re-evaluating the paradigms of contemporary Romantic criticism, one of the most convincing arguments, I think, is concisely offered by Marilyn Butler: "perhaps the best of all reasons for shedding preconceptions about Romanticism is not the point of principle -- that they may be untrue -- but the point of pragmatism -- that they interfere with so much good reading."\footnote{Marilyn Butler, \textit{Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 187.}
CHAPTER 2

THE MATERIAL SUBLIME: TRANSCENDENCE, SUPPRESSION, AND GENDER IN ROMANTIC POETRY

Language abounds with too many Inaccuracies . . . and hence arises the most Difficulty in adjusting and defining the proper Limits to many Things. . . . I know how often the Word Sublime is improperly used.

John Baillie, An Essay on the Sublime (1747)

[I] observed that the ideas of the sublime and Beautiful were frequently confounded; and that both were indiscriminately applied to things greatly differing, and sometimes of natures directly opposite.

Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757)

Those who talk rationally on other subjects, no sooner touch on [the sublime], than they go off in a literary delirium; fancy themselves, like Longinus, "the great sublime they draw," and rave like methodists, of inward lights, and enthusiastic emotions, which, if you cannot comprehend, you are set down as un-illumined by the grace of criticism, and excluded from the elect of Taste.

Martin Shee, Elements of Art (1809)

Any attempt to understand the complex position of women poets in the rhizomic network of British Romanticism must take into account the gendered tropes of the sublime which circumscribe the aesthetic possibilities of female authorship in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Historically, the aesthetic discourse of sublimity is articulated through an idiom of teleological belatedness in which critics assume that the ambiguous applications to which their contemporaries put the term "sublime" necessitate the recovery of the sublime's original signification. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed a myriad of essays and inquiries (by such theorists as John Dennis, Joseph Addison, Edmund Burke,
Alexander Gerard, Archibald Alison, Richard Payne Knight, Lord Kames, and Immanuel Kant) that attempted to reformulate and refine Boileau's seventeenth-century translation of Longinus. Consistent among these redefinitions, however, is a set of rhetorical maneuvers concurrently establishing the sublime as a tropological and phenomenological index of masculinity while representing female experiences and articulations of sublimity as "unnatural." The discourses of the sublime and of Romanticism intersect at numerous sites, but canonical criticism privileges only those sites at which poetic expressions of sublimity reinforce the mythic identity of the self-begotten male poet and his ability, as Thomas Weiskel puts it, "transcend the human";¹ twentieth-century accounts of Romanticism have linked these sites to form a linear, progressive narrative in which the sublime reaches its theoretical apex in Wordsworth. In this developmental narrative, the Mount Snowdon passage from Book XIII of The Prelude (1805) has come to represent, for canonical Romantic criticism, the quintessentially sublime

¹Weiskel's definition of the sublime is indicative of the twentieth-century preoccupation with the psychological discourse of transcendence in Romanticism. According to Weiskel, "the essential claim of the sublime is that man can, in feeling and in speech, transcend the human." Thomas Weiskel, The Romantic Sublime (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 1.
response of the human imagination to the overwhelming power of nature.  

What, however, do we make of the ambivalent, or even negative, responses to nature's power that appear in such poems as Dorothy Wordsworth's "The Floating Island"? Her account of a slip of land that has broken away from the shoreline at Hawkshead solemnly recognizes the destructive processes of nature, which "though we mark her not, / Will take away -- may cease to give" (19-20), and the poem predicts that this island, "a peopled world . . . in size a tiny room" (16), is fated to be "buried beneath the glittering Lake! / Its place no longer found" (25-26). In contrast to William's conviction that "Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her," Dorothy's own experience teaches her that the organic physicality of the natural world, in which "Harmonious Powers with Nature work / On sky, earth, river, lake, and sea" (1-2), necessitates random acts of destruction in order "to fertilize some other ground" (28). This seemingly subversive manipulation of those same Romantic tropes that usually lead to

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2 Canonical criticism has, for the most part, accepted Wordsworth's claim for the universality of the transcendental sublime, despite the fact that such an experience is explicitly off-limits to women. Not only is this supposed universality compromised by gender but by class as well; Lucinda Cole and Richard Swartz argue that "Wordsworth represents aesthetic competency as a universal possibility available to all, but only by obscuring the concrete, socially conditioned forms of dispossession that such an aesthetic education necessarily implies." "Why Should I Wish for Words?" At the Limits of Romanticism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 144.
articulations of transcendence, in male-authored poems, represents a technique employed in much of the women's poetry throughout the Romantic period, but to categorize this technique as an ideology of subversion is to oversimplify the complex epistemology that defines a large number of Romantic women writers and their texts.

In many of her sonnets, for example, Charlotte Smith appropriates the popular eighteenth-century images of threatening tempests, rough seas, and eerie moonlit nights, but her sublime encounters with the natural world consistently forestall her textual progression toward an articulation of transcendence. Smith repeatedly expresses a desire to embrace the destructive forces that, when kept at a distance as specified by Burke and Kant, produce the elevation of spirit and expansion of imagination indicative of transcendental sublimity; however, in "Written in the church-yard at Middleton in Sussex," Smith remains rooted in the physical world, envying the dead bodies torn from their graves by a violent storm because "They hear the warring elements no more: / While I am doom'd -- by life's long storm opprest, / To gaze with envy on their gloomy rest" (12-14). In a similar manner, Mary Tighe also makes use of Romantic nature imagery to underscore her own distantiation from transcendental sublimity, when she despairs, in "Written at Scarborough," that ocean waves may change and
pass, "but I, like worn sand, exposed remain / To each new storm which frets the angry main" (13-14). And in a more direct complaint about the unattainability of the sublime, Joanna Baillie laments, in "An Address to the Muses," that "Whene'er I aim at heights sublime, / Still downward am I call'd to seek some stubborn rhyme" (71-72). How are these accounts of the overwhelming power of Nature, and of the material concerns that pull an author down from "higher" aesthetic experiences, related to the discourse of the sublime, and how can we distinguish between the canonical sublime of Romanticism and other discourses of sublimity circulating during the Romantic period?

Romantic criticism, dominated by the linear interpretive structure described in the previous chapter, has traditionally viewed "other" rhetorical accounts of sublimity as disarticulations, lesser offshoots from the main branch of an aesthetic discourse that flowers in its transcendental formulations.³ In a rhizomic model of intertextuality, however, we can see how numerous treatments of the sublime developed concurrently, intertwining with historical, political, social, and economic discourses, to produce the gendered tropes that women Romantic writers

³Weiskel claims that a "mingling of excitement and danger" characterizes the "sublime poem in general as well as its bastard scion, the gothic sort of writing" (112), and this hierarchic distinction is indicative of the critical tradition that prioritizes the transcendental sublime over its many "lesser" offshoots.
often appropriate in their poetry and incorporate into their perceptions of themselves as poets.

The nascent dichotomy in late-eighteenth-century aesthetics that proves troublesome for women writers involves the opposition between a "material" and a "transcendental" sublime. The transcendental sublime in British Romanticism demarcates an exclusively masculine realm of discourse, in which the poet, through the sudden expansion of his imagination, responds to the overwhelming power of the natural world by crediting himself with momentarily overspilling the finitude of his own corporeal existence. At the height of the sublime experience, the poet is supposed to touch the infinite, or what the Jena Romantics called the "Absolute," but the success of this transcendental moment, I argue, is predicated upon the unacknowledged suppression of the material world and its physical limitations. Formulations of the sublime have historically excluded the feminine, and, in turn, the transcendental sublime of Romanticism associates the figure of woman with physical limitation, troping her as the "embodiment" of the "body," in order to advance a masculine discourse of sublimity that can claim a physically unencumbered access to the infinite. However, the concurrent suppression of both the material world and the

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feminine body has been overshadowed, in aesthetic theories of the nineteenth as well as the twentieth centuries, by the sublime's psychological formulations, which emphasize the supposed universality of transcendence at the expense of recognizing what the discursive constructions of the sublime specifically exclude. If the rhetorical success of the transcendental sublime is dependent upon the suppression of encroaching material forces in Romantic texts, then what we can call the "material sublime" denotes those moments either when the physical world announces itself within the textual gesture toward transcendence, effectively disrupting the act of suppression, or when the text itself foregrounds the materiality upon which the sublime experience is based.\(^5\)

In Romantic poetry by women, the material sublime takes many forms, most often beginning, like the transcendental sublime, as an encounter with something terrible, overwhelming, or awe-inspiring in nature. However, at the point of semantic saturation which leads beyond

\(^5\)I am using "material" not only in its most comprehensive New Historicist and Marxist senses -- to encompass the historical, political, and economic forces that shape poetic texts as they respond to the quotidlan concerns of nineteenth-century England -- but also to refer to the spatial and temporal limitations of the human body, and especially to those signifiers that draw attention to the body's physical needs and desires. As I believe the Romantics perceived it, materiality functions as an uncomfortable reminder to the theorizing self that it is the product of social and historical forces, that its survival and quality of life are dependent upon economic and sexual mechanisms, and that, as a mortal being, its ultimate physical end is death. The discursively masculine quest for transcendence, therefore, can only sustain the illusion of passing beyond the physical by suppressing its material signifiers.
signification to transcendent understanding, the material sublime is marked by a turn toward the physical world.6 As we have briefly seen, this turn can manifest itself as Smith's desire for physical-annihilation, or as Tighe's frustrated attempts to rise above her suffering. In Baillie, the material sublime most often takes the form of an expansion of sympathy resulting from the compassionate observation of another person's physical torture. Among women writers of the Romantic period, the foregrounding of materiality in articulations of the sublime represents not only the textual incorporation of the culturally inscribed codes of female bodiliness, but also the rhetorical means by which these writers accessed the proscribed aesthetic discourse of Romanticism.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is threefold. First, I intend to show that the transcendental sublime -- that is, the subjective, psychologized aesthetic belief in the possibility of individual transcendence -- is only one version of the sublime that was popular among the its eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theorists and literary practitioners. All versions of the sublime share a common foundation in the self's encounter with the material world, and by identifying this suppressed material basis we can

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identify analogously the discursive suppression of women in the aesthetics of transcendental sublimity. Second, by mapping the pervasive sexual and reproductive metaphors that link the sublime to the discursive containment and suppression of the female body, we can begin to understand how the figurative construction of women as signifiers of materiality effected the cultural exclusion of Romantic women writers from commercial engagement with the aesthetics of literary sublimity. The causal forces at work here are neither temporal nor linear, but rely upon the intersection of a number of forces: economic, political, and historical, as well as aesthetic. Thus, I am arguing that the exclusion of women from the discourse of the sublime is both the product of masculine anxieties in the Romantic period, and an inherited perspective embedded in the discourse of Western aesthetics. Third, and most importantly, in formulating the concept of the material sublime, I argue in this chapter that many women writers of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries participated in the Romantic pursuit of the infinite by internalizing the cultural prohibitions against female transcendence and intensifying their poetic accounts of the material world.' In doing so, they achieved a kind of transcendence of the self-other dialectic by dissolving the boundaries of self and object.

For a more detailed account of this process of aesthetic internalization, see Linda Cole and Richard Swartz.
This approach aligns many of the women poets of the period with definitions of the sublime that focus on the kinds of pleasure derived from facing unavoidable pain, rather than those produced by escaping physical suffering.\(^6\)

I must stress that I am not making the essentialist claims that women writers are incapable of, uninterested in, or ethically opposed to the psychology of transcendence or to the phenomenological realm that it demarcates;\(^7\) such assertions are not only beyond the scope of my argument, but they also exacerbate the problems posed by psychoanalytic criticism of the sublime. To put it simply, whether or not men and women can actually experience something called the "sublime" when they look at a mountain or an approaching storm is a question for psychoanalysis and points to a highly subjective and affective inquiry that is distinct from understanding the sublime as a critical term in Romantic aesthetics. This chapter historicizes the term "sublime" as an aesthetic category and deals with its psychological implications only insofar as they intersect,

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\(^6\)Most feminist criticism distinguishes male Romantics by their ability to transcend the quotidian and female Romantics by their concern with it. In particular, see Stuart Curran, "The 'I' Altered" in Anne Mellor, ed. Romanticism and Feminism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 185-207.

\(^7\)This is the central argument in Mellor's formulation of the "domestic" sublime, in which women emerge as the more socially responsible group of writers because of their attention to the real world and its moral and ethical concerns. In Mellor's terms, the transcendent, or "masculine" sublime is bound up with an irresponsible reluctance to face the material implications of the pursuit of such Romantic ideals as free love, spontaneous response to emotion, and political rebellion.
textually, with aesthetic criticism.\textsuperscript{10} Keeping in mind Weiskel's problematic claim that "any aesthetic, pressed beyond a certain point, becomes or implies a psychology," I want to retrace our steps to the point in our critical discourse before which "the sublime makes every man his own psychologist."\textsuperscript{11}

Before tracing the gendered development of the sublime, however, we should first briefly glance at the psychoanalytic criticism indicative of current approaches to it. In the tradition of Bate, Abrams, Bloom, and Hartman, Weiskel's work on the sublime remains the epitome of the dominant psychoanalytic views of sublimity that have interfered with its efficacy as a critical concept.\textsuperscript{12} His approach blends Freudian psychoanalysis with Saussurean semiotics in order to analogize the experience that the mind

\textsuperscript{10}Throughout its critical history as an aesthetic category, the status of the sublime has remained contingent upon the intervention of a subject, but what confuses the various formulations of sublimity is the substantive use of "the sublime" as a signifier for an independent noumenal entity. In such abstract formulations, ambiguity masquerades as universality and obscures the explicitly gendered history of the sublime and its rootedness in sexual and reproductive anxieties.

\textsuperscript{11}Weiskel, 83.

\textsuperscript{12}Weiskel's book is passionate and sincere, and in many ways it brings to the study of literature what much criticism too quickly dismisses: an openly stated emotional and ethical commitment to giving meaning to life through the production and study of literary texts. The major problem with works such as Weiskel's, however, is that they cloud historical issues by foregrounding spiritual beliefs and personal intuitions that make such theories as the sublime even more inaccessible. Our necessarily mediated understanding of what the Romantics thought and wrote about the sublime must be kept separate from whatever subjective opinions (if any) we may have with regards to nature, psychology, and the possibility of transcendence. I am actually sympathetic with Weiskel's desire to understand the human capacity to comprehend the infinite, but such an understanding is not a necessary corollary to understanding the connotative and denotative functions of the sublime as an aesthetic concept in the Romantic period.
undergoes, in the sublime moment, to a breakdown in the relationship between the signifier and the signified. Although Weiskel claims that he wants to "deidealize" the sublime from its basis in Kantian aesthetics, his strategy is not aimed at bringing our conception of sublimity closer to its material foundations; rather it is motivated by a desire to re-universalize the sublime for contemporary aesthetics on a basis other than nineteenth-century idealism, since "transcendental idealism of one kind or another no longer seems as inevitable for aesthetics as it once did." In the kind of "uncritical absorption in Romanticism's own self-representations" that McGann has identified as a problem of contemporary Romantic critics, Weiskel continues in the tradition of the male Romantics by trying to find a definition of the sublime that is itself sublime; he dismisses idealism, but only after he has established that "the challenge is to find the structure that is immanent in a vast and eclectic theory and practice in the conviction, not here to be disguised or much argued, that the structure still undergirds our imaginative intellelection." Following out this agenda, Weiskel

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13 McGann, 137.
14 Weiskel, 5. The success with which Weiskel places himself within the Romantic tradition can be seen in Harold Bloom's assessment in the Foreword to The Romantic Sublime (echoing Pope's famous praise of Longinus) that "Weiskel, as a critic, ultimately was in the tradition of Longinus rather than Aristotle, which is to say that Weiskel was not a formalist, but was himself a sublime critic. ... Transcendence of the human, in feeling, is a universal experience (or illusion) and itself transcends most modes of utterance," vii.
reformulates the Kantian sublime into a three-phase process beginning in 1) a static phase of order and agreement between object and mind, which is disrupted by 2) a breakdown brought on by excess, leading to 3) a reactive stage or the sublime moment, in which "the very indeterminacy which erupted in phase two is taken as symbolizing the mind's relation to a transcendent order."\textsuperscript{15} Upon this structure, the sublime unfolds to reveal Oedipal desires that represent the poet's need to create, or father, the self. As a result, Weiskel projects the exclusively masculine desires inherent in Bloom's model of literary influence back upon the Romantic pursuit of the sublime and aligns these desires with the poet’s individual quest for a self-created poetic identity.

Neil Hertz continues Weiskel's psychoanalytic-semiotic line of thinking with a more Lacanian and deconstructive turn that places Oedipal desire, and its figurative relationship to the disintegration of language, at the center of the sublime. For Hertz, sublimity is the cumulative effect of signifiers which produce the "sublime turn" through the "movement of disintegration and figurative reconstitution." Although Weiskel and Hertz examine how the discourse of sublimity intersects figuratively with Freudian and Lacanian sexual anxieties, their psychoanalytic

\textsuperscript{15}Weiskel, 23.
approaches work backwards, analyzing Romantic texts in the assumption that sublimity itself is a universalizable category of experience, independent of its discursive construction.\textsuperscript{16} Psychoanalytic criticism tends to examine the sublime from the perspective of subjects undergoing the experience of sublimity, and it ignores the fact that the discourse of the sublime assumes these subjects to be male; furthermore, it neither investigates the possibility that sexual and reproductive forces drive and shape the conceptualization of the sublime, nor does it examine the discursive effects of this conceptualization upon the cultural and historical perceptions of gender.

In what are usually considered the major documents of the sublime for Romanticism, Burke's \textit{A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful} (1757) and Kant's \textit{Critique of Judgment} (1799), the discursive containment and usurpation of female sexuality generates both an aesthetic concept that guarantees the rhetorical viability of masculine transcendence and an ethical standard that ensures the propagation of human

\textsuperscript{16}In his study of Burke's aesthetics, Tom Furniss establishes important guidelines for his investigation that I would like to adopt for my own methodology: "I want to abandon the suggestion that eighteenth-century discussions of the sublime represent early attempts to account for a human condition which Freud has finally allowed us to theorize properly. Instead I am considering Burke's theorizing of the sublime in the \textit{Enquiry} as a discursive construct whose point of reference is not an ahistorical experience but a set of discursive issues which are particular to the eighteenth-century." Tom Furniss, \textit{Edmund Burke's Aesthetic Ideology} (London: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 23.
society. Burke's formulation of the sublime is almost as far removed, in its theoretical orientation, from the transcendental sublime of Wordsworth as it is from the rhetorical sublime of Longinus, but Burke codifies the sexual tensions implicit in preceding theories of sublimity in three specific ways, and this codification survives in Romantic aesthetics. The logical structure of his argument relies upon a series of basic oppositions which characterize the sublime, from Burke onward, as a Foucauldian discourse of power. In Wordsworth as well, the discourse of sublimity effectively marks the relationships of power that obtain between such oppositions as self and other, imagination and nature, the terrible and the beautiful, and male and female.

First, Burke introduces self-preservation and sexual reproduction as the two most important duties of mankind, and he spins out his aesthetic doctrine with respect to the ethical responsibilities implied by these duties. Second, he sets up the sublime in opposition to the beautiful. Whereas previous theorists saw the beautiful as a lesser aesthetic quality than sublimity, a pleasing way station

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17Tom Furniss and Frances Ferguson point out that deconstructive approaches to the sublime have largely overlooked the fact that the strength of Burke's definition derives completely upon the sublime being diametrically opposed to the beautiful; however, neither Furniss nor Ferguson acknowledge that such an oppositional structure undergirds Burke's entire system. For Ferguson's argument, see Solitude and the Sublime (New York: Routledge, 1992).
that one may pass through on the way to overwhelming astonishment or delightful terror, in Burke's treatise the powerful hold that the beautiful exerts over the senses interferes with the mind's ability to achieve the disinterestedness required for a sublime experience.18 Third, it is in Burke that what I have been calling the "suppression" of materiality appears under the rubric of "distance"; according to Burke, the subject must place a safe distance between himself and the material object of terror if an experience of sublimity is to be possible. The first two points of Burke's argument enable him to figure women and beauty as the material signifiers of the physical world, in opposition to the male imagination which, as the third point insists, distances itself not only from the distracting physicality of female beauty, but from the material threats that initiate the experiences of the sublime. Although transcendence is not yet an explicit attribute of the sublime in Burke's formulation, the prerequisite distancing from the material component of sublimity establishes the basis upon which Romantic transcendence creates the illusion of escaping the limitations of corporeality.

18 Critics usually view Burke as an empiricist who bases his aesthetics on his own sense impressions and tests his theories against the physical attributes of objects. But the emphasis he places on the obscurity and uncertainty that give rise to the sublime, coupled with the threat posed by physical beauty, shows Burke's resistance, on one level, to the empirical aesthetics of Locke and Hume, and this
Burke begins his formulation of the sublime by considering its effects on the passions, which exist only for the purpose of furthering the goals of society." He specifies that the "passions belonging to the preservation of the individual, turn wholly on pain and danger; those which belong to generation, have their origin in gratifications and pleasures," (40) and he declares that pain and danger "are the most powerful of all the passions" because they produce the sublime experience necessary for motivating men to pursue their own self-preservation. "The generation of mankind is a great purpose," argues Burke, and it "is therefore attended with a very high pleasure" (41). Burke assumes that it is the duty of men to promote civilization through public accomplishments, and that it is the responsibility of women to attend to domestic duties. Whatever threatens to interfere with the fulfillment of the former duty is considered a source of the sublime, and whatever expedites the accomplishment of the latter is typically considered beautiful. Burke's Enquiry serves not only as an aesthetic explication but also as a reaffirmation

fundamental break provides a basis for the transcendentalism of later theories of the sublime.

19"Most of the ideas which are capable of making a powerful impression on the mind, whether simply Pain or Pleasure, or of the modifications of those, may be reduced very nearly to these two heads, self-preservation and society; to the ends of one or the other of which all our passions are calculated to answer." Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 38. All subsequent references to Burke's essay refer to this text and will be cited parenthetically.
of the social order, with regard to both patriarchy and class hegemony, and it reflects the political and economic forces that shape aesthetic formulations of the sublime as well. According to Tom Furniss, the labor that the sublime provides for the soul was a necessary concept to the ascendant bourgeois class which, having lifted itself from the physical labors of the lower classes, risked lapsing into the decadent lethargy of the aristocracy. For the middle classes, the agitation provided by the terrifying experience of sublimity replaces the physical exertions that keep the lower classes healthy and pure in body and spirit. The aristocracy, on the other hand, is characterized by its self-indulgent obsession with the beautiful, and expresses no such interest in the self-improving agitations of sublimity. Burke insists that it is labor that is the "best remedy" for all of the mental illnesses that result

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31 Lord Kames's dedication to King George III makes the connection between economic forces and the cultural mission of aesthetics more readily apparent: "To promote the Fine Arts in Britain, has become of greater importance than is generally imagined. A flourishing commerce begets opulence; and opulence, inflaming our appetite for pleasure, is commonly vented on luxury, and on every sensual gratification: selfishness rears its head; becomes fashionable; and, infecting all ranks, extinguishes the amor patriae, and every spark of public spirit. To prevent or to retard such fatal corruption, the genius of an Alfred cannot devise any means more efficacious, than the venting opulence of the Fine Arts: riches so employed, instead of encouraging vice, will excite both public and private virtue. Of this happy effect, ancient Greece furnishes a shining instance; and why should we despair of another in Britain?" *Elements of Criticism* (Philadelphia: Carey, 1761) i.
from a "relaxed state of body," including "melancholy, dejection, despair, and often self-murder," (135) but he explicitly warns that, in contrast to the labor exacted by the sublime, the "very high pleasure" of sexual intercourse is "by no means designed to be our constant business," and therefore this pleasure, in contrast to the delight produced by the sublime, is short lived. Thus, the suppression of the material, in Burke, is accompanied by an unwavering denial of physical desires as well.

The beautiful serves several purposes for Burke: it demarcates the limits of the sublime, safeguards procreation within a civilized social order by transforming lust into love, distinguishes feminine from male characteristics, and serves as the material sign of female submissiveness.

By beauty I mean, that quality or those qualities in bodies [emphasis mine] by which they cause love, or some passion similar to it. ... I likewise distinguish love ... from desire or lust ... We shall have a strong desire for a woman of no remarkable beauty; whilst the greatest beauty in men, or in other animals, though it causes love, yet excites nothing at all of desire. (91)

Beauty, however, is also the sign of weakness inscribed on women's bodies: "so far is perfection considered as such, from being the cause of beauty, that this quality, where it is highest in the female sex, almost always carries with it an idea of weakness and imperfection" (110). Whereas the strong passions of the sublime enable masculine self-preservation, women can effect their own self-preservation
only by relying upon masculine sublimity. It is by means of their submissiveness that they render themselves beautiful, and it is their beauty which ensures the fidelity of their husbands.

Burke's underlying anxiety over grounding his aesthetic discourse in physical desire comes to the surface as he develops a more intensely misogynist response to female beauty and its power over the masculine senses.

Observe that part of a beautiful woman where she is perhaps the most beautiful, about the neck and breasts; the smoothness; the softness; the easy and insensible swell; the variety of the surface, which is never for the smallest space the same; the deceitful maze through which the unsteady eye slides giddily, without knowing where to fix or whither it is carried. (115).

[emphasis mine]

In this objectification of the female body, Burke demonizes feminine beauty as a mechanism of deceit, and he blames it for the failure of the male eye to remain steady or focused in its presence. The beauty of the female body transfigures woman into a serious threat to male self-preservation because it is feminine beauty that disrupts the disinterestedness required by the sublime. However, in order to make sure that the disruptive capability that Burke attributes to female beauty does not bestow too much power upon women, he insists: "the beauty of women is considerably owing to their weakness, or delicacy, and is seen enhanced by their timidity, a quality of mind analogous to it" (116).
These heterosexist and misogynist views are not singular to Burke, but are part of a historically gendered aesthetic which reflects and spills over into its social and cultural context. I say this not to defend Burke, but to remind us of the embeddedness of these views in the evolving discourse of the sublime. A half-century before Burke, John Dennis set out to "restore Poetry to all its Greatness, and to all its Innocence."\textsuperscript{22} Credited with being the first Englishman to focus specifically on the subjective, emotional aspect of the sublime, Dennis insists that passion is the defining aspect of the sublime, and his brief definition looks to a violently charged sexual metaphor to express the effects of the passion:

\begin{quote}
it gives a noble Vigour to Discourse, an invincible force which commits a pleasing Rape upon the very soul of the Reader; that whenever it breaks out where it ought to do, like the artillery of Jove, it Thunders, blazing and strikes at once, and shews all the united force of a Writer.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

In Dennis, the misogyny inherent in the sublime manifests itself as an intense desire to purge the masculine of its feminine qualities, to erase the traditional tropes of man's effeminate intellect. The paradoxical claim that the sublime \textit{rapes} the consequently effeminized soul of the male reader (since women, of course, are incapable of achieving

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{22}John Dennis, \textit{The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry} (1704) 1.
\textsuperscript{23}Dennis, 79.
\end{footnotes}
the sublime) is a complex issue that we will return to in a moment.

The discursive containment and disempowerment of women that undergirds the rhetoric of the sublime extends back beyond Dennis to Longinus. Following out his pedagogical aim to set up guidelines for producing "great writing" that moves the passions of its audience, Longinus encourages his readers to imitate the writers of earlier generations, and his description of the original inspiration of sublime writing provides Western aesthetics with its root metaphor for poetic creation.

For hence it is, that numbers of Imitations are ravished and transported by a spirit not their own, like the Pythian Priestess, when she approaches the sacred Tripod. There is, if Fame speaks true, a Chasm in the Earth, from whence exhale divine Evaporations, which impregnate her on a sudden with the Inspiration of her God, and cause in her the Utterance of Oracles and Predictions. So from the sublime Spirit of the Ancients there arise some fine Effluvia, like Vapours from the sacred Vents, which work themselves insensibly into the Breasts of Imitators, and fill those, who naturally are not of a tow'ring Genius, with the lofty Ideas and Fire of others.²⁴

This, for Longinus, is the origin of inspiration, a divine sexual act between a priestess and her god, and male poets re-enact this scene of impregnation by emulating each other, homosocially masking the intervention of a woman in the

²⁴I have used William Smith's 1739 translation of Longinus instead of the standard Rhys Roberts edition of 1899, since it is with the Smith translation that the late eighteenth- and early-nineteenth centuries were most familiar. On the Sublime (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1975), 36.
procreation of literary texts. This classical image of procreative and imaginative usurpation by male poets accompanies the concept of the sublime in the journey toward its subjective codification in Burke and Kant and survives in such Romantic metaphors as the "unfathered vapour" of Wordsworth's poetic imagination in *The Prelude.*

The discursive containment of female sexuality that extends from Longinus through Kant preserves the exclusivity of the male literary tradition by increasing its homoerotic valence, but eighteenth- and nineteenth-century aesthetic theories resisted the physical implications (i.e. the involvement of the male body) in this homosocial lineage. The ethical emphasis that we have already seen Burke place on the "duty" of procreation masks an inert homophobia that expresses itself in a pervasive aesthetic resistance to unproductive sexual relationships. For example, Addison reflects the concerns of his time when he scornfully comments that the undesirable sterility resulting from "unnatural" sexual relationships is evidence for the procreative teleology of beauty in the natural world:

He [God] has made anything that is beautiful in our own species pleasant, that all creatures might be tempted to multiply their kind, and fill the world, with inhabitants; for 'tis very remarkable that wherever

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There is no shortage of inspirational "vapor" imagery among male Romantic poets, the most famous being the "unfathered vapour" of Wordsworth's "imagination," in *The Prelude,* which amounts to a self-impregnation whereby Wordsworth gives birth to poetry of transcendent insight after usurping the creative power of the traditionally feminized natural world.
Nature is crossed in the production of a monster (the result of any unnatural mixture) the breed is incapable of propagating its likeness, and of founding a new order of creatures; so that unless all animals were allured by the beauty of their own species, generation would be at an end, and the earth unpeopled. (182)

The heterosexist underpinning of the sublime further reinforces its masculinist agenda by combining the containment of female sexuality with the exclusion of same sex desire, and Burke remains vigilant against the potential homoerotics of an all-male literary tradition. Longinus appropriates the heterosexual reproduction of the muse with her God in order to establish the figurative same-sex reproduction enacted by male poets imitating each other, and Burke reacts to this process by instructing poets to stop imitating each other and to turn to nature for their models. According to Burke, "the reason why artists in general, and poets principally, have been confined in so narrow a circle" is that "they have been rather imitators of one another than of nature" and have failed to realize that sometimes "the meanest things in nature, will give the truest lights" (54).

The modern understanding of the sublime traces its starting point to Kant's Critique of Judgment, and the "Analytic of the Sublime" is usually taken to represent the psychological paradigm of the transcendental sublime in European Romanticism. 26 However, Kant's early, pre-critical

work on the sublime assumes a straightforwardly materialist approach. His "Observations on the Feelings of the Beautiful and Sublime" is often overlooked or dismissed on account of its informal, uncritical style; yet it reflects not only the concern with sexuality in continental and British conceptualizations of the sublime, but also the concerns operating behind his critical discussion of aesthetics in The Critique of Judgment. Compared to Kant's explicit division of men, women, and nationalities into the categories of the sublime and beautiful, Burke's own categorizations seem subtle. "The fair sex," Kant asserts, "has just as much understanding as the male, but it is a beautiful understanding, whereas ours should be a deep understanding, an expression that signifies identity with the sublime" (78). Like Burke, Kant spends little time explaining the sublime qualities of men, "since they are parallel to the feminine [qualities of beauty]," and he focuses instead on the limitations implied by this beauty; his descriptions of beauty, however, quickly evolve into a pedagogical program for producing the "proper" woman:

Laborious learning or painful pondering, even if a woman should greatly succeed in it, destroy the merits that are proper to her sex, and because of their rarity they can make of her an object of cold admiration; but at the same time they will weaken the charms with which she exercises her great power over the other sex. A woman who has a head full of Greek . . . or carries on fundamental controversies about mechanics . . . might as well have a beard; for perhaps that would express
more obviously the mien of profundity for which she strives."

While men pursue the infinite, "the content of woman's great science, rather, is humankind, and among humanity, men"(79).

As does Burke, Kant identifies a natural weakness in women that renders them beautiful and unites them to men:

A woman is embarrassed little that she does not possess certain high insights, that she is timid, and not fit for serious employments, and so forth; she is beautiful and captivates, and that is enough. On the other hand, she demands all these qualities in a man, and the sublimity of her soul shows itself only in that she knows to treasure these noble qualities so far as they are found in him. How else indeed would it be possible that so many grotesque male faces, whatever merits they possess, could gain such well-bred and fine wives? 

Here again, as I pointed out earlier, we can see how women are expected to enjoy the sublime vicariously, through the accomplishments of their men, and it becomes the duty of men, according to Kant, to educate women so that they remain intellectually attractive even after time has eroded their physical beauty.

Even Frances Reynolds, sister to Sir Joshua Reynolds and one of the few women to write explicitly about the sublime in the late-eighteenth century, maintains the distinction that the "softness and mildness of the feminine expression would be displeasing in a man," and "the robust and determined expression of the rigid virtues, justice,

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3Ibid., 93-94.
fortitude, &c. would be displeasing in a woman."39 In accordance with the kind of biological essentialism that we have seen in Burke and Kant, Reynolds insists that "it is the feminine character that is the sweetest, the most interesting, image of beauty; the masculine partakes of the sublime."40 It is also interesting to note that at the late date at which Reynolds is writing, 1785, there are still versions of sublimity in circulation that involve neither transcendence of the human mind nor the usurpation of nature's powers. Reynolds' sublime is a religious one; it finds its initiating experiences in the same objects that point the way to transcendence in the Romantic sublime, but her sublime leads instead to Grace." Denied the secular experience of spirituality that the masculine sublime represents, women could find an escape from the material world and still remain attentive to their culturally-prescribed domestic responsibilities by seeking refuge in religion.

This returns us, finally, to Burke's definition of the sublime. Despite his detailed accounts of female beauty and

39Reynolds 29
31"Where pure grace ends, the awe of the sublime begins. . . . It is a pinnacle of beatitude, bordering upon horror, deformity, madness! an eminence from whence the mind, that dares to look farther, is lost! It seems to stand, or rather to waver, between certainty and uncertainty, between security and destruction. It is the point of terror, of undetermined fear, of undetermined power!" Reynolds, 18.
its effects, his descriptions of the sublime remain surprisingly quite simple: "Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime." However, Burke makes an important qualification:

When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience. (40)

In Burke, the suppression of materiality occurs in one of two ways: either 1) those objects of irredeemable materiality (including women) are dismissed from discussions of the sublime by being restrained within the category of the beautiful, or 2) those objects of overwhelming grandeur and threatening destructiveness that initiate the sublime experience are separated from the subject's immediate physical environment by a safe "distance." The emphasis that Burke places on the need for physical distance between the terrifying object and the subject experiencing the sublime remains a consistent stipulation in Romantic formulations of the sublime. Both Kant and Wordsworth insist that sublime enjoyment is impossible if the physical threat foregrounds the materiality of the subject's body. Kant summarizes: "just as we cannot pass judgment on the
beautiful if we are seized by inclination and appetite, so we cannot pass judgment at all on the sublime in nature if we are afraid.\textsuperscript{32} Kant's theory necessitates disinterestedness since the material effects of beauty and sublimity interfere with the purely rational task of aesthetics. Not only are the limitations of the physical body incompatible with transcendence, they also inhibit the subject's ability to govern self and nature through the faculty of judgment.

Wordsworth upholds this belief in the incompatibility of materiality and sublimity in a seldom discussed passage on the sublime that he left out of A Guide Through the District of the Lakes (1835):

Power awakens the sublime either when it rouses us to a sympathetic energy and calls upon the mind to grasp at something towards which it can make approaches but which it is incapable of attaining -- yet so that it participates in the force which is acting upon it; or, 2dly, by producing a humiliation or prostration of the mind before some external agency which it presumes not to make an effort to participate . . . but if that power which is exalted above our sympathy impresses the mind with personal fear, so as the sensation becomes more lively than the impression or thought of the exciting cause, then self-consideration and all its

\textsuperscript{32}Kant, Critique of Judgment 120. Kant elaborates: "consider bold, overhanging and, as it were, threatening rocks, thunderclouds piling up in the sky and moving about accompanied by lightning and thunderclaps, volcanoes with all their destructive power, hurricanes with all the devastation they leave behind, the boundless ocean heaved up, the high waterfall of a mighty river, and so on. Compared to the might of any of these, our ability to resist becomes an insignificant trifle. Yet the sight of them becomes all the more attractive the more fearful it is, provided we are in a safe place. And we like to call these objects sublime because they raise the soul's fortitude above its usual range and allow us to discover in ourselves an ability to resist which is of a quite different kind, and which gives us the courage [to believe] that we could be a match for nature's seeming omnipotence."
accompanying littleness takes place of the sublime, and wholly excludes it. ... it may be confidently affirmed that no sublimity can be raised by the contemplation of such power when it presses upon us with pain and individual fear to a degree which takes precedence in our thoughts [over] the power itself."

What is at stake in Wordsworth's argument is not only aesthetic appreciation, or personal intellectual and spiritual elevation, but power: the power to observe, to judge, and to articulate. As we have seen, this Romantic power "awakens" at the site of tension between the beautiful and the sublime, and the masculine power to speak of sublimity is predicated upon the discursive silencing of women and the materiality that they represent.

Now that we have examined the explicit role that gender and sexuality play in the development of the sublime, we can begin to understand the historical forces, from Longinus to Wordsworth, that place women in their ambiguous position in Romanticism. The masculinization of the transcendental sublime is accompanied by a complex shift in the figurations of gender in Western philosophical and aesthetic discourse, and this shift produces a series of telling contradictions. Theoretically, women are supposed to be incapable of experiencing, embodying, or articulating the sublime; yet, in the Romantic period, more women were writing poetry than ever before, and their poems often aggressively engaged the same tropes of nature and terror popular with male writers.

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As a genre, poetry is supposed to be an inappropriate medium for women writers, since it is, according to Burke and others, the most sublime medium of artistic expression; yet writers such as Smith, Baillie, and Tighe are widely praised for their poetic qualities by male writers and critics of the period. Finally, and most paradoxically, men alone are supposed to be capable of the sublime, and yet, those mental faculties that are most affected by the sublime -- the intellect, the spirit, and the soul -- are frequently troped as feminine. As Dennis's account of the sublime rape of the intellect shows, male writers, referring to the expansion their own imaginations at the moment of transcendence, often identify their mental faculties, their souls, or their spirits (i.e. whatever we might consider to be the immaterial elements of selfhood) with feminine pronouns.

For example, we can also see this pronoun slippage in John Baillie's *An Essay on the Sublime* (1747), in which he genders the mind both neuter and feminine as it undergoes an experience of the sublime.

Hence comes the Name of Sublime to everything which thus raises the Mind to Fits of Greatness, and disposes it to soar above her Mother Earth; Hence it arises that Exultation and Pride which the Mind even feels from the Consciousness of its own Vastness -- That object only can be justly called Sublime, which in some degree disposes the Mind to this Enlargement of itself, and gives her a lofty Conception of her own Powers. \(^{15}\)

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\(^{14}\) Burke asserts that, in comparison with painting, "poetry with all its obscurity, has a more general as well as a more powerful dominion over the passions than the other art" (61).

Throughout a variety of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century texts, we can find many such examples of this paradoxical effeminizing of the intellect caught in the rapture of the sublime.

Traditionally, Western philosophy has used the figure of the female to signify the unknown, the mysterious, and the unrepresentable, and in Longinian aesthetics, as well as in the Neoclassical Period, such attributes were deemed undesirable. Although the Neoclassical program sought to excite the passions of the reader, the sublime elevation lauded by Alexander Pope relied on a set of strict rules. However, by the late-eighteenth century, the emerging forms of Romanticism that subordinated mimesis to self-expression concurrently emphasized an independence from structure that posed a dilemma to male literary aestheticians. If the ascendant concept of Romantic sublimity finds its best subjects in chaos, disorder, and mystery, then the problem that subsequently arises for male writers in the early Romantic period is that women -- as the discursive figuration of the unspeakable and unknowable -- stand poised to fully inhabit the realm of the sublime. As signifiers of

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For a further exploration of this tradition, see Genevieve Lloyd, The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy, (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984).

Hertz argues that the Neoclassical analogue to the masculine Romantic sublime was actually "chaos" and that this concept was trooped feminine in the first half of the eighteenth century. See The End of the Line.
the other, the stereotypical figure of woman in Western culture already occupied the space that Burke identifies as the best source of the sublime: "dark, confused, uncertain images have a greater power on the fancy to form the grander passions than those have which are more clear and determinate" because "it is our ignorance of things that causes all our admiration, and chiefly excites our passions" (61-62). As a result, the epistemology of woman undergoes a radical modification in the eighteenth-century as the tropes and figures of femaleness become more explicitly aligned with the material world in the dominant aesthetic theories of the period. Yet, the old discourse linking the feminine to the mysterious survives in the figuration of the male intellect as itself feminine. If the mysterious survives in Romanticism as a characteristic of women, it finds itself contained and weighted down by an inescapable bodiliness, representative of all the material concerns that the male Romantics strive to cast out of their own pursuit of the infinite.38

38Julie Ellison deals with this issue from a slightly different angle: "The key terms of romantic poetics--the sublime, the haunted, the grotesque, the sentimental, the ironic, memory, desire, imagination--are accompanied by the demand to be understood intuitively. Intuition is marked as a feminine quality, just as most objects of romantic longing are, including childhood, nature, and the demonic. The invention of the romantic subject as the hero of desire is therefore wholly bound up with the feminine. At the same time, romantic writers suspect that desire may be a form of power, understanding a form of science, and woman a form of sabotage. Objects of desire are lost or violated in ambivalent allegories of the domestic and the maternal. Ultimately, the feminine becomes, first, wholly figurative or non-referential and then invisible." Delicate Subjects (Ithaca, Cornell UP: 1990), 10-11.
Many women writers respond to this new figuration by isolating those moments in their poetry when the material, refusing to be suppressed, returns (or resurfaces) within the text to intensify the physicality of the overwhelming, terrifying moment of sublime self-diminution. These moments often specify the economic and social restraints that interrupt or preclude transcendence; for example, such extratextual restraints materialize in Charlotte Smith's numerous autobiographical allusions to her struggle to support her ten children solely on her literary earnings. For women in the Romantic period, to write is to engage in a process of signification that has already aligned them with the materiality of the signifier; however, Romanticism valorizes, in the linguistic terms of the transcendental sublime, the semiotic breakdown that liberates the material sign and permits access to the unnamable signified. (Baillie, for example, complains that she is held back from the sublime by the material concerns of rhyme, meter, and genre.) Women writers discover that to suppress the material, in a gesture toward transcendence, is to discard the only discursive identity available to them. For the male Romantic, self-annihilation opens a space in which the poet can re-create a non-corporeal poetic self by means of the figuratively usurped procreative powers of Longinus's Pythian priestess; for female Romantics, however, poetic
self-annihilation is suicide. Through the material sublime, then, women poets find a means of reinforcing their authorial identity while articulating a desire to shatter that identity and escape the oppressive forces that discursively circumscribe their limited expressions of selfhood.

The material sublime is not exclusively a female trope; it is also occasionally deployed by male Romantics, but less as a complaint about discursive constructions of self and more as a lamentation over the inescapability of corporeality. One of the best examples of this is Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" where the material signification of the word "forlorn" invades the poem's approach to sublimity. "Forlorn! the very word is like a bell / To toll me back from thee to my sole self!" The worldly agonies, the "weariness, the fever, and the fret" that the poem enumerates early on, refuse to be suppressed at the poem's close; the bird leaves, and we are left with the Keatsian motif of bittersweet uncertainty. "Fled is that music: -- Do I wake or sleep?" Among women writers, the material sublime articulates the epistemological uncertainty surrounding the ambiguous status of female poets in an age that will not allow them to discard the discursive trappings of material existence. Paying close attention to the material element that is often foregrounded in female
encounters with the sublime provides us with a way to expand the current recuperation of Romantic women’s poetry beyond the thematic boundaries set by the traditional domestic and maternal responsibilities expressed in many poems of the period.

In the idiom of material sublimity, we can enlarge the scope of this reappraisal to view the complex rhizomic intersections of women’s texts with what criticism has traditionally identified as the dominant male aesthetic and philosophic discourses of the Romantic period. Such a critical methodology avoids the pitfalls of treating women writers as subordinate to, or isolated from, male writers and aims at unraveling essentialist readings of women’s texts by showing how the opposing discourses of transcendence and materiality actually interpenetrate each other. The following three chapters will offer examples of how Smith, Baillie, and Tighe each make use of different forms of the material sublime in their poetry and aesthetics. These chapters will also examine how these women refashion the "masculine" tropes of the transcendental sublime in order to participate in the Romantic discourses of imaginative expansion and elevation while concurrently foregrounding the economic, social, and historical codes that prohibit them, as women, from articulating experiences of transcendence.
CHAPTER 3


Sonnet. A short poem consisting of fourteen lines, of which the rhymes are adjusted by particular rule. It is not very suitable to the English language, and has not been used by any man of eminence since Milton.

Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755)

And as the time ere long must come
When I lie silent in the tomb,
Thou wilt preserve these mournful pages;
For gentle minds will love my verse,
And Pity shall my strains rehearse,
And tell my name to distant ages.

Charlotte Smith, "To my Lyre" (c. 1806)

Charlotte Smith's hopeful resignation in "To my Lyre," the last poem she wrote before her death in 1806, strikes an ironic note when read against Wordsworth's often-cited remark, made twenty-five years later, that she was a poet "to whom English verse is under greater obligations than are likely to be either acknowledged or remembered."\(^1\) If the greatest sin that a poet could commit in the Romantic period is suggested by Wordsworth's anti-materialist complaint that "Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers," ("The World Is Too Much with Us," 2), then it would appear that Smith had already sealed her own fate, as far as Wordsworth was concerned, by "wasting" her powers on the economic

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\(^1\)Stuart Curran, ed., *The Poems of Charlotte Smith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 323n, xix. All subsequent references to Smith's poetry and prefices are taken from this edition, unless otherwise indicated. Page numbers to this edition are given parenthetically.
preoccupations of such sonnets as "To Dependence." Although this poem stoically announces that Smith's "unfettered heart / Still to the Mountain Nymph" offers poetic "service," its assertion of artistic independence comes only after it has dramatically foregrounded the hopelessness of her financial imprisonment:

Dependence! heavy, heavy are thy chains,
And happier they who from the dangerous sea,
Or the dark mine, procure with ceaseless pains
An hard-earn'd pittance—than who trust to thee!

(1-4)

In contrast to Wordsworth, who would rather experience nature as "a Pagan suckled in a creed outworn" so that he might "Have glimpses that would make [him] less forlorn" ("The World Is Too Much with Us," 9-12), Smith turns to the natural world not to escape the materiality of consumer culture, but rather to achieve the kind of spiritual freedom that comes only with financial self-dependence, even if this independence must be earned through arduous physical labor.

Wordsworth's desire to move beyond the economic fetters of the material world is predicated upon his potential for prospering within them, (i.e. his disdain for "getting and spending" is motivated by his ability to get and spend) but it is the very promise of such economic proficiency, unattainable though it may be for a woman in eighteenth-century England, that is bound up with Smith's aesthetic
ideal.² The heavy chains, dangerous seas, dark mines, and ceaseless pains that populate Smith's poetic landscape constitute a mode of sublimity in which she finds a self-sufficient poetic identity; at the same time, these poetic images also temporarily obscure the financial anxieties that represent, for Smith, a sublime terror all their own. Although Wordsworth admits that Smith's poetry left its mark, linguistically and structurally, on his own work and on English verse in general, her failure to see beyond her personal economic and maternal burdens has nonetheless come to represent her unforgivable transgression against the Romantic aesthetics of transcendence.

Consequently, despite its critical and commercial success in its own time, Smith's poetry has fulfilled Wordsworth's prediction, receiving almost no attention in the critical discourse of the past century. Even in the recent expansion of the Romantic canon by feminist and revisionist critics, Smith's role as a poet remains unexplored. In his study of the rise of women's poetry in the Romantic period, Marlon Ross includes Smith in his comprehensive catalogue of women writers, but he avoids

²I am not suggesting that Wordsworth was always economically comfortable, or that freedom from financial constraints enabled him to write poetry; Wordsworth's early financial troubles have been well documented. My point, rather, is that Wordsworth's very ability to shun material possessions is made possible by the fact that, as a man in nineteenth-century England, such material possessions can be his to shun in the first place. In Lacanian terms, it has, of course, been repeatedly observed that one must already possess the phallus in order to be able to play at not having it.
discussing her individual poems. Anne Mellor gives more attention to Smith than does Ross, but she focuses on her primarily as a novelist and entirely ignores her poetry. Mellor argues that the expansion of the market for women's writing does not erase the cultural assumptions regarding domestic and maternal issues. Men and women writers continue to represent the "ideology of maternity," in different ways. Whereas "male writers focus on biological maternity, on the body of the mother (and especially on her milk-filled breasts), as the source of life itself," female writers "celebrate the mother as educator and moral guide, as the provider of spiritual and emotional comfort."\(^1\) Although Mellor may be able to find specific instances where this dichotomy holds true, her generalized "ideology of maternity" fails to explain Smith's own mixed response to motherhood. Nowhere in her poetry does Smith "celebrate" maternal responsibilities or present an unqualified, positive view of motherhood. Instead, her depiction of motherhood focuses on suffering and sacrifice, and in her darkest poems she portrays the maternal figure as little more than a repository for the knowledge of future miseries that await her children.

Smith's marginal status has thus been doubly enforced by the inability of feminist criticism and canonical

\(^1\)Mellor, 83.
Romantic criticism to assimilate her poetry into their respective discourses, and, in addition, Smith's marginalization is also a product of such self-fulfilling evaluations as Wordsworth's. His remark, taken out of context, subordinates Smith's literary significance to his own aesthetic judgment, implying that something inherently lacking in her verse had already doomed her to historical anonymity. Wordsworth's frequently-quoted comment, however, is actually part of a longer passage, in his textual notes to "Stanzas suggested in a Steamboat of Saint Bee's Heads, On the Coast of Cumberland," composed in 1833, in which he awkwardly declares his indebtedness to her.

The form of stanza in this Poem ["Saint Bee's Heads"] and something in the style of versification, are adopted from the "St. Monica," a poem of much beauty upon a monastic subject, by Charlotte Smith: a lady to whom English verse is under greater obligations than are likely to be either acknowledged or remembered. She wrote little, and that little unambitiously, but with true feeling for rural nature, at a time when nature was not much regarded by English Poets; for in point of time her earlier writings preceded, I believe, those of Cowper and Burns.\(^5\)

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\(^4\)Wordsworth's comment has become quite popular lately, as Smith's poetry has begun to enjoy a resurgence of critical interest. But recent articles on Smith, and almost every conference paper that I have heard on Smith, all use Wordsworth's comment as a touchstone without either interrogating its context or realizing that such selective reiterations of canonical evaluations only serve to reinforce the authority of the critical discourse that has excluded Smith in the first place.

\(^5\)Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), 4:405. Bishop C. Hunt, in his ground-breaking study of Smith's influence on Wordsworth, is one of the few critics to quote this passage in its entirety, but he does not draw out the significance of its implications, which give a much different sense of Wordsworth's indebtedness to Smith. For a further discussion see Bishop C. Hunt, "Wordsworth and Charlotte Smith," The Wordsworth Circle 1 (1970): 103.
We can dismiss Wordsworth's comment that Smith "wrote little" as simply not true, but what are we to make of his ambivalent statement that Smith wrote "unambitiously, but with true feeling"? Such an assertion reveals Wordsworth's own anxiety over his indebtedness to a female poet for whom he repeatedly expresses qualified admiration.⁶ As we shall see, Smith was nothing if not ambitious, and she took her writing seriously, not only as a means of making a living, but also as a form of social and political commentary. The "St. Bee's Heads" passage signals Wordsworth's open appropriation of Smith's "form of stanza" and "style of versification" and his concurrent exclusion of her from the ranks of more serious, ambitious poets.

Mapping the recurrence of Smith's voice in Wordsworth's poetry will help us to see how the intertextual polyvocality of the Romantic period extends in numerous directions, freely crossing the permeable boundaries of gender and canonicity. Bloom's Oedipal model of the revisionary struggle between successive generations of poets does not

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⁶Wordsworth owned a copy of the fifth edition of Smith's Elegiac Sonnets (1798) while he was a student at St John's College, Cambridge, and this copy is now in the Wordsworth Library at Dove Cottage. The back cover contains two additional sonnets by Smith, (nos. XLIX and LI from the sixth edition) which Wordsworth copied out by hand. Although Hunt argues that the marginalia and emendations to Smith's sonnets are Wordsworth's, these marks actually do not appear to be in the same hand as the copied sonnets. Wordsworth's gave this copy as a gift to his daughter Dora, and the book has since been cut down and rebound; considering the number of hands the book has passed through, we cannot be certain that all of the annotations are Wordsworth's own. (Frederic Rownon, Curator of the Wordsworth Museum, has been very helpful in providing textual information in this matter.)
help explain the kind of tangential, rhizomic connections between such poems as Smith's "The Emigrants" (1793) and Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" (1798), and a brief look at a few passages from each will establish interesting parallels in "form" and "style" as well as in theme. Smith begins Part II of her compassionate account of the refugees from the French Revolution, who are now residing in England, with a lonely meditation on the passage of time:

Long wintry months are past; the Moon that now
Lights her pale crescent even at noon, has made
Four times her revolution; since with step,
Mournful and slow, along the wave-worn cliff,
Pensive I took my solitary way,
Lost in despondence, while contemplating
Not my own wayward destiny alone,
(Hard as it is, and difficult to bear!)
But in beholding the unhappy lot
Of the lorn Exiles; (II:1-10)

The use of natural objects as markers or signifiers of time is a technique that Wordsworth also employs in the opening of "Tintern Abbey," and he likewise follows his reflection on time's passing with an account, similar to Smith's, of his own solitude. (It is not until the poem's conclusion that we learn of Dorothy's presence.)

Five years have past; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a soft inland murmur.--Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; (1-7)

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"It is an interesting coincidence that five years also marks the amount of time that has passed since the publication of "The Emigrants" and the writing of "Tintern Abbey"."
Like Smith, whose despondence links her to the suffering exiles, Wordsworth aligns his state of solitary reflection to the physical isolation of the observed persons in his poem, the vagrant dwellers. The lessons that Smith and Wordsworth draw from nature are different, but their pedagogic reflections follow a similar pattern.

Smith laments the impossibility of Nature to return her to the state of childhood bliss in which she naively took pleasure in her natural surroundings:

Ah! 'twill not be:—So many years have pass'd, Since, on my native hills, I learn'd to gaze On these delightful landscapes; and those years Have taught me so much sorrow, that my soul Feels not the joy reviving Nature brings; But, in dark retrospect, dejected dwells On human follies, and on human woes.— (II:36-42)

The phrase "reviving Nature" brings to mind Wordsworth's faith in Nature's restorative powers, and, like Smith, Wordsworth's observations of nature are informed by his sober knowledge of human suffering.

For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes The still, sad music of humanity, Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power To chasten and subdue. (88-93)

Both poets arrive at the conclusion that their adult experiences have filled them with a sense of the inherent sadness of human existence; Wordsworth is able to find "abundant recompense" from this knowledge, but Smith finds herself suspended in "dark retrospect". This moment of
intellective suspension, recurrent in poems by Smith, marks the point at which the material sublime arises to characterize her discursive containment within the material concerns of the physical world, concerns which Wordsworth suppresses in his poetry through the deployment of the transcendental sublime. Such descriptive and structural parallels in the poems of Smith and Wordsworth are numerous, but their usefulness in a study of Romantic intertextuality is limited, since rooting them out tells us little about Smith's own poetic project.

I want to begin this study, then, by positioning Smith historically in order to identify the economic and political tensions that inform her poetry; I will then examine three sites of discursive intersection, between her work and what has come to be recognized as canonical Romantic aesthetics, in order to locate Smith in the intertextual network of British Romanticism. Her deployment of the material sublime encompasses the first and second of these intersections. First, Smith's allusions to her maternal, financial, and legal burdens represent an authorial self-fashioning anticipatory of what was later to become a Romantic obsession with the identity of the self-created poet. This method of self-presentation characterizes not only Smith's poetry but her novels as well; however, this foregrounding of personal, material concerns has led canonical criticism
to dismiss her for not rising above her quotidian preoccupations through the discursively inaccessible tropes of the transcendental sublime. Second, by embracing the material sublime in her poetic encounters with rustic scenes and natural landscapes, Smith places herself firmly within the theoretical discourse surrounding Burkean and Kantian formulations of the sublime, and this positioning disrupts contemporary interpretations that view women writers as practicing a "feminine" or "domestic" sublime (as described by Mellor) in opposition to the masculine sublime of Wordsworth's transcendental project. Third, through her choice of the sonnet form as her primary poetic genre, Smith takes on the additional challenge of writing in a form that numerous critics of the time deemed inappropriate for the English language; yet, she finds an enthusiastic audience and inserts herself into the rigid linearity of the sonnet tradition, a tradition dominated by such canonical figures as Petrarch, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats.

In 1784, Smith's husband, Benjamin, was once again imprisoned at King's Bench for debt. Although they both expected a generous inheritance from Benjamin's recently

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deceased father, Benjamin’s own financial irresponsibility had caused his cautious father to word his will in such a way as to keep control of his estate out of his son’s hands. Unfortunately, the will was such an indecipherable mess that family lawyers kept the estate tied up in legal battles for years; most of the inheritance intended for Smith and her children would eventually be absorbed by legal fees. Henceforth, Smith carried a bitterness toward the legal profession throughout her life. This was not the first time that Benjamin had been imprisoned for debt, but by 1784 their family had grown considerably and Charlotte now needed to find a way to feed herself and her nine children. In this moment of financial desperation, Smith gathered the scattered poems that she had written over the years and, unable to find a publisher willing to accept them, published them at her own expense. **Elegiac Sonnets, and Other Essays by Charlotte Smith of Bignor Park** appeared on May 10, 1784; before the end of the year, the success of the slender quarto volume warranted a second edition, and over the next twenty-seven years the volume would be reprinted in revised and expanded editions nine more times, the eleventh and final edition appearing in 1851 and containing a total of ninety-two sonnets and additional poems. **Elegiac Sonnets** enjoyed an enthusiastic response from both reviewers and the growing reading public. **The Monthly**
Review for November, 1784, acknowledges that Smith "apologizes, in her Preface, that her Sonnets are not of the legitimate kind," but the author of this favorable review insists: "We cannot, however, agree with her."9 A measure of the impact and influence of Smith's sonnets can be found two decades later in a review of a new edition of Milton's poems. The reviewer admits that literary historians traditionally "trace the history of the English sonnet from Surrey to Milton" and that critics aligned with Anna Seward assert the superiority of the Italian structure over the irregular English structure; however, this reviewer contests both these opinions:

It should be remembered that such a preference is contradicted as well by experience as by theory. The sonnet has been revived by Charlotte Smith: her sonnets are assuredly the most popular in the language, and deservedly so; but they are almost all irregular"10

Smith was not without her detractors, one of the most aggressive being Seward, but her poems remained commercially

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popular midway into the nineteenth century, even though her

critical fame itself barely outlived her."

In the midst of this poetic success, Smith turned to

novel writing in 1788 as a more lucrative occupation, and it

is primarily as a novelist that she is remembered by

twentieth-century critics. Eighteenth-century reviewers of

her novels, however, continued to think of her as a poet. A

reviewer of her second novel, Ethelinde, praises the work

but adds: "we cannot help lamenting, that this elegant

writer neglects her talent for poetry, though we perceive in

her novel that she looks at nature with a poet's eye."12 A

few years later, in another review praising Smith's most

political novel, Desmond, the only real complaint concerns

the novel's lack of poetry: "Mrs. Smith's talent for poetry

is so universally acknowledged that we had a right to expect

some specimens. There is but one however, 'An Ode to the

Poppy,' but it is a charming one . . ."13 What is

significant about these reviews is that while Ross, Mellor,

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11In a letter of July 20, 1786 to Sophia Weston, Seward is
particularly caustic toward a favorable review of Smith's Elegiac
Sonnets: "Yes, truly, dear Sophia, our public critics are curious
deciders upon poetic claims. Smiled you not to see the reviewer of
verse, in a late Gentleman's Magazine, gravely pronouncing, 'that it is
a trifling praise for Mrs. Smith's sonnets to pronounce them superior to
Shakespeare's and Milton's?' O! rare panegyrist! Such praise may vie,
as an offering at the shrine of dulness, with the censure which the
Monthly Review passed on Jephson's noble tragedy . . ." The Letters of
Anna Seward (Edinburgh: George Ramsay & Co., 1811), 1:162.

12Rev. of Ethelinde or the Recluse of the Lake, by Charlotte

13Review of Desmond, by Charlotte Smith, The European Magazine and
London Review 22 (1792): 23. The same issue of this magazine reprints
Smith's "Ode to the Poppy" in its "poetical department."
and other modern critics cite examples of cultural and critical resistance to the idea of female-authored poetry in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there nonetheless appear to be numerous examples of critical acceptance and support of individual women poets. This clearly seems to be the case with Smith, whose novels were often criticized for being written hastily but were praised for their poetical quality. The fact that Smith is remembered as a novelist and marginalized as a poet seems to be not so much the result of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century male paranoia as it is the product of contemporary, canonically obsessed, interpretive paradigms.

While writing the novels that would gain her this limited recognition in the 20th-century, Smith also wrote a collection of children's poems, produced two long poems, "The Emigrants," and "Beachy Head," (the latter remaining incomplete at her death), and continued composing sonnets, which she included in her novels and added to the expanding editions of Elegiac Sonnets. Despite the continued demand for her work, her literary reputation was already embattled among critics within a year after her death, and an anonymous biographer in the Monthly Magazine felt compelled to defend her from her detractors:

Fortunately the idle remarks of the stupid, the unfeeling, or the envious, either are, or will be forgotten, while the brilliancy of Mrs. Smith's genius
will shine with undiminished lustre, as long as the English language exists."14

Regardless of such enthusiasm, the prediction that Wordsworth made in 1833 seems to come true as early as 1862, when Julia Kavanagh can confidently say of Smith that as a novelist she is little more than a transitional figure, and "as a poetess she is quite forgotten," facts that, as she goes on to argue, are critically justified.15

I
The Poetic Self, Motherhood, and the Audience

One of the most striking visual icons of European Romanticism appears in "The Wanderer Above the Sea Fog," a painting by the German artist, Caspar David Friedrich, in which a solitary male figure stands on a precipice, with his back to the viewer, gazing over the sublime expanse of a mist covered valley.16 In a move that is uncharacteristic of most women poets of the period, Smith adopts an early

15Julia Kavanagh, English Women of Letters (Leipzig, 1862), 91.
16Although Friedrich's "Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog" was not composed until 1818, thirty-four years after the first edition of Elegiac Sonnets, it nonetheless graphically represents the powerful iconic status of the solitary male wanderer, which had already been well-established in European Romanticism. Friedrich painted a number of solitary women from a similar perspective, but these women are always standing on level ground, as in "Woman before the Setting Sun," (1818) or are indoors, framed by an open window, as in "Woman at the Window" (1822). In his portrayal of women in sublime settings, Freidrich preserves the contact between the female body and the material world, as seen most clearly in his only depiction of a woman on a mountain top, "Chalk Cliffs on Rugen" (1818-19). As her two male companions peer over the edge of the cliffs, the female figure in this painting remains seated, clinging to a nearby branch. For an excellent collection of Friedrich's works see Joseph Leo Koerner, Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
version of this troped male posture in "To the invisible moon." The sonnet opens with a disparaging description of the timid effeminate "votaries" of "Melancholy" and "Mild Sorrow" who take delight in passively watching the moon, throughout all its phases, glide gently through the night sky, "but I" Smith proclaims,

prefer from some steep rock to look  
On the obscure and fluctuating main,  
What time the martial star with lurid glare,  
Portentous, gleams above the troubled deep;  
Or the red comet shakes his blazing hair;  
Or on the fire-ting'd waves the lightnings leap (7-12).

The sonnet places the reader (like the viewer of Friedrich's painting) in the position of looking over the poet's shoulder at the tumultuous ocean and sky beneath her. Smith works hard to establish a distinctive persona that is not easily delighted by popular images of nature's benign beauty. Hers is a persona that craves dynamic encounters with the unlimited power of the natural world. Wordsworth is incorrect to assume that Smith wrote about nature at a time when it was "not much regarded by English poets"; the Age of Sensibility overflowed with emotional responses to nature, but Smith distances herself from her contemporaries and the tropes of nature that they deployed. The popular sentimental image of the moon cannot comfort her because, as she concludes, its "fair beams illume another sky, / And shine for beings less accurst than I" (13-14). Smith's poetic persona emerges through the complex discursive
interweavings of defiance and apology that characterize her struggle to carve out a distinctive space for herself in a literary marketplace that required her, as a woman, to justify her very participation in it.

Although the liberal attitude of the "age of revolution" and the growing reading public at the end of the eighteenth century provided a new area of employment for many women interested in writing,7 Smith still feels compelled to ask her readers to excuse her attempts at composition in her Preface to the first edition of Elegiac Sonnets. Such an apology, though, was common; even William Blake had asked his readers to excuse the poor quality of his Poetical Sketches the previous year.8 In her Preface, Smith quietly alludes to the financial dilemmas that ostensibly drove her into publication, referring to them only as those "other circumstances" which contributed to her decision to seek a poetic vocation; yet her many hardships, financial, marital, and legal, recur more explicitly in the sonnets themselves. Although Smith's biographers corroborate her argument that desperate financial need alone forced her into the audacious move of publishing her private poems, her apologetic preface presents us with an author who

8William Blake, The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake, ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Doubleday, 1988) 846. All subsequent references to Blake will be from this edition unless otherwise cited; page and line numbers will be given parenthetically.
is orchestrating the development of her poetic persona for the audience:

The little Poems which are here called Sonnets, have, I believe, no very just claim to that title: but they consist of fourteen lines, and appear to me no improper vehicle for a single Sentiment. I am told, and I read it as the opinion of very good judges, that the legitimate Sonnet is ill calculated for our language.

(3)

Through these serpentine negations, Smith claims not only that she has chosen an inferior form in which to express her sentiments, but that she has not even used this form very well. In making these excuses, Smith participates in the eighteenth-century debate over the appropriateness of the sonnet form for the English language. But she justifies the existence of these doubly inferior verses by autobiographically gesturing toward "melancholy moments" that forced her to seek relief in poetic composition. If sentimentality is one of the chief thematic concerns of late eighteenth-century poetry, then by citing emotional expression as the motive behind her sonnet writing, Smith unites, in form and content, two of the most popular literary concerns of her period.

Some very melancholy moments have been beguiled by expressing in verse the sensations those moments brought. Some of my friends, with partial indiscretion, have multiplied the copies they procured of several of these attempts, till they found their way

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19 Smith was considered by many to be the leading sonneteer of her day, but she was not alone in composing in this supposedly "inferior" genre. Raymond Dexter Havens estimates that in the late eighteenth century, British poets published more than 2,500 sonnets. The Influence of Milton on English Poetry (Cambridge: Yale University Press, 1922), 499.
into the prints of the day in a mutilated state; which, concuring with other circumstances, determined me to put them into their present form. (3)

Lest anyone accuse her of rushing into print, Smith asserts that enthusiastic friends have already circulated her poetry, and, thus, she can argue that it is her audience which has forced her to publish her "attempts" at verse.30

Smith concludes her preface by directly invoking the image of the audience that she envisions for this volume: "I can hope for readers only among the few, who, to sensibility of heart, join simplicity of taste"(3). This closing statement is more than an idle wish; it describes the type of audience that she intends to design for herself, and the marketing strategy that this statement represents locates Smith at the beginning of a tradition later identified as a central characteristic of Romanticism. According to Jon Klancher, writers had attempted to choose their audiences since the late seventeenth century, but "the English Romantics were the first to become radically uncertain of their readers, and they faced the task Wordsworth called 'creating the taste' by which the writer is comprehended."31

30Blake had used a similar strategy in his own preface the year before, insisting that the enthusiasm of friends compelled him to print his poems. Speaking of himself, in the third person, as an "untutored youth," Blake claims that he was led by his friends's opinions and not his own: "Conscious of the irregularities and defects to be found in almost every page, his friends have still believed that they possessed a poetic originality, which merited some respite from oblivion." Blake, 846.

In the 1798 "Advertisement" to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth acknowledges that some readers "of superior judgment may disapprove of the style in which many of these pieces are executed," but he nonetheless instructs his remaining audience in what the proper method of reading requires:

> An accurate taste in poetry, and in all the other arts, Sir Joshua Reynolds has observed, is an acquired talent, which can only be produced by severe thought, and a long continued intercourse with the best models of composition. This is mentioned not with so ridiculous a purpose as to prevent the most inexperienced reader from judging for himself; but merely to temper the rashness of decision, and to suggest that if poetry be a subject on which much time has not been bestowed, the judgment may be erroneous, and that in many cases it necessarily will be so.\(^{22}\)

Smith and Wordsworth attempt to mold their audiences by issuing them a similar challenge. The implicit assertion in their prefaces is that while it is the author's job to find the proper readers, it is also each reader's responsibility to become a better reader, whether by joining "sensibility of heart" with "simplicity of taste" or by acquiring the "talent" produced by "severe thought" and "long continued intercourse" with canonical texts. Reading, or rather reading well, begins to take on an ethical imperative in the Romantic period, as the individual reader becomes entangled in the commercial pressures of the burgeoning literary marketplace; one's ability to adapt to changing literary tastes therefore emerges as a cultural index of self-worth.

This process, however, is reciprocal. Just as Smith challenges her audience to develop a taste for her work, she struggles to re-fashion her authorial persona to appeal to the tastes of her readers.

Throughout much of *Elegiac Sonnets*, Smith foregrounds the very process of poetic self-definition in the assumption that it is her social position as a poet, as a woman, and as a mother, that perpetuates the suffering through which she gains privileged access to the universal truths that her poetry purports to reveal.\(^3\) "Sonnet V: To the South Downs" represents one of Smith's characteristic techniques; the sonnet begins with blissful memories of childhood, recollections of a former, idyllic period of life, and then moves on to describe the misery of the present.

Ah! hills belov'd!--where once a happy child,
Your beechen shades, "your turf, your flowers among,"
I wove your blue-bells into garlands wild,
And woke your echoes with my artless song.

The narrative "I" identifies the child with the speaker of the poem, but this identification comes only after the child has already been introduced with an indefinite article that functions to suggest the universality of this childhood

\(^3\)The conflation of art and autobiography in Smith's writing is indicative of the rhetorical technique, mentioned earlier, that Rajan calls "autonarration," an "integrenre" that "locates ideology within a fictional rewriting of personal experience. From the distinctions by Schiller and the Schlegels onwards, between classicism as impersonal and romanticism as the revelation of personality, the inscription of the author in the text is a characteristically romantic move: expressive not of the egotistical sublime, but of the text as the unfinished transcription of a subject still in process." Rajan, 149.
experience; "a" child signifies potentially "any" child or "all" children. This signals the collapse of personal into collective experience, as well as the temporal conflation of adulthood and childhood as the adult poet attempts to summon experiences belonging to the child.

The child does not experience a moment of helplessness, in awe of nature's power, as would an adult in a sublime encounter with the natural world, but engages in a reciprocal relationship with her surroundings, actively bringing nature to life by awakening its echo. The child matures in an Edenic world where her "artless song" is testimony both to the sincerity of her actions and to the semiotic fidelity of her naive representational poetry, poetry that is itself re-signified by the surroundings that it represents. This is the status of poetry before language; in the prelapsarian world of childhood that Smith depicts, art and nature are unanimous in their representations. However, after shedding the naiveté of childhood, Smith's poet can only find that innocent world solely through the language of poetry, a language which now is only a bridge to the natural world, a realm to which the poet can no longer unmediatedly return.

Ah! hills belov'd--your turf, your flowers remain;
But can they peace to this sad breast restore;
For one poor moment soothe the sense of pain,
And teach a breaking heart to throb no more?
And you, Aruna! --in the vale below,
As to the sea your limpid waves you bear,
Can you one kind Lethean cup bestow,
To drink a long oblivion to my care?

Through this series of urgent questions, Smith maps out the development of an epistemological crisis that arises as she matures. Wordsworth's own reflections on the effects of maturation, in Book V of The Prelude, have been described as a movement from "infantile appetite, the capacity for almost unlimited sensation and fantasy" in a "period that is rich and dumb," to an age in which language "seems at first to enable the infant to express his wants" but reveals itself to be "utilitarian and reductive." In organizing their poetry around their own self-identities as poets, both Smith and Wordsworth find that self and language are inextricably intertwined and that the power of articulation is necessary for self-realization. The Prelude argues that, through poetry, Wordsworth can improve upon his lost childhood unity with nature, but the close of "To the South Downs" answers Smith's urgent questions with no such promise of spiritual compensation.

Ah! no!--when all, e'en Hope's last ray is gone,
There's no oblivion--but in death alone!

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3Richard J. Onorato, The Character of the Poet: Wordsworth in "The Prelude" (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 114. Onorato argues that in Wordsworth's poetry "language gradually limits the wonder of experience, darkens the vision and recollection of pleasure. Only the experiences offered by poetry, which is partially elusive of the limits of ordinary human speech, are capable of evoking the infantile and fantastic sense of alternatives to reality, of a prior and superior existence, perhaps as soul, from which the sense of self and time are a gradual estrangement."
In her attempt to return to the natural world of her childhood, the poet can find neither peace nor forgetfulness, and the unequivocal answer to her own questions leads her out from her subjective complaint to a general comment on human life. The narrative "I" disappears in the last two lines and the conditional statement becomes applicable to her readers, informing them that in the absence of hope, traditional sources of relief in nature can provide no comfort. The conclusion thus self-reflexively gestures toward the sonnet's beginning. Just as the child's unity with nature is the result of the child's own actions, the division between poet and nature at the conclusion stems from the poet's inability, as a result of her experiences as an adult, to maintain the hope that only naive innocence can make possible.

Many of Smith's sonnets thematize her personal suffering by appropriating the Romantic tropes of nature's restorative powers and subverting them. Smith's characteristic rejection of the empty hope promised by recollections of nature can be seen in such passages as: "Ah! what to me can those dear days restore, / When scenes could charm that now I taste no more" (Sonnet XXXI, 13-14), or "Alas! these cruel joys are mine in dreams alone, / When cruel Reason abdicates her throne" (Sonnet XXXVIII, 9-10). Smith's nineteenth-century critics, however, are divided
over the aesthetic value of her melancholic, autobiographical strategy. In 1834 Sir Egerton Brydges approvingly notes that "sorrow was her constant companion; and she sung with a thorn at her bosom, which forced out strains of melody, expressive of the most affecting sensations, interwoven with the rich hues of an inspired fancy." Thirty years later, however, critics such as Kavanagh disagree, believing instead that "a few faults, great faults," marred her authorship, and that "a sensitiveness embittered Mrs. Smith's temper":

we miss a gentle, lenient, and kindly spirit in her writings. She could not forget her sufferings and her wrongs; rebellion was rife in her, and revolt, though it may give momentary power, secures no lasting fame.

Perhaps it could be argued that by 1862 poetry emphasizing the passions routinely evoked the disparagement of the more reserved aesthetics of Victorian verse; thus, such highly emotional poems as Smith's would have fallen out of favor with the capricious tastes of the reading public. However, the male Romantic poets all wrote highly emotional poetry, claimed to draw from personal "sufferings" and "wrongs," and often characterized themselves as filled with "rebellion" and "revolt." What then distinguishes Smith from canonical Romanticism, and what links can we find between her poetics and Romantic aesthetics?

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36Kavanagh, 113.
Smith's sentimentality provides more than a medium for melodramatic effusions of self-pity. In her poetry, Smith recreates herself for her audience; she responds to her economic and domestic oppression by marketing her misery, autobiographically placing herself alongside her poems in the literary marketplace, in order to use the patriarchal discourse circumscribing her identity as a woman to her own advantage. Smith's concern with her authorial persona is an orientation that she shares with the male Romantics. But what she shares with other women writers of the period is a supposed failure, or inability, to articulate a moment of transcendence beyond the initial sublime encounter with the natural world. The discourse of sublime transcendence that nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics have learned to expect from the male poets of the Romantic period, has become universalized as an evaluative standard by which the poetry of the entire period is judged. But this discourse is inaccessible to Smith, whose extratextual material concerns preclude her discursive engagement with the aesthetics of transcendence. If the transcendental sublime constitutes the ceaseless striving of the alienated, male, Romantic poet to restore a lost unity with the natural world, through an imaginative expansion that bridges this epistemological gap, then Smith's articulations of the material sublime would seem to underscore a female union
with the natural world that has never been severed. However, since the discursive confinement of woman as the signifier of the material world aligns Smith with the numerous material burdens of domesticity and maternity, this apparent unity with nature is not a cause for celebration but is rather the marker of female limitations. Smith challenges these limitations not by suppressing them, but by foregrounding them in the materialist aesthetics that circumscribes her poetic identity.

In constructing her public persona, Smith consistently foregrounds her struggle to fulfill her maternal duties and her suffering at the hands of a patriarchal legal system. Smith's correspondence with her publishers gives ample evidence of this conscious authorial positioning; regarding her portrait in the 8th edition of Elegiac Sonnets (the only edition she allowed to be sold by subscription), Smith requested that changes be made in the engraving, to convey the physical cost of her suffering, and that the following motto from Shakespeare be printed beneath it to describe how grief has changed her appearance."

Oh! Time has changed me since you saw me last,
And heavy Hours with Time's deforming Hand,
Have written strange Defeatures in my Face.

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Both linguistically and visually, Smith attempted to keep before the eyes of her readers a poetic persona whose physical misery is indistinguishable from its representation in verse. The image of time inscribing its effects on Smith's face transforms her body itself into a text. This effort to dissolve the boundary between language and body intersects with the Romantic alignment of women with the material signifier, an epistemology which, as we have seen, already blurs this distinction. Smith's citation of the Shakespearean passage, accompanied by the modified engraving of herself, iconically represents her calculated appropriation of her own discursive containment as a woman in order to construct an independent identity for herself as a female poet.

While the presentation of her melancholy persona was a task that Smith undertook on her own, her image as a mother was preserved aggressively by her publishers, critics, and biographers, all of whom seem to have had a great investment in preserving the idea that publication did not need to distract a woman from what society considered to be her proper duties. An anonymous early biographer of Smith, in *Public Characters 1800-1801*, set the example of depicting Smith as never once sacrificing her maternal responsibilities for her reading and writing.

Her studies, however, did not interfere with the care of her children; she nursed them all herself, and
usually read while she rocked the cradle of one, and had, perhaps, another sleeping on her lap.\textsuperscript{38}

This fictionalized domestic scene is true to the cultural mythologization of the mother/writer, but it actually has little basis in the reality of Smith's life. In Smith's own accounts, her maternal and literary duties are usually at odds, competing with each other for her attention, and are seldom performed in such an integrated fashion.

This same biographer describes \textit{Elegiac Sonnets} as a collection of "little pieces of poetry which she had composed on her walks, (often accompanied by her children). . . to her children the 27th Sonnet particularly alludes."\textsuperscript{39} It is not enough, for this biographer, that Smith's writing career still leave her the time and energy to attend to her children; her poetry must itself be compositionally and thematically linked to her children. Any sacrifices incurred for the sake of her literary pursuits must be written, not on her children, but, on her own body.

Mrs. Smith devoted herself entirely to her children, and to that species of labor by which she could assist them most effectually. She was now in the place of both parents, and while she saw them healthy and happy, her application to the desk was rather a matter of delight than of complaint, though her health began to suffer considerably.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{38}"Mrs. Charlotte Smith," \textit{Public Characters of 1800-1801} (London: R. Phillips, 1801), 3:46. Although this article is unsigned, most of the contents of the first nine volumes of \textit{Public Characters} were contributed by Alexander Stephens.

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Public Characters}, 3:49.

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Public Characters}, 3:60.
As far as this early biography is concerned, interest in Smith's self-satisfaction as a writer and even in the state of her own health pale in comparison to the well-being of her children. In less specific terms, Fredric Rowton indirectly alludes to the unequivocal value of motherhood when he enthusiastically introduces Smith in the *Cyclopedia of Female Poets* with the statement: "one of the most admired of our female poets is also a noble specimen of womanly excellence."

Smith's only twentieth-century biographer, Florence Hilbish, continues this practice, in a chapter devoted entirely to Smith's children, when she insists that this poet and novelist possessed "the greatest virtue of womanhood -- she was a good mother."

Despite the numerous assertions by critics and biographers that Smith's writing remained a secondary interest where her domestic duties were concerned, a letter from Smith to her publishers, Thomas Caddell Jr. and William Davies, offers convincing evidence that Smith's own opinion was quite the opposite:

I am never so well pleased as when I have a good deal of work to do, & my greatest vexation is that the affairs of my family require so much of my attention that I cannot work at my literary business & at that only --.  

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When Smith addressed the issue of motherhood in her poetry, she painted a less celebratory picture than Hilbish and others are willing to admit. The sonnet to which her biographer in *Public Characters* alludes is hardly a testimony to the joys of motherhood; instead, Sonnet XXVII is actually one of her darkest sonnets, presenting a Blakean view of the vulnerability of childhood innocence in the world of experience:

Sighing I see yon little troop at play,  
By Sorrow yet untouch'd, unhurt by Care;  
While free and sportive they enjoy to-day,  
"Content and careless of to-morrow's fare!"  
O happy age! when Hope's unclouded ray  
Lights their green path, and prompts their simple mirth;  
Ere yet they feel the thorns that lurking lay  
To wound the wretched pilgrims of the earth;  
Making them rue the hour that gave them birth,  
And threw them on a world so full of pain,  
Where prosperous folly treads on patient worth,  
And, to deaf Pride, Misfortune pleads in vain!  
Ah!--for their future fate how many fears  
Oppress my heart--and fill mine eyes with tears!

The burden of maternal responsibility, as Smith here constructs it, is the burden of knowledge, of knowing the inescapable misery that will cause her children to curse the "hour that gave them birth." For Smith, motherhood is characterized by helpless suffering.

In "Verses intended to have been prefixed to the novel of Emmeline" Smith presents a slightly more empowered account of motherhood, describing her solitary struggle to support and raise her children. She credits "Maternal Love"
with the power to "animate the heart and guide the hand"
against the "fiend Despair," and she hopes that her children
may "escape the evils I was born to bear!" But at the
poem's end she demands of her children:

Recall my hapless days in sad review,
The long calamities I bore for you,
And--with an happier fate--resolve to prove
How well you merited your mother's love.

Smith presents her audience with a portrait of a selfless,
devoted mother who expects, as her only payment, her
children's continued self-improvement. Thus, Smith here
brings together her literary aspirations, her economic
desires, and the audience's expectations, in order to
assemble a marketable persona for herself that, drawing upon
her personal experiences, meets the public demand for, and
obsession with suffering maternal figures.

II

Nature and the Material Sublime

"To Night," one of Wordsworth's favorite poems from
Elegiac Sonnets, is also epistemologically one of Smith's
least characteristic. With its tentative postulation of a transcendental realm offering compensation for the suffering exacted by the material world, "To Night" is suggestive of the kind of recompense that Wordsworth finds at the end of "Elegiac Stanzas Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle." A poem which has itself been considered one of Wordsworth's least characteristic, "Elegiac Stanzas" soberly acknowledges nature's destructive powers, powers which inspire not love, but a "pageantry of fear" (48). After bidding farewell to the heart that "lives alone, / Housed in a dream, at distance from the Kind," (53-54) Wordsworth finds solace in the newly found fortitude which supplants the "blind" happiness and "fond illusion" of his heart:

But welcome fortitude, and patient cheer,  
And frequent sights of what is to be borne!  
Such sights, or worse, as are before me here.--  
Not without hope we suffer and we mourn. (57-60)

Wordworth's guarded expression of hope in the midst of unrelieved mourning mirrors Smith's hesitant gesture toward a metaphysical reward for such endurance:

I love thee, mournful, sober-suited Night!  
When the faint moon, yet lingering in her wane,  
And veil'd in clouds, with pale uncertain light  
Hangs o'er the waters of the restless main.

\(^{34}\)In direct contrast to his grim outlook on the future of her literary fame, Wordsworth seems determined to keep Smith's poetry before the public eye. In 1830, he encouraged Alexander Dyce to include additional sonnets by Smith in any future editions of his Specimens of English Sonnets, an anthology which Dyce dedicated to Wordsworth. "If a 2nd edition of your Specimens should be called for, you might add from H.M. Williams the sonnet to the Moon, and that to Twilight; and a few more from Charlotte Smith, particularly, 'I love thee, mournful, sober-suited night.'" William Wordsworth, "To Alexander Dyce," 10 May 1830, The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, ed. Alan G. Hill, vol. 5 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 260.
In deep depression sunk, the enfeebled mind
Will to the deaf cold elements complain,
And tell the embosom'd grief, however vain,
To sullen surges and the viewless wind.
Tho' no repose on thy dark breast I find,
I still enjoy thee--cheerless as thou art;
For in thy quiet gloom the exhausted heart
Is calm, tho' wretched; hopeless, yet resign'd.
While to the winds and waves its sorrows given,
May reach--tho' lost on earth--the ear of Heaven!

"To Night" begins in praise of the melancholy night sky, but after acknowledging the inability of the natural world to offer repose, the sonnet reconceptualizes the "quiet gloom" as an intimation of a more compassionate realm beyond earth. The poem ends paradoxically, with what we might call a hopeful hopelessness; "tho' wretched" the "exhausted heart," through its own "hopeless" resignation, finds solace in the vague promise that its vain outpouring of sorrow just "May reach . . . the ear of Heaven." This sonnet is a departure from Smith's usual articulations of anti-transcendental experiences of the natural world. Although Smith does not suppress the material world as do the male Romantics in their articulations of the transcendental sublime, her turn toward a metaphysical solution to the sonnet's dilemma temporarily aligns her with the dominant masculine ideology of the Romantic period, which looked to the infinite to solve the problems of the finite world. Thus, the poem that Wordsworth singles out as among Smith's best is, discursively, her most masculine.
Sonnet XL is more characteristic of Smith's deployment of the material sublime, which functions as a negation of the restorative power of nature.

Far on the sands, the low, retiring tide,
   In distant murmurs hardly seems to flow;
And o'er the world of waters, blue and wide,
   The sighing summer-wind forgets to blow.
As sinks the day-star in the rosy West,
   The silent wave, with rich reflection glows:
Alas! can tranquil nature give me rest,
   Or scenes of beauty soothe me to repose?
Can the soft lustre of the sleeping main,
   Yon radiant heaven, or all creation's charms,
"Erase the written troubles of the brain,"
   Which Memory tortures, and which Guilt alarms?
Or bid a bosom transient quiet prove,
   That bleeds with vain remorse and unextinguish'd love!

The opening sestet reiterates the sentimental tropes of eighteenth-century poetry, only to undercut their efficacy in dispelling her troubles: "Alas! can tranquil nature give me rest, / Or scenes of beauty soothe me to repose?" The catalogue of ethereal, natural images gives way to increasingly material concerns as the poem strategically moves from "scenes of beauty" and "radiant heaven," to the "brain," to the "bosom," and finally to "blood"; the poem pulls the twentieth-century reader down from canonical expectations of lofty Romantic concerns with abstract ideas of beauty and truth, to ineffaceable sorrows grounded in the body and "written" on the brain.

In order to understand the significance of Smith's poetic engagement with what I have simply been calling
"nature" it is important to consider the status of this concept in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. During this period, the concept of nature undergoes an important shift that leaves it connotatively fragmented. Among the male Romantic poets, nature represents a spiritual alternative to human civilization, as in Wordsworth's poetry, while for Byron, Shelley, and Blake, nature also draws attention to the physical sensations and sexual desires of the human body. In both deployments, however nature is aligned with the forces of rebellion against either the tyranny of material needs, or the institutionalized repression of physical desires. Most often, nature figures in the ideology of the male Romantics as the liberating enemy of oppressive governments and customs. Another conceptualization of nature, however, can be found in the Neoclassical political discourse that culminates in Burke's _Reflections on the Revolution in France_ (1790), which identifies the state of nature as the least desirable condition for human existence. Burke argues that established governments and social institutions are self-justified by virtue of their having survived the test of nature, and therefore should not be challenged by unnatural means, i.e. political revolution. As a result, the political discourse that Burke represents aligns nature with the maintenance of the status quo. At the time when
Smith is writing, to champion nature blindly is, in some sense, to defend (as "natural") the cultural ideology that discursively contains and manipulates female identity.

Smith's treatment of nature through the material sublime often identifies the disjunction between it and human existence. In Sonnet II, "Written at the Close of Spring," Smith does not construct the typical Romantic spiritual allegory out of the cyclical process of nature; rather, she highlights the repetition of the seasons to emphasize the lack of any such corresponding cyclicality in human life.

The garlands fade that Spring so lately wove,
Each simple flower which she had nursed in dew,
Anemonies, that spangled every grove,
The primrose wan, and hare-bell mildly blue.
No more shall violets linger in the dell,
Or purple orchids variegate the plain,
Till Spring again shall call forth every bell,
And dress with humid hands her wreaths again.--

The poem begins in a state of temporal disarray, bordering on contradiction. The first eight lines contain nine verbs enacting a number of subtle changes in tense. The sonnet describes Spring's actions in the recent past ("lately wove") and the distant past ("had nursed") and declares that in the indefinite future the fading flowers "no more shall" appear. Then the poem qualifies this dismal prediction by claiming that at some point in the future, Spring, in fact, will again bring the flowers to life. Yet, this is hardly a hopeful observation; the first four lines emphasize the
withering process by following the word "fade" with a list of flowers to which the verb applies, creating what seems like a perpetual present. While the poet meditates on past and future, the flowers of Spring nonetheless continue to die.

The third quatrain marks an abrupt shift in the poet's meditation as she applies her observations to human life.

Ah! poor Humanity! so frail, so fair,
Are the fond visions of thy early day,
Till tyrant Passion, and corrosive Care,
Bid all thy fairy colours fade away!

For Smith, the flowers of Spring are illustrative of the human condition not because they hold the promise of renewal or rejuvenation, but because they too are as frail and temporary as experience and expectation. As in "To the South Downs," Smith here points to the experience of adulthood as the source of human misery; cares and passions enact a day-to-day fading of those "fond visions" of childhood, mirroring the fate of the flowers of Spring.

At the sonnet's conclusion, Smith asks the kind of question that, several decades later, Keats forbids Autumn to ask. Smith's insistent question, "Another May new buds and flowers shall bring; / Ah! why has happiness--no second Spring?" is echoed in Keats's "Where are the songs of spring? Ay, where are they? / Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,--." Smith and Keats are more closely related
than may at first seem apparent. Smith's central emotion is despair whereas Keats's is resolution, but the strength of both poems comes from their severance of the allegorical connection between human life and nature. In neither poem does the cyclicality of the seasons, and the promise of new life with the return of spring, guarantee a rejuvenation of hope, or translate into the promise of spiritual immortality. Both poems make use of landscape description to represent human emotions and, at the same time, to signify the isolation of human experience from the natural world.

It seems clear that although Mellor argues that women Romantic writers articulate their relationship to nature primarily through the domestic sublime, Smith's sonnets neither domesticate the sublime in order to express a "feminine" unity with nature, nor exhibit the "masculine" Wordsworthian transcendence of self and other. If we accept Mellor's general assertion that the women Romantics "grounded their notion of community on a cooperative rather than possessive interaction with a Nature troped as a female friend or sister," then Smith clearly distinguished herself

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35 According to Mellor, the domestic sublime is characteristic of "those women writers who grew up in Scotland or Ireland or Whales, surrounded by the mountainous landscapes explicitly celebrated as sublime by numerous English writers and painters. For these writers . . . sublime landscapes are home scenery, the location of blissful childhood memories," and the experience of the sublime "brings with it no Oedipal anxiety, no recognition of human frailty or mortality" (97).
from other women Romantic poets. Mellor claims that women represent the sublime "as a flowing out, an ecstatic experience of co-participation in a nature they explicitly gender as female," but in the sonnet "On passing over a dreary tract of country, and near the ruins of a deserted chapel, during a tempest," Smith presents us with a scene not of "co-participation" but rather of commiseration.

The sonnet begins by appropriating a popular Romantic trope: a violent storm.

Swift fleet the billowy clouds along the sky,
Earth seems to shudder at the storm aghast;
While only beings as forlorn as I,
Court the chill horrors of the howling blast. (1-4)

In these opening lines, nature is strangely divided against itself, fearful of its own power, and into this division between earth and sky Smith inserts her poetic persona. Her own "forlorn" disposition draws her into courtship with the approaching storm, which serves not only as the external representation of her emotional state, but also as the sign of her social and economic isolation; these material concerns distinguish her from those who would flee the storm.

Even round yon crumbling walls, in search of food,
The ravenous Owl foregoes his evening flight,
And in his cave, within the deepest wood,
The fox eludes the tempest of the night. (5-8)

An interesting parallel is established here. The physical threat of the storm discourages the owl and the fox from
satisfying their material needs, but for Smith, it is just such needs which drive her out into the storm to seek relief.

    But to my heart congenial is the gloom
    Which hides me from a World I wish to shun;
    That scene where Ruin saps the mouldering tomb,
    Suits with the sadness of a wretch undone. (9-12)

The sonnet closes by again emphasizing that nothing is as well prepared as the poet herself to weather the storm: "Nor is the deepest shade, the keenest air, / Black as my fate, or cold as my despair" (13-14). Smith is discursively prohibited by the cultural codes of maternity from suppressing the materiality of her domestic and maternal burdens; she can find temporary relief from these overwhelming troubles only by seeking a cathartic experience in the physical threat of the sublime. In contrast to the imaginative expansion brought on by the transcendental sublime, the elevation of self produced by the material sublime stems from the realization, in the poems final lines, that the sublime holds no terrors greater than what the poet has already experienced in her daily life.

    There is, perhaps, no better example of Smith's deployment of the material sublime than Sonnet XLIV, "Written in the churchyard at Middleton in Sussex," a sonnet that Wordsworth liked enough to copy out by hand on the
flyleaf of his copy of Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets.* Once again, Smith implies that her strength as a poet comes from her ability to withstand the terrifying forces of nature. The poem begins with an image that was common among the poets of sensibility and that would become a popular symbol among the Romantics: the moon.

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Press'd by the Moon, mute arbitress of tides,
While the loud equinox its power combines,
The sea no more its swelling surge confines,
But o'er the shrinking land sublimely rides. (1-4)
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As in no other poem in the Romantic period, this sonnet depicts the sublimity of the moon in a manner that is not only visually startling -- as is the description in the "Simplon Pass" episode of Wordsworth's *Prelude* -- but quietly destructive as well. Unlike Gothic accounts of the sublime, in which nature is typically identified as masculine, Smith's sonnet genders the natural world as feminine. The storm and sea are under the tempestuous influence of the female moon, the "mute arbitress of the tides," and the ensuing destruction and terror result from the powerful expression of this feminine will.

Smith's alienation is underscored by the fact that the moon is itself isolated from the storm raging on earth. The silent authority of the distant moon is contrasted by the

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violent obedience of the impersonal, natural forces surrounding Smith:

    The wild blast, rising from the Western cave,
    Drives the huge billows from their heaving bed;
    Tears from their grassy tombs the village dead,
    And breaks the silent sabbath of the grave!
    With shells and sea-weed mingled, on the shore
    Lo! there bones whiten in the frequent wave;  (5-10)

The destruction brought on by the invisible interworkings of the sun, moon, and earth not only poses a physical threat to living creatures, but also violates the peaceful rest of the dead, of those who have passed beyond the effects of the material world. Far from being a horrific experience, this mass exhumation is a dark epiphany to Smith, a revelation that even the disturbed sleep of death is preferable to her own life.

    But vain to them the winds and waters rave;
    They hear the warring elements no more:
    While I am doom'd--by life's long storm oppres;
    To gaze with envy on their gloomy rest.  (11-14)

Smith almost returns, in her conclusion, to a restored state of unity with nature in death. Here though, even this restoration is forestalled and she is left to "envy" the "gloomy rest" of the dead.

According to Kant and Burke, in order for the sublime to bring about the agreement of reason and imagination that produces pleasure, the subject must experience terror or awe without fear of actual physical harm. The danger that Smith feels comes not from her immediate surroundings but from the
personal, domestic struggles to which she autobiographically alludes as "life's long storm." Her trials with her spendthrift husband, her inability to receive the family inheritance that is tied up in litigation, and her economic struggles in raising nine children on her own, all constitute the "warring elements" of her own life. Smith does not transcend the self-other dialectic, as does Wordsworth; rather, she boldly asserts her position in it.

III

Transitionality, Anxiety, and the Sonnet

As we have already noted, the year before Smith published Elegiac Sonnets, Blake privately printed Poetical Sketches, a small pamphlet of his early poems. In this volume, according to canonical criticism, Blake "follows his age in seeking a new inwardness," and thereby establishes a standard by which we can define later productions of Romanticism. 3 Bloom's rhetorical strategy for preserving the integrity of the all-male canon is particularly interesting with regard to Blake; Smith, and other "minor" poets of the late eighteenth century, are often criticized for their excessive sentimentality, but when Bloom redefines "sentimentality" as the emotional "inwardness" sought by

3Harold Bloom, commentary, The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake, ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), 967. All subsequent references to Blake will be from this edition unless otherwise cited; page and line numbers will be given parenthetically.
Blake, it achieves the kind of critical legitimacy that makes it acceptable to the all-male literary canon. Transparently, though effectively, Bloom re-values the characteristics of the Age of Sentimentality through a substitution of terms carefully chosen from the Romantic lexicon. Thus, when Bloom describes the "sensibility" of Blake's age as a "heightened mode of consciousness," he establishes the discursive foundation upon which he can then argue for the continuity of Blake's early work as it moves into the Romantic period. In an interesting example of deliberate canon formation, Bloom praises the early poems of Poetical Sketches as the "culminating works of the literary period that can be said to begin with the death of Pope in

38Dyce's anthology of British women poets, Specimens of British Poetesses (1827), already contained several of Smith's sonnets, as well as several excerpts from her longer poems, but his own qualified praise of Smith acknowledges the brevity of her popularity and singles out those elements of her poetry which reflect the sentimentalism of her age. He argues that Smith "has been excelled by few of her countrywomen," but adds that her "once very popular sonnets" nevertheless "exhibit little of concentrated thought; but they are most musical, most melancholy, and abound with touches of tenderness, grace, and beauty." Alexander Dyce, Specimens of British Poetesses (London, 1827), 254. The ambivalence that Dyce displays with regard to Smith's role in literary history is in keeping with the critical discourse that dismisses her poetry as exemplifying feminine "sentimentality," rather than elevating it as an example of what Bloom identifies as a "new inwardness."
1744 and conveniently to end with the first major poems of Blake and Wordsworth in 1789."\(^39\)

Traditional scholarship has long marveled over a historical discontinuity in literature for which it is itself responsible: namely, the absence of a "major" poet between Pope and Wordsworth.\(^40\) The critical tradition in Romantic studies has forced Smith into this ambiguous gap by misrepresenting and suppressing the opinions and assessments of her contemporaries, especially those of Wordsworth. Thus, this "absence" actually represents the strategic selectivity of a critical discourse concerned with preserving the historical discontinuity between Neoclassicism and Romanticism in order to underscore the "revolutionary" appearance of Lyrical Ballads in 1798. Almost forty years ago, Northrop Frye warned that this kind of periodization, namely the conceptualization of a "pre-Romantic" period, leads to a false teleology that

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\(^39\) Bloom, 967. Bloom explains Blake's relationship to pre-Romanticism by "conveniently" creating a literary period over which Blake can be viewed as holding sway, and the single major development of this period, according to Bloom, is the very same characteristic that Hilbish, James Foster, and other critics of Smith describe as one of her strongest poetic qualities: landscape description. According to Bloom, "what is immediately evident is that Blake is already closer to eighteenth century poets later than Thomson (to Collins and Chatterton in particular) and that his practice as a landscape poet in the 1770s is premonitory of the work of Shelley and Keats fifty years later." Harold Bloom, Blake's Apocalypse (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 13.

mythologizes the birth of Romanticism." A closer look at Smith, however, helps to dispel the notion that the decades preceding *Lyrical Ballads* represent a fallow period in British literature, a period important only for its Romantic intimations. Although canonical evaluations of Smith typically discount her historical importance by claiming that "her fate in literary history . . . has been to fall somewhere between periods conventionally defined by Thomas Gray and William Wordsworth," the constructedness of Smith's liminality actually marks the importance her intertextual engagement with Neoclassical and Romantic discourses.

One does not need to look far to find explicit examples of her incorporation of Neoclassical conventions and her anticipation of early Romantic techniques. The first poem in *Elegiac Sonnets* is a collage of just such disparate literary elements: it invokes the muse, represents the poet as an alienated figure, deploys images of nature as the

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4Frye convincingly argues that our contemporary characterizations of historical literary periods emphasizes opposition and contrast to the point of distorting the concerns of these periods. "What we do is to set up, as the logical expression of Augustanism, some impossibly pedantic view of following rules and repressing feelings, which nobody could ever have held, and then treat any symptom of freedom or emotion as a departure from this. Our students are thus graduated with a vague notion that the Age of Sensibility was the time when poetry moved from a reptilian Classicism, all cold and dry reason, to a mammalian Romanticism, all warm and wet feeling." "Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility," in Eighteenth-Century English Literature: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. James L. Clifford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 311.

5Zimmerman, 58.
solitary haunt of the doomed poet-ego, uses capitalized nouns to represent abstract emotions, and even quotes Pope in its final line.

The partial Muse has from my earliest hours
Smiled on the rugged path I'm doom'd to tread,
And still with sportive hand has snatch'd wild flowers,
To weave fantastic garlands for my head:
But far, far happier is the lot of those
Who never learn'd her dear delusive art;
Which, while it decks the head with many a rose,
Reserves the thorn to fester in the heart.
For still she bids soft Pity's melting eye
Stream o'er the ills she knows not to remove,
Points every pang, and deepens every sigh
Of mourning Friendship, or unhappy Love.
Ah! then, how dear the Muse's favours cost,
"If those paint sorrow best--who feel it most!"

By invoking the muse in the opening line, Smith participates in a tradition extending through both Neoclassicism and Romanticism, but in doing so as a woman poet, she initiates a relationship for which canonical criticism has yet to provide an explanatory paradigm. As we saw in Chapter One of this dissertation, twentieth-century canonical criticism has appropriated the mythological image of the duplicitous Sphinx to characterize the enigmatic identity of the female poet who must maintain a same-sex relationship with the muse. At least for one nineteenth-century critic, however, this relationship does not seem to pose a problem in Smith's case; Brydges claims that "of Charlotte Smith's poetry it is not easy to speak in terms too high. . . . Her name, therefore, is to live among the most favored of the muse."43

43Brydges, 100.
Brydges's compliment is ambiguous; is Smith favored as a poet by the Muse, or is she favored as a muse by male poets? The relationship between women poets and the muse in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literature is a vexed one, involving the traditionally Romantic burden of poethood and the added cultural burden of being a woman "doom'd" to this vocation.

Smith characterizes her relationship to the muse in sadistically erotic terms. It is with a "sportive" hand that the muse picks the flowers from which she weaves Smith's garland." But whereas a poet's garland is traditionally woven from laurel leaves, Smith's garland consists of "wild flowers" which the Muse has violently "snatch'd" from their beds, an image suggestive of defloration, a loss of innocence, or perhaps a defiance of domestic expectations, the symbols of which the female poet wears with pride. Like the "Cold Pastoral" of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," Smith's muse is an antagonistic one, teasing her out of thought and then denying her relief from the suffering that inspires her poetry."

"Garland" alternately means a "collection" or "anthology" of poems, and through this meaning Smith may also be giving credit to the muse for the poems in the volume that follows.

Smith's language is echoed in Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale." Her lament, "But far, far happier is the lot of those / Who never learn'd her dear delusive art," bring to mind for the twentieth-century reader Keats's insistent address to the nightingale that his wish for oblivion is "not through envy of thy happy lot, / But being too happy in thine happiness."
The burden under which Smith suffers is a troped one, a heightened -- and therefore vulnerable -- emotional sensitivity, the same burden that Keats and Shelley would later cite as the curse of being a poet.\(^4\) Smith's sadistic muse takes delight in ceremoniously forcing this burden upon her, and at the end of the sonnet, inspiration itself is demystified and re-expressed in terms of an economic exchange; poetry does not come cheaply for Smith. The "cost" of the "Muse's favours" are "dear," not only emotionally and psychologically, but socially as well.

Using what would become another popular object of Romantic contemplation, Sonnet III, "To the Nightingale," also considers the burden of poetic inspiration and composition.

Poor melancholy bird--that all night long
Tell'st to the Moon thy tale of tender woe;
From what sad cause can such sweet sorrow flow,
And whence this mournful melody of song?

The ostensible motivation for the sonnet is the poet's desire to know the meaning behind the nightingale's song,

\(^4\)In describing this ritual of inspiration, Smith makes use of a standard eighteenth-century convention; capitalized nouns represent the abstract emotions of "Pity," "Friendship," and "Love" each of which the muse perverts in order to cause the poet ills that "she knows not to remove." Smith appears to be going against the practice of her contemporaries since at least one critic at this time laments the passing of this convention. Seward complains bitterly, in 1786, about "the senseless custom of excluding all capitals except at the beginning of sentences, and to actual proper names. Such exclusion is of serious bad consequence to poetry . . . When abstracted qualities are clothed and embodied by fancy, common sense revolts at their sneaking appearance with a little letter." As we have already seen, Smith's continuation of this practice was apparently not enough to convince Seward of the merit of her poetry. Anna Seward, \textit{Letters of Anna Seward} (Edinburgh: George Ramsay and Co., 1811), 163-64.
but this question is eclipsed at the poem's conclusion by the narrator's concern with her own suffering. The actual motivation emerges at the conclusion as a desire for identification.

Pale Sorrow's victims wert thou once among,
Thou' now released in woodlands wild to rove?
Say--hast thou felt from friends some cruel wrong,
Or did'st thou--martyr of disastrous love?
Ah! songstress sad! that such my lot might be,
To sigh, and sing at liberty--like thee!

Among the poets of Sensibility and of Romanticism, the nightingale represents both the embodiment of unattainable beauty in nature, as well as the expression of suffering through song. As it is appropriated by the male Romantics, the nightingale most often seems to serve in the former capacity -- representing a level of poetic expression beyond the capability of the poet -- or as an image that initiates a desire for escape. However, the myth of Philomela that lies beneath the surface of these allusions provides the means for a much stronger sense of self-identification for Smith as a woman.

Smith's identification with the nightingale operates on a two-fold level. It represents a desire not only to become a creator of poetry (and not just a source of inspiration) but also to escape her suffering, like Philomela, by drawing creativity from it. Unlike male appropriations of the nightingale that pursue the bird as something to be captured, Smith is concerned with becoming a twin companion
to the nightingale, and more importantly, with protecting
the bird. Sonnet VII, "On the departure of the Nightingale"
reflects upon the vulnerability of the bird in the
heterosexual realm of mating and courtship.

    Sweet poet of the woods! --a long adieu!
    Farewel, soft minstrel of the early year!
    Ah! 'twill be long ere thou shalt sing anew,
    And pour thy music on "the Night's dull ear."
Whether on Spring thy wandering flights await,
    Or whether silent in our groves you dwell,
The pensive Muse shall own thee for her mate,
    And still protect the song she loves so well.

Smith bids farewell to the nightingale, not as a "deceiving
elf" as does Keats, but rather as a "Sweet poet" and "soft
minstrel." Whereas Coleridge and Keats praise and then seem
to reprimand the nightingale, Smith expresses anxious
concern for its well-being. Significantly, the nightingale
finds protection in its relationship with its mate, the
pensive Muse, signifying a homoerotic relationship safe from
the threatening realm of heterosexuality.

    The dangers of heterosexuality, interwoven with the
cultural demands of domesticity and with the procreative
expectations of Spring, pose the greatest threat to both the
nightingale and Smith. She characterizes the distinct
relationships that men and women maintain with the
nightingale in the second half of the sonnet:

    With cautious step the love-lorn youth shall glide
    Thro' the lone brake that shades thy mossy nest;
    And shepherd girls from eyes profane shall hide
    The gentle bird, who sings of pity best:
    For still thy voice shall soft affections move,
    And still be dear to Sorrow, and to Love!
According to Smith, the male poet, like a "love-lorn youth," stalks the nightingale as it rests in its "mossy nest," while the female poet protects the "gentle bird," identifying with its song of pity. Smith seems to suggest that the male desire for the nightingale is a desire to appropriate suffering in order to create poetry from vicarious experience, whereas the female poet, already burdened with domestic and maternal responsibilities, embraces the nightingale as an expression of this suffering. In this sonnet, then, Smith views her poetry as an expression of distinctly female experience, verbalized by the muse and the poet, in contrast to male poetry, which must be created, or procreated, from the heterosexual union of male poet and female muse.

Up to this point, we have seen how Smith's language, thematic concerns, and authorial positioning anticipate and appropriate the tropes of canonical Romanticism, and I would now like to look at the responses of Wordsworth and Coleridge to Smith's structural influence on the sonnet form in the Romantic period in order to identify the rhetorical strategies that have contributed to her marginalization. Wordsworth's interest in preserving Smith's poetry has attracted little attention despite the fact that it represents his critical appreciation of her style and its
importance to his own sonnet writing. In a letter of thanks to Alaric Watts, who presented him with an anthology of sonnets in 1836, Wordsworth again acknowledges Smith as a modern forerunner in that genre:

Your [Watts'] collection as far as I am yet acquainted with it appears to be judiciously made; I cannot but regret however that it does not contain a single specimen from my old friend Charlotte Smith, who was the first Modern distinguished in that Composition.

Wordsworth's recognition of Smith as the "first Modern" writer of sonnets complicates his assertion that Milton was the most immediate influence on his sonnets. Despite his praise of Smith, Wordsworth's anxiety over her influence on his own work becomes apparent in his narrative description of his own turn to sonnet writing in his Poems in Two Volumes of 1807. Avoiding Smith's "irregular" Shakespearean sonnet, Wordsworth claims to have built upon Milton's adaptation of the Italian octave/sestet structure, and to have liberated the strict regularity of the Miltonic form in much the same way that Milton liberated the Italian form.

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47 Bishop Hunt's study remains the most thorough examination of Smith's influence on Wordsworth, but he is careful throughout not to jeopardize Wordsworth's creative autonomy; after pointing out stylistic similarities between Book V of The Prelude and Smith's "I love thee, mournful sober-suited night," Hunt quickly retreats from accusing Wordsworth of derivativeness by transforming these similarities into a tribute to the capaciousness of Wordsworth's creative mind: "Such is the constancy of Wordsworth's auditory imagination, that words, phrases, and patterns of phrase, from even the most unlikely writers, turn up time and time again in his own poetry." In a Herculean effort at preserving the stability of the Romantic canon, Hunt argues that Smith's "use of the imagery of light and vision and flowers sets a poetic precedent for the much greater originality of Wordsworth and Coleridge" [emphasis mine]. "Wordsworth and Charlotte Smith" 88-91.

By Wordsworth's own account, Milton's sonnets led him to reconsider his dismissal of the sonnet form as "egregiously absurd."

It is in a letter to Walter Savage Landor, that Wordsworth recreates the moment that this conversion took place:

Many years ago my sister happened to read to me the sonnets of Milton, which I could at that time repeat; but somehow or other I was singularly struck with the style of harmony, and the gravity, and republican austerity of those impositions. In the course of the afternoon I produced 3 sonnets, and soon after many others; and since that time, and from want of resolution to take up anything of length, I have filled up many a moment in writing Sonnets, which, if I had never fallen into the practice, might have easily been better employed."

By designating Milton as his literary precursor, Wordsworth attempts to recuperate his own interest in writing sonnets, a practice which he implies is a waste of time and inferior to writing poems of "length." If Wordsworth must confess to embracing what he thinks is an inferior genre, at least he can claim to have done so in emulation of a superior literary figure. However, the letter to Landor in which Wordsworth positions himself as the inheritor of Milton's sonnet form, in order to deny the influence of "minor" sonneteers like Smith, rewrites Dorothy's account of one such formative moment in 1802:

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William is now sitting by me, at 1/2 past 10 o'clock. I have been beside him ever since tea running the heel of a stocking, repeating some of his sonnets to him, listening to his own repeating, reading some of Milton's, and the Allegro and Penseroso. It is a quiet keen frost . . . my beloved William is turning over the leaves of Charlotte Smith's sonnets, but he keeps his hand to his poor chest, pushing aside his breastplate.50

The dynamics of this scene are revealing. Wordsworth's and Milton's sonnets are part of a verbal exchange between William and Dorothy, but Smith's sonnets are read silently, privately. In fact, Dorothy does not even use the active verbs "reading," and "repeating" in combination with Smith's sonnets, the leaves of which Wordsworth is passively "turning over."

The same anxiety that would lead Wordsworth unconsciously to rewrite, or to forget altogether, this scene with Dorothy appears to motivate the addition of a new introductory poem to Part I of the 1827 edition of Poems in Two Volumes, in which Wordsworth aggressively defends his choice of genre.

Scorn not the Sonnet; Critic, you have frowned, Mindless of its just honors; with this key Shakespeare unlocked his heart; the melody Of this small lute gave ease to Petrarch's wound; A thousand times this pipe did Tasso sound; With it Camoens soothed an exile's grief; The Sonnet glittered a gay myrtle leaf Amid the cypress with which Dante crowned His visionary brow: a glow-worm lamp, It cheered mild Spenser, called from Faery-land To struggle through dark ways; and when a damp Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand The Thing became a trumpet; whence he blew

Soul-animating strains--alas, too few!
Written some time between 1820 and 1827, "Scorn not the Sonnet" reflects Wordsworth's growing anxiety that his interest in the sonnet will expose him to criticism for not only using an inferior poetic form but also for following the example of inferior writers. Here he unequivocally gives a list of the canonical male poets whose tradition he wants to be seen as continuing. Contemporary criticism has followed Wordsworth's instructions.

While Wordsworth presents a carefully defined and calculated developmental narrative of his interest in the sonnet, his own critical perspective on this verse form remains somewhat less clear. Almost thirty years after the appearance of Poems in Two Volumes, Wordsworth admitted "though I have written so many, I have scarcely made up my own mind upon the subject," and he vaguely depicts the sonnet as a "dew drop" in which the elements blend into one another, ultimately returning the reader to the beginning. He criticizes what he sees as the unnatural division in the Italian sonnet between the octet and sestet, and prefers instead Milton's variation on this structure.

In the better half of his [Milton's] sonnets the sense does not close with the rhyme at the eighth line, but overflows into the second portion of the metre. Now it has struck me, that this is not done merely to gratify the ear by variety and freedom of sound, but also to aid in giving that pervading sense of intense Unity in which the excellence of the Sonnet has always seemed to me mainly to consist. Instead of looking at this
composition as a piece of architecture, making a whole out of three parts, I have been much in the habit of preferring the image of an orbicular body, --a sphere-- or a dew-drop.\footnote{William Wordsworth, "To Alexander Dyce," 22 April 1833, The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, ed. Alan G. Hill, vol. 5 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 604-5.}

Wordsworth modifies the structure of the sonnet by varying the position of the "volta" or "turn" within the poem, in some cases eliminating this turn altogether. Canonical accounts credit Wordsworth with creating this innovation in the Miltonic sonnet, but Smith also experiments with a variety of patterns, and in 1784 she was already freely moving the sonnet's turn as a function of her "irregular" form.

Coleridge exhibits a similar anxiety over the influence of Smith and the "minor" sonneteers, and his anxiety masquerades as contempt for the genre, as expressed in his satirical "Sonnets Attempted in the Manner of Contemporary Writers," first published in the Monthly Magazine for November 1797 under the pseudonym Nehemiah Higginbottom. Although he mocks the melancholic tropes commonly found in Smith's poetry, in his historical account of the development of the modern sonnet form in English he skips Shakespeare and Milton and equates Smith and Bowles with Petrarch as popularizers of the genre:

Petrarch, although not the inventor of the Sonnet, was the first who made it popular; and his countrymen have taken his poems as the model. Charlotte Smith and Bowles are they who first made the Sonnet popular among
the present English; I am justified therefore by analogy in deducing its laws from their compositions.\textsuperscript{52}

By analogy, Coleridge designates Smith as one of the sources in English of the structural rules governing the sonnet. In doing so it is not surprising that he then defines the sonnet as "a small poem, in which some lonely feeling is developed." Consequently, "poems in which no lonely feeling is developed, are not Sonnets because the author has chosen to write them in fourteen lines." Rereading Coleridge's assertions in contrast to canonical definitions of the sonnet, as it supposedly developed in the Romantic period, draws attention to the need for a paradigm shift in several ways. First, unlike canonical accounts of the rebirth of the sonnet, Coleridge places Smith instead of Milton at the epicenter of this literary revival. Second, he identifies the single most consistent thematic trait of Smith's poetry -- its melancholy sense of loneliness -- as the central concern of the sonnet, and, third, he elevates the thematic content of the sonnet above its structural format as its defining characteristic.

In Wordsworth's relationship to Smith, then, we find a revealing conflict, a conflict that epitomizes the anxiety of male Romantic poets and critics regarding the influence of women poets. Wordsworth repeatedly acknowledges his

admiration of Smith's sonnets and cites her profound importance to British Literature. Throughout his life he attempts to keep her poetry before the reading public by recommending her sonnets to editors of popular anthologies. His own copy of *Elegiac Sonnets* suggests his careful reading of her poems. Yet he maintains, particularly in his later career, a defensive posture toward the influence of her work on his own, and in doing so he exhibits an anxiety that completely elides her presence from his work. Almost a century and-a-half after his death, what we should find most revealing in this conflict is not so much Wordsworth's erasure of Smith's influence, but rather the un-critical acceptance and perpetuation of this erasure by Romantic scholarship, which continues to preserve the established boundaries of canonical literary periods at the cost of forgetting marginalized poets such as Smith.

To summarize, Smith's reputation as a poet is as much the casualty of literary periodization as it is the victim of a critical discourse that continues to be dominated by the ideology of canon formation. The critical discourse circumscribing Romanticism places the notion of transitionality under erasure and reiterates the Romantic ideas that Romanticism self-begottenly burst forth with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, and that this experimental volume of poetry ushered in a new literary age of writers
influenced by the major figures of literary history. Preserving the continuity of the all male canon at the expense of historical accuracy, canonical criticism argues that the early Romantics are neither the descendants of Neoclassicism nor the offspring of the Age of Sensibility; rather, the early Romantics are credited with reanimating pre-18th-century aesthetics and continuing the interrupted lineage of Shakespeare and Milton. According to this critical tradition, the works of Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, in the years prior to Lyrical Ballads, are not seen as transitional texts, transforming the ideologies of the Neoclassicism of the Augustan Age; instead, critics have traditionally viewed these early works as being anticipatory of later developments in Romanticism. Yet, many of the same qualities that critics praise in the early work of the Romantics are embodied in the works of those non-canonical writers who flourished in the period that has variously been labeled the Age of Sensibility, pre-aestheticism, or Pre-Romanticism.\(^{53}\)

\(^{53}\)Northrop Frye argues that the concept of "pre-Romanticism" leads to a "false teleology" whereby contemporary criticism imposes its own intentions and expectations upon eighteenth-century literature; he nonetheless proposes the term "Age of Sensibility" as a "label" for period sandwiched between the Augustan Age and the Romantic movement. "Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility," 311. Samuel Monk refers to this same period as the pre-aesthetic age, and most recently Marshall Brown revives the term Pre-Romanticism and argues that it "does not designate a preliminary state of romanticism," but rather a period that "was not yet romantic." Preromanticism (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 2.
This, then, is the ambiguous literary period in which Charlotte Smith finds herself. She is a participant in some of the same literary discourses, and a witness of the same historical tensions, that produced what would later be recognized as the seeds of Romantic thought and literature. Smith has nonetheless been unable to claim a position as either a transitional or an influential figure. As we have seen, these limited positions are themselves the product of interpretive paradigms invested in preserving the traditional canon by containing challenges from non-canonical writers such as Smith. Her own ideological concerns are ignored by literary history because linear periodization ignores discourses that parallel and intersect the master discourse; this is where the rhizomic model of interpretation can help us retrieve the complexity and richness of the literary intertextuality that strict periodization overlooks.
CHAPTER 4

THE RISE AND FALL OF JOANNA BAILLIE'S LITERARY THEORY: READING WORDSWORTH'S "PREFACE" THROUGH THE "INTRODUCTORY DISCOURSE" TO A SERIES OF PLAYS

O lovely sisters! well it shews
How wide and far your bounty flows:
Then why from me withhold your beams?
Unvisited of heav'ly dreams,
Whene'er I aim at heights sublime,
Still downward am I call'd to seek some stubborn rhyme.
Joanna Baillie, "An Address to the Muses" (1790)

There is a pleasure in poetic pains
Which only poets know;--'t was rightly said;
Whom could the muses else allure to tread
Their smoothest paths, to wear their lightest chains?
William Wordsworth, "Sonnet: There is a pleasure in poetic pains" (1827)

As part of the recent surge in interest regarding the women writers of the British Romantic Period, numerous scholars including Stuart Curran, Marlon Ross, and Jonathan Wordsworth have drawn attention to the fact that Joanna Baillie's "Introductory Discourse" to her Series of Plays promotes a set of aesthetic ideals, in 1798, that closely resemble the poetic theories of Wordsworth's 1800 "Preface" to Lyrical Ballads.¹ William Brewer has also sketched the connections between Baillie's plays and those of Byron,¹ while Marjean Purinton has examined Baillie's work in the


larger context of Romantic drama; in addition, several feminist critics, following the interpretive paradigms established by Anne Mellor, have recently taken up the important task of mapping Baillie's participation in what they argue is a distinctly feminine discourse of Romanticism. Yet, the complex intertextual resonances between Baillie and Wordsworth still remain largely unexplored. Thus far, discussions of Baillie's precedent-setting essay tend to unfold within the idiom of source study and primarily seek to determine whether or not the aesthetic theories espoused by the poems of *Lyrical Ballads*, and later by the "Preface," are derivative of Baillie's work; however, this limited interest in textual borrowings loses sight of the larger picture. Jonathan Wordsworth, for example, has suggested that the hooting owl passage from Wordsworth's "There was a boy" has a possible source in a scene from Baillie's tragedy on hatred, *De Monfort*, (based on the evidence that there was a copy of Baillie's plays at Alfoxden during the composition of *Lyrical Ballads*) but this assertion only enables him to draw the ambiguous conclusion that "irrespective of links and echoes, Baillie and Wordsworth are kindred spirits." This assessment is

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indicative of the critical ambivalence that envelops figures such as Baillie who, though part of the emerging constellation of writers whose rediscovered texts are forcing us to recontextualize the early works of the Romantic period, do not fit into the linear structure of influence dictated by Harold Bloom's well-known model of Oedipal anxiety.

As I have been arguing throughout this dissertation, our absorption in Bloom's interpretive methodology is so thorough at this point in the history of Romantic scholarship that even when we attempt to look at relationships outside of the established canon of male writers, and hence outside of the Oedipal matrix, we still impose the rigid structures of revision and influence as Bloom has formulated them. For this reason, scholars approaching Baillie's work often feel a residual pressure to look for textual proof that Wordsworth and Coleridge read the "Introductory Discourse" before *Lyrical Ballads* went to press; the purpose of this interpretive focus is, of course, to determine whether or not Baillie directly influenced the composition of this watershed volume by contributing specific theories or poetic phrasings. But influence can operate in many different forms. While I am not dismissing the importance of identifying substantive borrowings, I want to emphasize that such source studies, by themselves, fail
to re-shape our conception of the dynamic context of early
Romantic aesthetics and simply aim at substituting one
monolithic paradigm for another. The dominance of this kind
of critical methodology leads us into the ahistorical
practice of reading Baillie through Wordsworth instead of
reading the aesthetic theories of both poets within the
historical context formed, in part, by the dialogic tensions
between their early projects.

In other words, our critical investigation needs to be
open to the possibility that Baillie might be an important
literary figure for reasons other than just the similarities
that she shares with Wordsworth. As contemporary
scholarship begins to examine the proliferation of women's
writing during the Romantic period, it is important that we
have a critical model in place that helps to map what Curran
has recently described as a "remarkable period of creative
rivalry." To reiterate the central assumption of this
dissertation: Baillie and other Romantic writers, men and
women on both sides of the canonical divide, are part of a
complex intertextual network, the kind of network that
Deleuze and Guattari have likened to a rhizomic root system,
consisting of multiple interrelations, tangential

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5Stuart Curran, "Mary Robinson's Lyrical Tales in Context," Re-
Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776-1837, ed. Carol
Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania
Press, 1994), 19. Curran is specifically discussing the "dynamics of
the interrelationship" of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, and Mary
Robinson during the period prior to publication of the second edition of
Lyrical Ballads; into this dynamic I want to insert Baillie as well.
influences, and disparate offshoots. If we are to expand our understanding of the aesthetic origins of Romanticism, especially in light of recent inquiries into the roles played by women writers, then we must interrogate the seemingly inexplicable "links and echoes" that rhizomically connect such "kindred spirits" as Baillie and Wordsworth.

The central argument of this chapter is that Baillie's codification of her aesthetics in the "Introductory Discourse" of 1798, regardless of whether or not it served as a direct source for the ideas of the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*, provided the impetus for Wordsworth's articulation of his own poetic theories two years later. The strength of Baillie's aesthetic theory derives from the clarity and forcefulness of her authoritative prose, and I intend to show that subtle shifts in Wordsworth's own rhetorical strategy, from the "Advertisement" of 1798 to the "Preface" of 1800, indicate that he felt sufficient anxiety over the power of Baillie's programmatic manifesto to codify his own ideas in response. The "anxiety" to which I am here referring is distinct from the Oedipal anxiety posited by Bloom's model. Ross has redefined the anxiety of Romantic male poets in terms of their defensive reaction to the growing number of women poets, but Wordsworth's anxious response to Baillie poses a still more problematic situation. Since Baillie published anonymously in 1798,
Wordsworth would have been unaware that the "Introductory Discourse" had not been written by a man. As a result, when we read the 1800 "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*, we do not see Wordsworth misreading and revising the work of a strong precursor nor do we see him attempting to silence the voice of a popular female poet. Instead, we find him attempting to distance and distinguish himself from a contemporary writer, assumed to be a man, whose ideas come dangerously close to the theories espoused by *Lyrical Ballads* and threaten to absorb them into the ubiquitous ideology that would later be deemed the "spirit of the age."

In mapping the rise and fall of Baillie's literary theory, this chapter falls into three parts. First, this chapter examines the central aesthetic ideas of Baillie's thesis and attempts to put them into historical context. Too often, Baillie's ideas are compared to, and judged against, our established notions of Romantic aesthetic theory; while I believe that her ideas are similar to much of what Wordsworth and others theorize during the period, it is more productive for us to look at the earlier aesthetic ideas to which Baillie is responding in order to situate her properly within the rhizomic network that connects Romantic

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*Ross observes that even after Baillie was identified as the author of *A Series of Plays* in 1800, many critics still refused to believe that a woman had written the theoretical introduction. For more information on the popular debates over the authorship of Baillie's plays see Margaret S. Carhart, *The Life and Work of Joanna Baillie*, Yale Studies in English 64 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923).*
aesthetics to other discourses. Second, this chapter will explore the complicated intersections between Wordsworth’s “Preface” and Baillie’s “Introductory Discourse” that I have briefly described in the previous paragraph. Although Baillie is remembered as a dramatist who also wrote poetry, I am focusing entirely on Baillie’s “Introductory Discourse” for two reasons: 1) her essay is a rare example of a theoretical manifesto by a Romantic woman writer and 2) her own contemporaries (as we shall see) valued her plays primarily for the revolutionary aesthetic theories that they espoused. The final section of this chapter will then look at the critical response to Baillie in order to see how the same rhetoric of praise that elevated her above most male writers in the nineteenth-century, eventually came to dismiss her from the canon in the twentieth century.

I

The Sympathetic Curiosity

Several ideas in Baillie’s “Introductory Discourse” clearly link her to the nascent Romantic aesthetics that are poetically intimated by Lyric Ballads in 1798. These include her emphasis on using natural language to describe common scenes from rustic life, her valorization of the middle and lower classes of society as the best subjects for literary treatment, and her interest in representing the
power of the emotions and the consequences of violent passions. As early as 1790, in fact, Baillie was already writing lyrical poetry about rustic life; Poems: Wherein it is Attempted to Describe Certain Views of Nature and Rustic Manners deal extensively with the language and experiences of poor, humble, country people. In “A Winter’s Day,” for example, the main character is a “labouring hind,” and the poem quickly establishes an opposition between the natural and domestic spheres of his rustic world. The farmer “wakes from sleep at the unwelcome call / And finds himself but the same poor man / As when he went to rest,” and as he is preparing for the day’s work, “the family cares call next upon the wife / To quit her mean but comfortable bed.” The poem constructs a dialectic between the domestic community and the rustic, external world, such that a sympathetic union of the inhabitants of the domestic sphere enables a cooperative relationship between the two worlds. Baillie clearly genders the domestic sphere as feminine and the world beyond as masculine, giving equal attention and importance to both. Nature offers no solace to the family,

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Baillie explains in a footnote that she is using an archaic Scottish term referring to a poor farmer who belongs to a “class of men very common in the west of Scotland, ere political economy was thought of.” This evocation of a pre-economic Eden is evidence of Baillie’s conscious elevation of the lower classes and the language that they used. Joanna Baillie, The Dramatic and Poetical Works (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1851), 4. All subsequent references to this edition are cited parenthetically in the text.
but as long as all members of the household fulfill their duties, it rewards them with a peaceful existence.

In a particularly ominous passage, however, the supposedly innocent games of young boys foreshadow the potential destructiveness that the cultural construction of gender fosters:

In scatter’d groups the little idle boys,
With purple fingers moulding in the snow
Their icy ammunition pant for war;
And drawing up in opposite array,
Send forth a mighty shower of well-aimed balls,
Each tiny hero tries his growing strength,
And burns to beat the foe-men off the field.
Or on the well-worn ice in eager throngs,
After short race, shoot rapidly along,
Trip up each others heels, and on the surface
With studded shoes draw many a chalky line.
Untired and glowing with the healthful sport
They cease not till the sun hath run his course,
And threatening clouds, slow rising from the north,
Spread leaden darkness o’er the face of heaven;
Then by degrees they scatter to their homes,
Some with a broken head or bloody nose,
To claim their mother’s pity, who, most skillful!
Cures all their troubles with a bit of bread.

Violence stems from idleness, and from the patriarchal myths that praise heroes, heroism, and warfare -- boyhood images that in their literal realization send the young believers fleeing to their mothers. The poem concludes with a solemn story told by a retired soldier, now an old wandering beggar, who is welcomed into the farmer’s home, given food and shelter, and honored for the opportunity that he provides for the farmer, whose “honest heart is fill’d with manly kindness,” to perform an act of generosity. The
poem's moral, like its language and characters, is both simple and familiar: in the natural world, an honest day's work and an act of kindness toward the less-fortunate bring humble, though satisfying, rewards. Baillie's early verse is sensitive to the discourse of the domestic and natural worlds and presents a lyrical rendering of their interaction in a rustic setting. These are some of the most recognizable aesthetic concerns that she shares with Wordsworth, but looking only for such "Wordsworthian" ideas inherent in Baillie's work (ideas which, in 1790, were not yet widely recognized as "Wordsworthian") forces us to read backwards, to read Baillie through Wordsworth, and this limits our understanding of her overall aesthetic project.

The aesthetic theory expressed in Baillie's "Introductory Discourse" eight years later grows out of her search for a poetic telos, a search which builds upon the late-eighteenth-century aesthetic discourses that considered the evocation of powerful emotions, through the sublime, to be the highest purpose of literature. In pursuit of this end, male writers and critics in the late 1700s began to appropriate the emotional imagery present in much of the sentimental women's writing of the period, and by filtering it through the masculinizing grid of the transcendental sublime, they demarcated an exclusively male realm in which intense emotions and their accompanying actions formed an
index of masculinity. Baillie addresses the dominant aesthetic concern of her male contemporaries by undertaking an examination, in her plays, of powerful emotions and their effects on individual human actions. Baillie's stated rationale for writing a long, detailed preface is to explain and justify the overall plan of A Series of Plays, the idea behind which, as her subtitle explains, is "to delineate the stronger passions of the mind, each passion being the subject of a tragedy and a comedy." The first volume contained Basil and The Tryal, a tragedy and a comedy on love, respectively, and De Monfort, a tragedy on hatred. It is important to remember, however, that Baillie remained anonymous until the third edition of A Series of Plays appeared in 1800; until then it was widely assumed that the writer was a man, most likely Walter Scott. As a woman writer trying to gain access to the male terrain of dramatic verse, Baillie strategically writes in drag, effecting androgyny through public anonymity, discursively masking her gender with what many critics identified as a masculine treatment of her subject.

In order to understand the context in which Wordsworth and Baillie engage in their own "creative rivalry," we need first to determine the larger context to which the "Introductory Discourse" initially responds, and therefore we should begin by looking at the central thesis of her
aesthetic project. The anchoring concept of the "Introductory Discourse" is the "sympathetic curiosity," a universal human interest which she describes as "our best and most powerful instructor."

From it we are taught the propensities and decencies of ordinary life, and are prepared for distressing and difficult situations. . . . It is to this sympathetic curiosity of our nature, exercised upon mankind in great and trying occasions, and under the influence of 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.(4)

Baillie's concern with "great and trying occasions," "stronger passions," "the grand, the generous, and the terrible," and the "high and powerfully tragic" appears strikingly similar to the typical descriptive accounts of the sublime that were already popular among eighteenth-century writers. But whereas Edmund Burke, Joseph Addison, John Dennis, and their contemporaries acknowledged a subjective component of sublimity and then focused their efforts on categorizing the external sources that initiate the sublime experience, Baillie turns her attention inward to interrogate the human propensity for viewing scenes of terror or pain. The discursive internalization of experience and perception is a common technique in such lyrical ballads as "Tintern Abbey" and "Frost at Midnight."

However, for Wordsworth and Coleridge scenes of terror or awe trigger the pleasurable interaction of memory,
imagination, and reason, while for Baillie it is to the sympathetic curiosity alone that these scenes appeal, and it is likewise from the sympathetic curiosity that these scenes -- insofar as they contribute to "the study of human nature" -- derive their power. Baillie's formulation of the sympathetic curiosity represents the only attempt in British Romanticism to identify a specific, singular intellectual faculty to which such external agents of sublimity directly appeal.

As Baillie's argument unfolds, it parallels, structurally, Burke's delineation of the primary passions of the aesthetic experience. Operating within Burke's formulation of the sublime, which receives its impetus from the twin drives of self-preservation and preservation of the species, is a chain of passions, and the "three principal links in this chain are sympathy, imitation, and ambition."

It is by the first of these passions that we enter into the concerns of others; that we are moved as they are moved, and are never suffered to be indifferent spectators of almost any thing which men can do or suffer. For sympathy must be considered as a sort of substitution, by which we are put into the place of another man, and affected in many respects as he is affected; so that this passion may either partake of the nature of those which regard self-preservation, and turning upon pain may be a source of the sublime; or it may turn upon ideas of pleasure . . . It is by this principle chiefly that poetry, painting, and other affecting arts, transfuse their passions from one breast to another, and are often capable of grafting a delight on wretchedness, misery, and death itself. It is a common observation that, objects which in the reality would shock, are in tragical, and such like

See the discussion of Burke in Chapter Two.
representations, the source of a very high species of pleasure. (44)

For Burke, as for Baillie, sympathy enables a vicarious projection of the self into the subject position of the sufferer. Sympathy is not an expression of compassion but rather a means of bridging the gap between self and other. For both Burke and Baillie, this act of self-projection is itself generative of pleasing feelings, but the specific locus of this pleasure in Burkean aesthetics is what motivates Baillie's determined response. In Burke's account of the sublime, this pleasure derives directly from the misery of others, as his description of the "effects of sympathy in the distress of others" shows:

I am convinced we have a degree of delight, and that no small one, in the real misfortunes and pains of others; for let the affection be what it will in appearance, if it does not make us shun such objects, if on the contrary it induces us to approach them, if it makes us dwell upon them, in this case I conceive we must have a delight or pleasure of some species or other in contemplating objects of this kind.10

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9Kant took a decidedly different view of sympathy, considering this passion to be a source of the beautiful, but thoroughly incapable of arousing sublime feelings. In his Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime, Kant states that "a certain tenderheartedness, which is easily stirred into a warm feeling of sympathy, is beautiful and amiable; for it shows a charitable interest in the lot of other men, to which principles of virtue likewise lead. But this good-natured passion is nevertheless weak and always blind,"(58). Kant reiterates this point in the Critique of Judgment, when he describes what he perceives to be a Romantic desire for isolation, pointing out that "this sadness, which does not concern the evils that fate imposes on other people (in which case it would be caused by sympathy), but those that they inflict on themselves (a sadness that rests on an antipathy involving principles), is sublime, because it rests on ideas, whereas the sadness caused by sympathy can at most count as beautiful."(137)

To Baillie, such an explanation was abhorrent because of its basic assumption that an inherent sadism resides in human nature. Rejecting the sadism of this paradigm, Baillie carves a path through the tangled discourses of Sentimentality and Gothicism by shifting the locus of sympathetic pleasure from a delight in the pain experienced by others to an edifying admiration for the courage and fortitude of the sufferer.

Read against the background of late-eighteenth-century aesthetics, Baillie's "Introductory Discourse" can be seen as a direct refutation of the position represented by Burke. Baillie declares that "nothing has become so much an object of man's curiosity as man himself" and from this maxim she draws the corollary that this curiosity is naturally intensified in "extraordinary situations of difficulty and distress" (1-2). It then follows that it is this innate curiosity, and not, as Burke suggests, a sadistic pleasure derived directly from viewing the misery of others, that sends audiences flocking to public executions and other spectacles of intense suffering.

It cannot be any pleasure that we receive from the sufferings of a fellow creature which attracts such multitudes of people to a public execution, though it is the horror we conceive for such a spectacle that keeps so many more away. To see a human being bearing himself up under such circumstances, or struggling with the terrible apprehensions which such a situation impresses, must be the powerful incentive that makes us
press forward to behold what we shrink from, and wait with trembling expectation for what we dread. (2)

The feeling of admiration that the assumed fortitude of the condemned sufferer inspires in the viewer is the fulcrum upon which Baillie's aesthetics attempts to counter-balance the sadistic pleasure described by Burke with the moral self-education advanced by the sympathetic curiosity. The emotional experience that she outlines culminates in the temporally suspended moment of "trembling expectation" preceding the final dread which itself acts as a kind of denouement in her formulation. However, the intellectual reward that the viewer receives from this experience outlasts this "trembling expectation" and continues to draw upon the viewer's own memory of having seen a "human being bearing himself up" under dreadful circumstances. Baillie does not explicitly articulate a theory of the sublime, but her suggestion that the sympathetic curiosity leads the viewer to seek out sights and experiences that will arouse admiration of the human potential for displaying unmatched courage, links her to the nascent concept of the transcendental sublime as an experience based not on pleasure alone, as in Burke's model, but on the recognition of a dormant power or capacity residing in the self.

According to Baillie, people are attracted to otherwise repulsive scenes of terror and suffering because such scenes
satisfy the natural human desire to experience the wide range of human emotions in their most extreme forms by providing the vicarious experiences that the sympathetic curiosity translates into knowledge of others and, analogously, of self. "In examining others," Baillie repeatedly insists, "we know ourselves." It is a natural inclination for furthering self-knowledge that draws people to witness the misery of others, and Baillie drives this point home with a graphic description:

In examining others we know ourselves. With limbs untorn, with head unsmitten, with sense unimpaired by despair, we know what we ourselves might have been on the rack, on the scaffold, and in the most afflicting circumstances of distress. Unless when accompanied with passions of the dark and malevolent kind, we cannot well exercise this disposition without becoming more just, more merciful, more compassionate; and as the dark and malevolent passions are not the predominant inmates of the human breast, it hath produced more deeds -- O many more! of kindness than of cruelty. (4)

For Baillie, understanding one's own absolute possibility of being is predicated upon the visible destruction, the literal tearing apart, of the human body. Since the dismemberment of one's own body would, quite obviously, preclude one's ability fully to comprehend and benefit from the attendant virtues of this experience, it is only from a safe distance that such an experience can beneficially be viewed, as it befalls the body of another. As we have seen in Chapter Two, the discourse of the transcendental sublime
makes the similar argument that, a sublime experience is only possible when the initiating events of terror or awe are viewed from a safe distance, such that the viewer is neither harmed nor seriously threatened. For Baillie, the actual pleasure that the we derive from witnessing the destruction of a physical body displayed by a public execution is a secondary effect of becoming "more just, more merciful, [and] more compassionate" as a result of knowing what we "might have been . . . in the most afflicted circumstances of distress," (4).

This returns us to the purpose of literature in Baillie’s essay. If viewing the misery of another is pleasurable because the intense emotions and virtues exhibited by the sufferer teaches the viewer, via the sympathetic curiosity, the full range of human feelings and actions, then the purpose of literature is to recreate such scenes of violent passion and despair as will appeal to the reader’s sympathetic curiosity. The successful work of literature is therefore both entertaining and instructive, and its appeal is universal. Baillie’s sympathetic curiosity involves no gender distinctions, unlike the many accounts of the sublime that demarcate an experiential and discursive space off-limits to women. In the "Introductory Discourse," Baillie is adamant about the aesthetic equality of men and women:
I believe there is no man that ever lived, who has behaved in a certain manner on a certain occasion, who has not had amongst women some corresponding spirit, who, on the like occasion, and every way similarly circumstanced, would have behaved in the like manner. With some degree of softening and refinement, each class of the tragic heroes I have mentioned has its corresponding one amongst the heroines. (9)

Quite simply, Baillie’s poet is not a man speaking to men. As she repeatedly stresses, the sympathetic curiosity is “universal,” but it is most effectively employed by a mind that is given to meditative reflection.

The mind of the poet, therefore, is an ordinary mind, in possession of no special capacities, but it carries out its observations with a heightened sensitivity that distinguishes it from the “generality of mankind.”

Universal, however, as this disposition undoubtedly is, with the generality of mankind it occupies itself in a passing and superficial way. Though a native trait of character or of passion is obvious to them as well as to the sage, yet to their minds it is but the visitor of a moment: they look upon it singly and unconnected: and though this disposition, even so exercised, brings instruction as well as amusement, it is chiefly by storing up in their minds those ideas to which the instructions of others refer, that it can be eminently useful. Those who reflect and reason upon what human nature holds out to their observation, are comparatively but few. (4)

Those few who reflect upon their experiences and observations find themselves connected to a vast network of sense impressions so that “no stroke of nature which engages their attention stands insulated and alone.” Each observation “presents itself to them with many varied
connections; and they comprehend not merely the immediate feeling which gave rise to it, but the relation of that feeling to others which are concealed" (4). Baillie concedes that the ability to access the full power of the sympathetic curiosity inheres in a limited number of people, and her rhetorical maneuvering on this point anticipates Wordsworth's own strategic attempt to distinguish the poet from other men without isolating him from them. For Wordsworth, the poet is like other men "in kind." The creative imagination inherent in external nature is present and accessible to everyone, but it is the poet alone who possesses the heightened sensibility necessary for appreciating sensuous experience. Compared to other men, the Wordsworthian poet is a man who is

endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul than are supposed to be common among mankind . . . and an ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events, yet . . . do more nearly resemble the passions produced by real events, than anything which, from the motions of their own minds merely, other men are accustomed to feel in themselves.\textsuperscript{11}

Sensibility, recollection, and most importantly the ability to reproduce "nearly" the passions that first excited that "more lively sensibility" are the characteristics that distinguish Wordsworth's poet. Sensibility and passion also

figure in Baillie's definition of the poet, but these qualities are not solely found in the poetic character. As she argues, the sympathetic curiosity inheres in all people; it is through the active cultivation of this faculty that a person comes to a better understanding of humanity, and it is by appealing to this faculty that the poet fulfills the noblest purpose of literature.

II

Baillie and Wordsworth

With this view to educating her readers, Baillie's "Introductory Discourse" enlists a set of aesthetic priorities that superficially resemble the poetically intimated aesthetics of Lyrical Ballads in 1798. As mentioned earlier, these resemblances include her emphasis on using natural language to describe common scenes from rustic life, her valorization of the middle and lower classes of society as providing the best subjects for literature, and her interest in poetically representing the power of the emotions and the consequences of violent passions.¹² Rhetorically, Wordsworth's 1798 "Advertisement" to Lyrical Ballads seems to mimic the language of Baillie's

¹² As early as 1790, Baillie was already writing lyrical poetry about rustic life, and the poems of Fugitive Verses, especially "A Winter's Day," and "A Summer's Day," deal primarily with the language and landscape of common people.
discourse. Wordsworth explains that the poems of *Lyricall Ballads* are "experiments" written to "ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middling and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure," and he professes to establish new standards for poetry which include the "delineation of human passions, human characters, and human incidents," (443). Baillie's purpose, as we have just seen, is "to delineate the stronger passions of the mind" and she claims that her plays are "part of an extensive design: of one which, as far as [her] information goes, has nothing exactly similar to it in any language" (l). Her plays, she elaborates, will focus on common occurrences since "those works which characterize human nature in the middling and lower classes of society, where it is to be discovered by stronger and more equivocal marks, will ever be the most popular" (6).

It seems highly unlikely that Wordsworth was unaware of the similarities between their experimental volumes; it would have been difficult for him to overlook them, not only because of the immense popularity of Baillie's work, but also because Wordsworth himself was growing increasingly conscious, and protective, of his stake in the literary market. Curran has pointed out, for example, that Wordsworth was troubled enough by the proposed title of Mary Robinson's forthcoming *Lyricall Tales* (1800) to request,
unsuccessfully, that his publishers change the title of the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* to *Poems in Two Volumes* in order to discourage any association between the two volumes. The "Preface" of 1800 marks Wordsworth's defensive posture against a number of different fronts in the literary marketplace, but these defensive tactics are especially designed to deflate the importance of Baillie's similar theories. First, and most obviously, the substantive additions through which Wordsworth provides a programmatic explication of the ideas implied in both the "Advertisement" and the poems of the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* signal Wordsworth's proprietary claims to the aesthetic theories he and Baillie share. His second defensive gesture involves three subtle shifts in rhetorical strategy, at times signaled by the modification of already existing material in the "Advertisement," and this provides the framework within which we can reconsider the substantive similarities of Baillie's and Wordsworth's theories.

The first strategic change in Wordsworth's "Preface" of 1800 is his adoption of the same kind of apology that Baillie used in 1798. As a poet, she realizes that "our own word is frequently taken for what we say of ourselves, but very rarely for what we say of our works" (Baillie, 1). In his 1798 "Advertisement," Wordsworth gives the reader a list

\[\text{Curran, "Mary Robinson's Lyrical Tales in Context," 17-19.}\]
of instructions for properly reading *Lyrical Ballads*, but he does not apologize for making such demands upon his audience. In 1800, however, the reason that he claims to hesitate in following the advice of friends -- who have encouraged him, against his own wishes, to enumerate his theories -- mimics Baillie's logic.

But I was unwilling to undertake the task, knowing that on this occasion the Reader would look coldly upon my arguments, since I might be suspected of having been principally influenced by the selfish and foolish hope of reasoning him into an approbation of these particular Poems. (Wordsworth, 445)

Both poets excuse their aggressively theoretical prefaces by voicing their reluctance to appear either disingenuous or coercive. Nevertheless, both poets feel compelled to explain to their readers their overall plan, if only to assert that such a premeditated plan does indeed underlie their works. This compulsion itself is a product of their historical context. As Jon P. Klancher has suggested, "the English Romantics were the first to become radically uncertain of their readers, and they faced the task Wordsworth called 'creating the taste' by which the writer is comprehended."[14] Both poets were very conscious that they were doing something new, and this spirit of experimentation is accompanied by the anxious desire to be understood on their own terms.

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The second rhetorical maneuver that Wordsworth makes in the "Preface" of 1800 is his shift in emphasis from the poetic qualities inherent in common language to the active role played by the poet in shaping that language into verse. He mentions the poetic importance of common language only once in 1798; his stated interest is "to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure" [emphasis mine] (Wordsworth, 443). According to Wordsworth in 1798, his job as a poet is not to adapt common language to the purposes of poetic pleasure, but simply to display the extent to which that language is fit for, or already adapted to, the demands of versification. Baillie criticized her contemporaries for not writing in the language actually spoken by men and women; realistic dialogue, she explains, provides the grounds upon which people learn to judge each other. Wordsworth takes up Baillie's criticism of poets and dramatists who are not sensitive to the common language of everyday conversation, and he aggressively distances himself from these writers by taking a more active role in his theory of language. He shifts his emphasis from language already "adapted" to poetic purposes to his own adaptation of such language. In fact, in the opening paragraph of the 1800 "Preface" he rewrites the passage from 1798, quoted above.
[The first edition of Lyrical Ballads] was published, as an experiment, which, I hoped, might be of some use to ascertain, how far, by fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted, which a Poet may rationally endeavor to impart. (Wordsworth, 445) [emphasis mine]

In 1798, Wordsworth championed the intrinsic qualities of natural language that make it poetically pleasing, but by 1800 he is celebrating the ability of the poet to impart this poetical pleasure to the real language of men. When he again restates this goal later in the "Preface," he claims that he has avoided traditional poetic diction in order "to bring my language near to the language of men" (Wordsworth, 450) [emphasis mine]. Between 1798 and 1800 Wordsworth grows more assertive in taking possession of the theoretical language of Lyrical Ballads and he thrusts himself into the foreground of the experimental volume. Throughout the "Preface," Wordsworth repeatedly emphasizes the importance of real language in order to establish its centrality to his own poetic theory, just as Baillie had placed it at the center of her "Introductory Discourse."

The assumed primacy of natural language also provides Wordsworth with a just cause for dismissing drama as an inferior or artificial genre, and this gesture marks the

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15Wordsworth's increasing possessiveness is also displayed by the growth of his editorial control over subsequent editions of Lyrical Ballads, as well as by his eventual erasure of Coleridge's name from the title page. See Michael Mason's Introduction to Lyrical Ballads (New York: Longman, 1992).
third shift in the rhetorical strategy of the "Preface." By
de-legitimizing drama, Wordsworth attempts to limit
Baillie's encroachment upon his own poetic territory by
circumscribing her within a flawed genre. Baillie insists
that the "ideas regarding human nature . . . affect almost
every species of moral writings, but particularly the
Dramatic" (1). Drama, she argues, is best suited to her
purpose because "Drama improves us by the knowledge we
acquire of our own minds, from the natural desire we have to
look into the thought, and observe the behaviour of others"
(9). Far from making a firm generic distinction between
poetry and drama, she appears to blur the line between the
two, referring to her works as "dramatic verse" and
emphasizing their poetic dimension. We should recall that
even those reviewers who criticized the technical aspects of
her plays nonetheless praised her dramas for the quality of
their versification.

Wordsworth's redefinition of poetry, in the "Preface,"
constitutes a direct attack on Baillie's elevation of drama
as the genre best suited for her aesthetic goals. He
divorces poetry from dramatic verse by re-aligning the
genres to correct what he sees as a false opposition --
incorrectly established by literary critics -- between
poetry and prose. The "Preface" argues that the only
difference between poetry and prose is the former's use of
"rhyme and metrical arrangement." Instead, Wordsworth makes a clear distinction between imaginative writings and factual (scientific) writing, independent of the form; he therefore converts poetry from a primarily generic classification to an evaluative term describing those works representing the superior imaginative expressions of natural language. But Wordsworth dismisses drama as a genre unsuited for his purpose because "the dramatic parts of composition are defective, in proportion as they deviate from the real language of nature." The passage in which he makes this argument should be read immediately against the immediate background of Baillie. The "Introductory Discourse" deprecates those writers who "have not been very skillful in their delineations of nature . . . [and who] have represented men and women speaking and acting as men and women never did speak or act" (5). Wordsworth's attack on drama, and on Baillie, is predicated upon their mutual opposition to artificial language:

What has been thus far said applies to Poetry in general; but especially to those parts of composition where the Poet speaks through the mouths of his characters; and upon this point it appears to authorize the conclusion that there are few persons of good sense, who would not allow that the dramatic parts of composition are defective, in proportion as they deviate from the real language of nature, and are coloured by a diction of the Poet's own, either peculiar to him as an individual Poet or belonging simply to Poets in general; to a body of men who, from the circumstance of their compositions being in metre, it is expected will employ a particular language. (457)
In effect, Wordsworth suggests that Baillie's attempt to write her dramas in natural language is a contradiction. Since natural language in dramatic works is always already colored by the requisite diction of that genre, he argues that "it is not, then, in the dramatic parts of composition that we look for this distinction of language" (Wordsworth, 456-57).

Why would Wordsworth feel compelled to single out this particular genre as unsuitable for accomplishing the aesthetic goals that he and Baillie share? This attack on drama appears especially odd if we consider that when Baillie's Plays appeared, Wordsworth had recently completed his own drama, The Borderers, a play occupied with delineating the passions of its central character, Marmaduke, who is said to have committed "some dark deed to which in early life / his passion drove him" (I.15-16). As late as December, 1797, both William and Dorothy still had high hopes that The Borderers would be staged at Covent Garden. Wordsworth attributed the eventual rejection of The Borderers not to any flaws in the play, or inherent in the genre itself, but rather to "the deprav'd state of the stage at present."16 He refrained from publishing the play for forty-six years; yet, he obviously valued this dramatic work for its poetic content since he returned to it to cull lines

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for other poems, a practice for which he apologized in 1848. His dismissal of drama in the "Preface" is, ostensibly, not based on structural or formal objections, but on purely linguistic ones; however, his linguistic opposition to this genre is canceled out by his own incorporation of the language of The Borderers into his poetry of the early 1800s. Curiously, it is an "undue predilection for the dramatic form" that Coleridge would later count as one of the five major flaws in Wordsworth's poetry. Given this evidence, Wordsworth's dismissive attitude toward drama begins to take the form of a deliberate effort to distance his own literary project from Baillie's, while concurrently discrediting her project on generic grounds. By blocking the applicability of her aesthetic ideas to his poetry, which he has re-categorized as occupying a genre entirely separate from that of dramatic verse, Wordsworth discourages critics from comparing his freshly-minted ideas to those expressed by the well-known "Introductory Discourse." The aesthetic theory of Wordsworth's "Preface" unfolds,

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17 In a brief prefatory note to The Borderers Wordsworth explains: "Readers already acquainted with my Poems will recognise, in the following composition, some eight or ten lines, which I have not scrupled to retain in the places where they originally stood. It is proper however to add that they would not have been used elsewhere, if I had foreseen the time when I might be induced to publish this Tragedy."

18 According to Coleridge, this tendency leads Wordsworth into making one of two mistakes. "Either the thoughts and diction are different from that of the poet, and then there arises an incongruity of style; or they are the same and indistinguishable, and then it presents a species of ventriloquism, where two are represented as talking, while in truth one man only speaks." Biographia Literaria, Vol. II, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), 135.
therefore, within a discursive framework that demarcates and protects the theoretical territory that he feels he is belatedly claiming as his own.

In the context of the rhetorical maneuvers I have just outlined, we can see how Wordsworth's strategic emphasis on the centrality of the passions stems not only from his own poetic interests but also from his desire to wrestle this theory from Baillie's grasp and distinguish his theoretical project from the work of his contemporaries. Baillie criticizes other poets of the period for having ignored the primary task of unveiling the human mind under the dominion of those strong and fixed passions, which, seemingly unprovoked 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. (10)

She argues that the poetry of her day has used the passions only to ornament individual scenes rather than to advance the action of an entire play. Her assertion that the plots of her plays will find their primary motivation in a delineation of the "higher passions" directs our attention to what, according to Wordsworth, distinguishes *Lyrical Ballads* from "the popular Poetry of the day," namely, "that the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling" (Wordsworth, 448). De-emphasizing plot offers the
added challenge, for both poets, of keeping their readers interested in these literary experiments. Baillie, as we have seen, assumes that the power of the sympathetic curiosity will maintain her reader's interest, because "the highest pleasures we receive from poetry, as well as from the real objects which surround us in the world, are derived from the sympathetic interest we all take in beings like ourselves" (6). If we recall that, for Baillie, this powerful interest in the sufferings of others leads to greater self-knowledge, then we can see how the didactic orientation of her project reciprocally ensures its own efficacy. It is by attacking this didactic dimension that Wordsworth attempts to invalidate Baillie's treatment of the passions.

Wordsworth counters Baillie's emphasis on eliciting the reader's sympathy by advocating an affective rather than didactic approach to poetic composition. He argues that pleasure itself, and not sympathy, is at the heart of all successful poetic creations, including those that also evoke the reader's sympathy.

The poet writes under one restriction only, namely, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human Being possessed of that information which may be expected from him, not as lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher, but as a Man. (454)
The import of this sentence becomes clearer when it is read against Baillie's assertion that the cultivation of the sympathetic curiosity will make a man "the better Judge, the better Magistrate, the better Advocate," or the better "ruler or conductor of other men." Wordsworth parodies and rejects her view with his assertion that the poet writes as a "Man" and not as a "lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher" (Wordsworth, 454).

Wordsworth's interest in establishing a poetic lexicon that integrates the concepts of pleasure and masculinity underscores his related concern with preventing the painful emotions that he evokes in his poetry from overspilling into sentimentality. If the pain which is "always produced in pathetic and impassioned poetry" is left unbalanced by pleasure in poetic creations, "there is some danger that the excitement may be carried beyond its proper bounds" and lead to the kind of effeminizing melodrama that Wordsworth condemns; as a result, he reasons that the "harmonious music of metrical language" is necessary for producing the "complex feeling of delight" used in "tempering the painful feeling always found intermingled with powerful descriptions of the deeper passions" (Wordsworth, 461).

Ironically, Wordsworth's initial response to eighteenth-century sentimentalism is to embrace the notion of intense passion and suffering in a gesture which, when
compared to what critics identified as Baillie's "manly," rational response, aligns Wordsworth with an effeminacy marked by a passive submission to the power of emotions. But Wordsworth reinscribes himself into the masculine tradition through the sheer force of his rhetoric, which infamously insists that a poet is a "man speaking to men." Wordsworth's response to Baillie is consistent with the discursive "process," identified by such critics as Clifford Siskin, Alan Richardson, and David Goellnicht, through which male poets of the Romantic period colonized the emotional content of women's poetry while characterizing themselves as paradigms of masculinity. According to Goellnicht, "by the 1810s this process was so complete . . . that Wordsworth is reinscribed by the critics as the center of masculinity, the patriarch of contemporary poetry, which claims 'imagination' and 'passion' as its prime attributes." After identifying herself as the author of a Series of Plays in 1800, Baillie began to occupy a more ambivalent position in the critical discourse of reviewers who are uncertain how to catalogue a woman who writes "manly" verse. But if Baillie's aesthetic

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30For example, one nineteenth-century reviewer observed:
theory represents a "manly" approach to versification, Wordsworth's theory paradoxically appropriates the tropes and strategies of "womanly" verse to effect the supposed re-masculinization of British poetry, a project he achieves by colonizing the excessive, effeminizing emotions of sentimentality under the flag of the exclusively male territory of the transcendental sublime.

III

The Critical Tradition

For readers in the late-twentieth century, the dialogic relationship that I am drawing between Baillie and Wordsworth represents a relatively new way of looking at the early Romantic period, but nineteenth-century readers appear to have taken for granted that Baillie and Wordsworth were the co-architects of a new aesthetics. At the time of her death in 1851, Harper's called Baillie the "most illustrious of the female poets of England" and placed her at the

"As long as the plays were published anonymously, and were considered as the productions of a man, there was but one opinion entertained with regard either to the grandeur of the general plan, or the exquisite skill displayed in that portion of the work which was submitted to the judgment of the public. But, strange as it may appear, no sooner was it known that the first volume of Plays on the Passions was written by a female and a gentlewoman, than it became exposed to bear the full brunt of that strangely mingled stream of epigram and rhodomontade, sneer and paradox, which was allowed at that time to circulate among the reading world as the pure and unmixed waters of criticism . . ." Frazer's Magazine XIII (February 1836), 238.
forefront of the literary revolution that had opened the century.

To Miss Baillie and Wordsworth, more than to any others is to be attributed the redemption of our poetry from that florid or insipid sentimentalism which was its prevailing characteristic at the beginning of the present century. They boldly asserted, by precept and practice, the superiority of nature over all affection and conventionalism. . . . Her dramas are wrought wholly out from her own conceptions, and exhibit great originality and invention. Her power of portraying the darker and sterner passions of the human heart has rarely been surpassed."

The lavish praise of the Harper's obituary is representative of the respect and nostalgia with which many journals in both England and America conveyed the news of her death. This outpouring of critical appreciation was by no means belated; with the exception of Francis Jeffrey of The Edinburgh Review, critics and reviewers throughout the first half of the nineteenth century were unanimous in their enthusiasm for Baillie's dramatic verse, and they appeared equally as eager to position her, at least nominally, within the historical narrative of the established literary tradition. The Quarterly Review, in a disparaging article on the Italian dramatist Vittorio Alfieri, classed Baillie with Goethe and Schiller as among the best tragic writers in Europe. 22 Blackwood's judged her plays to be superior to those of "Coleridge, Byron, Scott, Crole, and Mitford," and designated her poetry as "the central orb" around which

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22Harper's 2 (April 1851), 709.
22Quarterly Review XIV (1815-1816), 366.
revolved the poetical works of Tighe, Hemans, Mitford, Bowles, and Landon -- "all bright, but [Baillie's] the brightest, though seemingly unconscious of its superior splendor." One reviewer went so far as to suggest that the discovery of a manuscript by Shakespeare, or a forgotten early novel by Scott, could not have created as much excitement as the unanticipated publication of Baillie's Dramas in 1836. Among her literary contemporaries, Sir Walter Scott called Baillie "the best dramatic writer whom Britain has produced since the days of Shakespeare and Massinger," and during the early days of her fame Lord Byron remarked, "Nothing would do me more honour than the acquaintance of that Lady -- who does not possess a more enthusiastic admirer than myself -- she is our only dramatist since the Otway and Southerne." Even Jeffrey, who penned the most venomous attacks on her work, was nonetheless eager to make her acquaintance when she visited Edinburgh in 1808, and he later counted himself as one of her regular visitors.

Even reviewers of the unsuccessful stage productions of Baillie's plays usually responded generously. Although many
critics upheld the quality of Baillie's language and argued simply that her dramas were technically unsuitable for the stage, others, including Byron, criticized the undeveloped tastes of the British public for being unable to appreciate the complexity of her work.\(^28\) Her plays were even viewed by some as having been more successful than "the determined, unevadeable protest and manifesto of Wordsworth" at disseminating "the essential principles of the literary reformation then in progress."\(^29\) The history of Baillie's critical reception is important to my argument because the question of "why" Baillie has been forgotten as an early Romantic theorist is inextricably bound up with the question of "how" the critical tradition effected her erasure. Later in this essay, I will argue that the rhetorical mechanisms responsible for Baillie's post-Romantic marginalization were already operating within the enthusiastic critical response to her work; these reviews, and their feverish attempts to explain how a woman could produce the "masculine" writing that distinguishes her dramatic verse, discursively contained and qualified her poetic achievements by hyperbolically representing her as an isolated spark of genius in the era of "darkness" preceding the Romantic revolution.

\(^{28}\)Carhart also provides a descriptive list of the performances of Baillie's plays and the public's response in both Europe and America. Life and Work of Joanna Baillie, 109-165.

\(^{29}\)Quarterly Review LXVII (1840-1841), 438.
Given the dynamism of the dialogic tension between the "Introductory Discourse" and the "Preface," the twentieth-century marginalization of Baillie appears all the more confusing, but we can find the causes of Baillie's dismissal from the canon in the very same critical discourse that bestowed so much praise upon her in the nineteenth-century. Operating within the critical discourse of the Romantic period is a subtle but powerful strategy of containment that enables critics to praise the ideas espoused by Baillie's works, while preventing her from achieving the personal fame that would ensconce her in the fraternity of British poets. Taken as a whole, the body of criticism surrounding Baillie in the nineteenth century makes use of three interrelated strategies that prevent her from achieving a permanent place in the historical consciousness of the male literary tradition. First, by cultivating the idea of Romanticism as a aesthetic revolution which burst upon the British literary scene with Baillie and Wordsworth, critics perpetuate the idea of literary periodization, which, in turn, enables them to place Baillie in a liminal position, between periods, such that her works appear brilliant only when compared to a literary landscape that was otherwise unbearably dull. The second strategy of containment is semantic; reviewers consistently praise Baillie's work in masculine terms, using adjectives such as "manly" to erase her gender. And
finally, Baillie's critics and contemporaries compliment her personality for embodying the cultural ideals of womanhood, in contrast to the masculine strength of her writing.

The first strategy I have identified may seem to contradict this chapter's earlier observations that critics classed Baillie with Wordsworth as one of the architects of the new aesthetics, but a brief survey of a few periodicals will show how critics rhetorically finessed this contradiction. The same article in the Quarterly Review which credits Baillie with disseminating the new aesthetics of the nineteenth century more efficiently than Wordsworth or Coleridge, also comments that the ability to appreciate Baillie's work depends upon the reader's memory of the dismal state of literature during her rise to fame.

Those only who can now remember the current literature of the end of the last and the beginning of this century; those only who have read Darwin, who have read Hayley, who have read — divitas miseras — or even looked over, or looked at, the mountain of vapid trash, which in the shapes of epic and lyric, didactic and dramatic, poems, then papered the town, and was worshipped as Parnassus itself; such only can adequately conceive the merit, or all the effect, of "De Monfort," "Ethwald," or "Basil." 30

This contextualization discreetly subtracts from the aesthetic value of Baillie's work by making her "merit" radically contingent upon her historical position. It is important to keep in mind that while this understanding of contingent value is a foregrounded assumption of many

30 Quarterly Review XIV (1814-1816), 366.
twentieth-century theorists, nineteenth-century critics did not praise the male poets in the same way; instead they looked for qualities they supposed were inherent in the work itself. Although another critic speaks of Baillie's "transcendent merits," these merits are apparently unable to transcend the fact that Baillie's first volumes derive their remarkable success from having been published in a distant past, in those "remote days":

when Wordsworth was yet unknown, and the first faint beams of the genius of Walter Scott had only shewn themselves in a few and scattered miscellaneous poems, and Southey's name was not yet glorified by the production of Madoc, or Kehama, or Roderic -- and Milman was a sap at Eton, and Byron a rebel at Harrow.\(^3\)

This particular reviewer, in a spasm of nostalgia, goes one step further in suggesting that the delight that he and his contemporaries still feel for Baillie's work stems from the fact that they first read her plays "at an age when we estimated the excellence of a tragedy by the emotions it excited, by the tears it drew from us, and by the thrill of terror which chilled us as we read."\(^4\) Thus, the residual implication of this otherwise flattering review is that Baillie's popularity rests on the fact that she attracted attention when the literary tastes of this particular reviewer, his friends, and by analogy British culture, were as yet undeveloped. In other words, the enthusiastic

\(^3\)Frazer's Magazine XIII (February 1836), 236.
\(^4\)Ibid., 236.
response of these critics in their youth derives entirely from an outmoded lexicon of sentimentality.

Such assertions of the degraded state of British literature during the height of Baillie's fame are numerous. Another article from the Quarterly Review confidently asserts that the popularity of Baillie's works transcend historical periods: "at any time she must have commanded high admiration by her masculine vigour both of conception and language, tempered with feminine grace and tenderness," but then he immediately contextualizes the impact of Baillie's dramas in his own period.

But, when these dramas first flashed across the poetic atmosphere -- what was, what had long been the state of the English tragic drama? . . . when Miss Baillie first wrote, the drama, throughout Europe, seemed expiring, never to revive."

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine features Baillie in the first of its series on "Celebrated Female Writers," and this essay serves as a perfect example of the rhetorical tensions inherent in the discursive attempts to praise and contain Baillie simultaneously. After admitting that the

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Quarterly Review 55 (February 1836), 488. The full passage in this review goes to great lengths to condemn the other dramatists of the period in which Baillie begins writing: "But, when these dramas first flashed across the poetic atmosphere -- what was, what had long been the state of the English tragic drama? We are unwilling to disturb the slumbers of the dead: if, as Ariosto imagined, there be a limbo in the heavenly regions for things lost on earth, we cannot suppose that the tragic writers of that age can be much nearer to the sun, or inhabit a more genial climate than the planet Saturn. If these works were yet on earth we should recommend a consignment in the next Arctic expedition; they would, no doubt, be very stirring and effective translated into the Esquimaux tongue. Seriously speaking, when Miss Baillie first wrote, the drama, throughout Europe, seemed expiring, never to revive."
assertion of Baillie's excellence "is a supposition which will be considered as humiliating to the pretensions of the stronger sex," this critic argues that "the evidence to substantiate its truth is seen in the state of our national poetry before the publication of the principles laid down by our authoress in her preliminary Essay and of the Tragedies that exemplified and illustrated her principles." Thus, the generally held assumption regarding the degraded state of British poetry at the time when Baillie starts writing makes possible the critical acceptance of her influence on the "boys" who have since "avowedly or unconsciously followed in the track marked out by her example."¹⁴ The argument that assembles itself intertextually in such reviews is that Baillie's dramas deserve the praise for saving English tragic drama because English tragic drama was in bad enough shape to allow a woman to save them. Furthermore, this contextualization of Baillie implies that, despite the debt that Romantic male writers owe to Baillie's dramas and her aesthetic theory, her importance and influence are contingent upon historical accident.

We have seen this strategy of containment before. The lavish praise that critics and poets, including Wordsworth, heaped upon Charlotte Smith's poetry depended almost

¹⁴Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine 16 (August 1824), 162.
entirely upon the argument that at the time that she was writing and expanding the numerous editions of *Elegiac Sonnets*, the sonnet form in England had fallen into disuse. According to Wordsworth and Coleridge, England's literary debt to Smith is that she alone preserved the sonnet tradition of Shakespeare and Milton when other male writers were uninterested in its possibilities. Baillie, likewise, is often portrayed as a caretaker and nurturer of English drama, maternal roles which must be assigned to her since, unlike Smith, she neither married nor had children:

> She penetrated the cause of the evil, and she mediated its cure. She saw that poetry — of which the themes are as copious as the streams of human thought and feeling, and as various as the beauties and wonders of Creation, had appeared to languish in exhaustion, because it had been charged with burthens that were not its own . . . She endeavored to correct this melancholy perversion; she sought to direct the taste of the nation, and the exertions of its authors, to the legitimate objects of poetry; she brought to the task her counsel and her example.¹⁵

Taken together, the reviews of Smith and Baillie alone are enough to suggest that women writers of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries rescued the sonnet form and dramatic poetry from oblivion; yet, ironically, neither genre has enjoyed the kind of critical attention, beyond the Romantic period, now given to the lyric, the epic, and

¹⁵Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine 16 (August 1824), 163-64. Blackwood's was not alone in promoting this perspective, The People's Journal, for example, takes the maternal imagery even further, suggesting that Baillie "arose like a mother in Israel, to wage war with the Philistine rabble, and to head the reaction which tended to rout them out of the land."
the ode. Nevertheless, the fact that women writers were apparently sustaining these forms generated enough anxiety among male poets and critics to lead them to construct the discursive strategies for containing the aesthetic value of these writers.

The second strategy of containment, employed even by Baillie's most enthusiastic reviewers, appears in amazement over the fact that Baillie is capable of relating "masculine" subjects in "manly" language. Rather than admitting that the power of Baillie's dramatic verse invalidates the belief that women are incapable of composing significant verse, male writers and critics marveled over the paradox that this woman writer, "living in the seclusion of a quiet narrow, domestic circle, without practical experience of the world's doings," had somehow discovered a way to write as a man.36 In contrast to the scandalously violent and passionate male characters of her plays, Baillie herself is approvingly described in submissive, domesticated terms. She is a "small, prim, and Quaker-like looking person, in plain attire, with gentle, unobtrusive manners, and devoid of affectation; rather silent, and more inclined to listen than to talk."37 The apparent contradictions that male readers found between Baillie's private life and her publications led them to label her "the mistress of a

36Dublin University Magazine XXXVII (April 1851), 520.  
37Ibid., 520.
masculine style of thought and diction," a contradiction which underscored the gendered expectations of the marketplace and established her as a literary curiosity.

This discursive paradox establishes the foundation for the third mechanism of critical containment in which her male acquaintances as well as her professional colleagues openly praise her for her personal qualities of humility, meekness, and what we might call her "lady-like" behavior. Wordsworth's most often-quoted assessment of Baillie consists of the simple approbation, "If I had to present anyone to a foreigner as a model of an English Gentlewoman, it would be Joanna Baillie." Journals often praised Baillie for lacking that which male critics and writers would have found most threatening in a woman: an ambitious desire for fame.

The celebrity of Joanna Baillie has been of a most peculiar nature -- her fame has had about it a kind of virgin purity. It has been the unparticipated treasure of the world of taste and intellect. The admiration of her lofty talents never made itself heard in the loud huzzas of the Theatre, or in those unmeaning expressions of approval, which are reiterated by the reading public, in the words of their several and respective Magazines . . . She was never "written up," to use the modern technical expression, in the Reviews and Magazines."

Baillie's reviewers consistently praise her for the split persona she maintains by keeping her personal identity

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38 Quarterly Review 67 (December 1840), 437.
39 Quoted in Carhart, Life and Work of Joanna Baillie, 1.
Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine 16 (August 1824), 165.
distinct from her identity as a successful author. They compliment her, in effect, for preserving the authorial anonymity under which she entered the literary world when the **Series of Plays** first appeared. Baillie's lack of a public self makes the achievement of her dramatic verse more palatable to the male writers of the period. *The Athenæum*, for example, commends Baillie for being "personally scarcely known in the literary world," even though she possesses "a fame and reputation on the strength of which any woman, less womanly in the best sense of the word, would have stared in effigy out of every print shop window."11 Clearly, to claim such public attention would be considered **unwomanly**. Thus, Baillie's success as a dramatist is viewed by her contemporaries as a sort of perversion, or even an instance of literary cross-dressing, since the qualities that her verse needed in order to achieve this success are tautologically defined as masculine.

The degree to which male writers were unwilling to abandon their gender-biased paradigms to view the quality of Baillie's dramas as representing anything other than a perplexing disruption of the masculinist categories of literary expression can be seen in a revealing comment made by Byron in a letter to John Murray in 1817:

> 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. 12

The testicles, quite appropriately, take on a double significance in Byron's comment: 1) standing in metonymically for the manhood supposedly required to write successful drama (and hence usurped from the male writers whose imaginations were supposedly rendered impotent by Baillie's superior dramatic creations) and 2) standing in metaphorically for the literary (pro)creations of men, i.e. their texts. The solution Byron offers to the question of how Baillie is capable, as a woman, of producing masculine verse is contained in the implicit accusation that Baillie "borrows" the (testes) texts of male writers. This accusation, however, flies in the face of the numerous reviewers who praise, above all else, Baillie's originality, and many of them echo the belief voiced by one critic that "no dramatist has borrowed so little [emphasis mine]." 13 Byron's joke about Baillie's borrowed masculinity, therefore, masks a much more explicit borrowing that takes place; Byron himself borrows the ideas, language, and even some of the characteristics central to what is now known as the "Byronic hero" from Baillie's De Monfort and incorporates them into his own Manfred and Marino Faliero."14 Moreover, as we have already seen, Wordsworth borrows

12BLJ, Vol. V., 203.
13Quarterly Review 55 (1836), 491.
Baillie's conceptual strategies for codifying his own aesthetic ideas in the "Preface," and it is possible that he even borrows lines from De Monfort for "There was a boy." Coleridge, as Jonathan Wordsworth has also suggested, borrows several lines from Baillie's Basil, uses them in his Lewti, and then lies (badly) about doing so." If Byron's joke of borrowing "testicles" linguistically covers over the unconscious threat of castration felt by Baillie's contemporary male writers, then the implied borrowing of texts euphemistically masks a male anxiety, or perhaps guilt, over their own unacknowledged acts of plagiarism. The rationalization implicit in Byron's comment is that if he, Wordsworth, and Coleridge can be accused of plagiarizing Baillie, it is only because Baillie is already guilty of castrating male authors. In this sense, the critical context surrounding Baillie is indicative of the overall climate in which the women writers of the Romantic period struggled for unqualified recognition from their male peers.

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15 Coleridge argued that the publication dates proved that Baillie's Basil had "borrowed" an image from Lewti, but Jonathan Wordsworth observes: "The dates do no such thing. A review in the Analytic shows that Baillie's Plays appeared in, or more probably before, April 1798; Lewti was printed in the Morning Post on the morning of the 13th... In his anxiety to accuse someone else of plagiarism, Coleridge (who, be it said, never made clear that Lewti is a rewritten early Wordsworth poem) establishes for us that a copy of Baillie was available at Alfoxden at the height of the Lyrical Ballads period." Jonathan Wordsworth, Ancestral Voices, 97.
and twentieth-century criticism has, to a large extent, adopted and perpetuated the misogynist metaphors designed to circumscribe the cultural dissemination of nineteenth-century women's poetry. Thus, Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge, or any other male writer for that matter, who plagiarizes Baillie (or any other woman writer) are quietly understood to be really only "borrowing" back what had been "borrowed" from them in the first place: their testicles, their masculinity, their texts, and their "right" to demarcate a specific literary discourse as an inherently and exclusively masculine domain.
CHAPTER 5

THE MUSE'S "LIGHTER LABOURS":
MARY TIGHE AND THE RECUPERATION OF BEAUTY

"Let a woman be ever so clever & let her act as she may, her figure is always an obstacle or a nuisance thro' life."
Mary Tighe, Reading Journal, April 14, 1806
(National Library of Ireland)

"A thing of beauty is a joy forever."
John Keats, "Endymion: A Poetic Romance"

In taking up Mary Tighe's Psyche, or the Legend of Love -- an epic poem in Spenserian stanzas, posthumously published in 1811 -- the present chapter underscores the recurrent subtext regarding the troublesome interrelationship of genre, gender, and canonicity in British Romanticism. Unlike Charlotte Smith and Joanna Baillie, who established their literary reputations in genres with which their male contemporaries had little success, Tighe's fame rests on a single poem written in a genre that was itself extremely popular among male writers of the early nineteenth century. As Chapters Three and Four of this dissertation have shown, male readers in the Romantic Period tended to foreground the generic boundaries of Smith's and Baillie's accomplishments while downplaying the substantive contributions to English literary history made by Smith's longer poems and by Baillie's literary theory. Wordsworth and Coleridge credited Smith with sustaining interest in the sonnet form and in poetic descriptions of Nature at a time when British writers were
supposedly adept at neither; likewise, Byron and Scott enthusiastically praised Baillie as being England's greatest dramatist since the Renaissance, and many other critics joined them in the belief that she had rescued English drama from the hands of its lesser practitioners. But, as we have already seen, such effusive praise appears hyperbolic when placed in its historical context; what these exaggerated critical appraisals achieve by emphasizing the generic categories of women's writing is not so much the elevation of women's literary accomplishments as the circumscription of their intertextual influences.

Through this process of containment, nineteenth-century male writers and critics concurrently mark what they perceive to be the limits of male literary potency. It has long been acknowledged that the definitive genres of Romanticism (the lyric, the ode, the ballad, the epic) are those forms of writing in which male writers sought to distinguish themselves. This is not to say that men were not writing sonnets or dramas, but their efforts in these areas were, for the most part, attacked by other male writers -- as we can recall from the examples given in the previous two chapters -- as having effeminized the English language. Conversely, Smith and Baillie were perceived, or were at least represented, by their male contemporaries as having harmlessly succeeded in the same liminal literary genres that male writers no longer respected.
Tighe's efforts, however, place her at the generic center of the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century fascination with Spenser and the epic form. If the acclaim granted to Smith and Baillie was predicated, in part, upon the fact that both women were working in genres that could easily be conceded by male writers preoccupied with epic aspirations, then Tighe poses a peculiar problem to male poets working in the Spenserian tradition. Greg Kucich has convincingly argued that Spenser represented for the male Romantics, and most specifically for Keats and Shelley, a less intimidating father-figure than Milton or Shakespeare and a more inviting master under which to serve a poetic apprenticeship. In fact, as Kucich points out, the homage paid to Spenser in prefaces and introductions to Romantic imitations of his work was often couched in familiarizing and effeminizing terms which suggest that nineteenth-century followers of Spenser viewed him as a gentle, humble teacher who taught them how to recognize and "correct" what they saw as flaws in his work.¹ Often, male readers identified Spenser's effeminate language as an unacceptable flaw in work, though one that they could easily fix. But whereas

¹For example, Kucich writes: "Hazlitt, usually hard-nosed in his literary judgments, always thought affectionately of Spenser's 'romantic' and 'pensive tenderness' (Complete Works 5:379). Todd stressed the 'amicable temper' and 'gentle disposition' of 'the tender-minded Spenser' (lvi, clxvi, cxxxvi). Lamb described him as 'Our elder Bard, Spenser, a gentle name (Letters 1:41). And Wordsworth summarized: 'In all that Spenser writes, you can trace the gentle affectionate spirit of the man' (Critical Opinions 265)." Greg Kucich, Keats, Shelley, and Romantic Spenserianism (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 83-87.
male writers may have willingly participated in the discursive effeminization of Spenser's work in order to render their precursor less intimidating, and thereby facilitate their own revisions, these writers were reluctant to acknowledge the influence of women writers, even those whose works they have praised as "manly."

Writing in the Spenserian tradition places Tighe in a double bind specific to her gender: to engage in the kind of masculinizing revisions popular among Romantic-Spenserians would have opened her to criticisms of literary cross-dressing, but to mimic Spenser uncritically would stamp her work with the same weak effeminacy as the original. Resolving this dilemma continues to be a major difficulty in modern reappraisals of Tighe's work. In Bloom's lexicon, Tighe qualifies neither as a willful ephebe nor as a strong precursor, because she does not rewrite Spenser through aggressive misreadings and her gender keeps her from inspiring the kind of Oedipal anxiety that characterizes the tension between poetic fathers and sons.

Tighe's descriptions of rich Spenserian bowers, filled with flowers, gems, and sumptuous banquets, apparently caught the eye of Keats during his early phase in the "realm of Flora and old Pan," and thus far the study of the relationship between the two poets has gone no farther than pointing out the kind of descriptive echoes that Earl Vonard
Weller first enumerated in 1928.² Her participation in the Spenserian tradition and her documented echoes in Keats have led critics, even in the twentieth century, to see her as little more than a curious mediator between Spenser and Keats, exerting a limited influence on Keats's phraseology that he eventually outgrows without undergoing the struggles of misprision and revision. This chapter's focus, therefore, is not on expanding previous lists of Tighe's echoes in Keats, but rather on coordinating her position in the network of influences shaping Keats's voice and the discursive agglomeration that we now identify as Romanticism.

If we are to understand *Psyche*'s literary significance in the rhizomic network of Romanticism, we must realize that it participates simultaneously in several intersecting traditions and that it can be read as more than just another Spenserian imitation. Tighe's adaptation of the popular Spenserian stanzas introduces little stylistic innovation beyond the elimination of Spenser's archaisms, a change for which many critics duly praised her. However, in the re-telling of Apuleius's story of "Cupid and Psyche," Tighe guides her heroine through an allegorical quest that intersects with the late-eighteenth-century discourse of

²Earl Vonard Weller, ed. *Keats and Mary Tighe: The Poems of Mary Tighe with parallel passages from the Work of John Keats* (New York: The Century Co., 1928). All citations of "Psyche" and other works by Tighe refer to the reprinted texts in this edition. Parenthetical citations of "Psyche" refer to canto, verse, and (when the entire verse is not quoted) line.
dialecticism dominating the Romantic approach to such conceptual oppositions as self/other, reason/imagination, and reality/fantasy. The Romantics saw this dialecticism reflected in the irresolvable dualities of Spenser's own language, and many twentieth-century critics have argued that Keats absorbed these Spenserian dualities into his own desire to unify the physical and metaphysical worlds in such poems as "Endymion," "Lamia," and "The Eve of St. Agnes."

In order to understand the complex links between Psyche and Romantic aesthetics, it will be necessary for us to read Tighe's epic against its historical background as represented in some of her other, shorter works.

Psyche, and some of the scattered poems that were collected for Tighe's posthumous edition of 1811, are important to this study in three ways. First, like the works of Smith and Baillie, Tighe's poetry exhibits the need to articulate a specific authorial position for herself as a woman writer working within a patriarchal literary discourse. Central to this articulation is Tighe's working out of her own problematic role in the traditionally heterosexist relationship between the epic poet and his Muse. Tighe complicates this relationship with her own reflections on the difficulties encountered by a female poet attempting to position herself within the traditional dynamic of poetic inspiration when that dynamic is historically dominated by the consummation of male desire for the female Muse. In considering Tighe's view of herself
as a poet, it will also be productive for us to consider the 
details of her life that will help to foreground the 
avtobiographical elements in *Psyche*.

The second aspect of *Psyche* that I want to consider is 
formal. Tighe's use of allegory as a means to delineating 
her heroine's apotheosis runs counter to the Romantic 
discourse of the symbol which Paul de Man has argued, in his 
famous essay "The Rhetoric of Temporality," absorbed and 
erased the temporal/spatial division of allegory, replacing 
it with transcendent meaning. For the Romantics, according 
to de Man, "this appeal to the infinity of a totality 
constitutes the main attraction of the symbol as opposed to 
allegory, a sign that refers to one specific meaning and 
thus exhausts its suggestive potentialities once it has been 
deciphered."³ Allegory, however, does not divorce *Psyche* 
from the ideologies of other Romantic texts. On the 
contrary, Tighe's allegory, I will argue, unravels the 
transcendental aesthetic of the sublime -- which enables the 
resolution of the self/other dialectic in most male authored 
texts of the Romantic period -- by achieving this resolution 
through the pursuit of beauty, rather than terror. In 
*Psyche*, embracing physical, natural beauty as a signifier of 
ideal love brings about the kind union of the metaphysical 
and physical worlds that would later become the goal of much

³Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," *Blindness and 
Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: 
University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 188.
of Keats's poetry. Tighe's aesthetic/philosophic argument is the product of at least three intersecting concerns: 1) her personal awareness of the demands and limitations that physical beauty places on women, 2) her understanding that the discourse of the transcendental sublime subordinates beauty to terror and restricts the ambitions of women writers, and 3) the residual influence of Tighe's Methodist upbringing, in which she learned that grace is manifested in the beauty of the natural world and is best discovered through a receptiveness to this beauty and the powerful emotions they evoke.

Finally, the third issue that I want to examine here is an intertextual one. Perhaps better than any other poet of the Romantic period, Tighe illustrates the insufficiency of the Bloomian model of Oedipal influence for explaining the kinds of tangential intertextuality that the rhizomic model takes into consideration. Tighe's recuperation of beauty, at a time when this aesthetic concept was being increasingly subordinated as an inferior and effeminate antithesis of the powerful masculine attributes of the transcendental sublime, also directs our attention to Keats, whose notoriously unsuccessful 4,050 line paean to beauty, "Endymion," has represented, for some twentieth-century critics, the height of his attachment to Tighe, an attachment that incurred the criticisms of an effeminacy of verse from which he struggled to distance himself. But Keats, I argue, continues to incorporate and resist Tighe's aesthetics well into the last
phases of his career, despite the unequivocal tone of his dismissal of her in 1818, and this continuing relationship provides additional evidence in support of my argument, in Chapter One, that literary history expands rhizomically, in multiple directions that -- while allowing for relationships involving anxiety-ridden bouts of denial, repression, and revision -- nonetheless complicate the limited scope of Bloom's model. The following chapter thus falls into three parts, corresponding to these interrelated concerns.

I

In the painting "The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain" (1779), Richard Samuel depicts a group of contemporary female artists, dressed in robes and bearing the symbolic tools of their respective artistic vocations; what makes Samuel's modernization of the Classical figures of inspiration remarkable is his decision to replace the mythological daughters of Mnemosyne and Zeus with a group of recognizable, "living" artists of England: Elizabeth Carter, Anna Letitia Barbauld, Elizabeth Anne Sheridan, Hannah More, Charlotte Lennox, Angelica Kaufmann, Catharine Macaulay, Elizabeth Montagu, and Elizabeth Griffith. I mention this painting as we begin to consider Tighe's presentation of her own relationship to the Muse because Samuel's painting, more clearly than any other I know, graphically represents the elision, in the aesthetic discourse of the Romantic period, of the boundary between the female artist as a creator and
the female artist as a source of inspiration. To review a common metaphor in Western aesthetics, the production of art, for a male artist, represents the offspring of his procreative union with one of the nine Muses. Conversely, as Samuel's painting illustrates, when a woman produces a work of art, she simultaneously elevates and reduces herself to the level of a surrogate Muse, presumably a source of heterosexual inspiration for the greater artistic works of male artists. It is important to cover this well-trodden critical ground because the Classical gendering of the Muse not only helped to foreclose the autonomy of women writers during the Romantic period, but also has survived in Bloom's critical model. As I have argued throughout, the assumption that "inspiration" is heterosexually charged continues to color the language through which literary criticism approaches the writings of women Romantic poets.

Tighe responds directly to the problem of seeking inspiration, as a female poet, from a female Muse. Although Freud and Bloom have provided twentieth-century readers with a critical lens that was unavailable to Tighe, she was by no means unaware of the awkwardness of seeking inspiration from the Muse in a literary marketplace where male poets competed against each other for the Muse's affections. True to the epic form, the opening stanza of *Psyche* invokes the Muse's aid, but Tighe complicates the classical invocation with an explanation of the specific type of inspiration that her work has summoned.
Let not the rugged brow the rhymes accuse,
Which speak of gentle knights and ladies fair,
Nor scorn the lighter labours of the Muse,
Who yet, for cruel battles would not dare
The low-strung chords of her weak lyre prepare;
But loves to court repose in slumberly lay,
To tell of goodly bowers and gardens rare,
Of gentle blandishments and amorous play,
And all the lore of love, in courtly verse essay. (1-9)

Anticipating the negative response of a male reader, whose
"rugged brow," she assumes, is accustomed to tales of "cruel
battles," Tighe explains that her Spenserian epic, the story
of a beautiful mortal woman's quest for apotheosis through
the unifying powers of love, is only the product of the
"lighter labours of the Muse." In so doing, Tighe
establishes a highly qualified relationship with a Muse who
is concerned solely with inspiring the "courtly verse" of
"goodly bowers," "gardens rare," "amorous play," and stories
of female devotion (the "lore of love") such as the one that
Tighe's *Psyche* recounts. Hers is a Muse who "would not
dare" to presume that the "low-strung chords of her weak
lyre" could ever be capable of telling masculine stories of
contest and conquest.

Tighe's self-deprecatory invocation of a less-than-epic
Muse serves as both a parody of the traditional, masculine
epic invocation and an indication that the love story which
follows is, itself, a reworking of masculine epic
aspirations. From the start, *Psyche* foregrounds its own
engagement with a literary genre that is resistant to
Tighe's projected thematic goal: namely, delivering an
account of heterosexual love from a female perspective. The ideological conflict between genre and theme resurfaces throughout *Psyche* as Tighe repeatedly appeals to the elusive Muse to grant her the power of "language."

Delightful visions of my lonely hours!  
Charm of my life and solace of my care!  
Oh! would the Muse but lend proportioned powers,  
And give me language, equal to declare  
The wonders which she bids my fancy share,  
When rapt in her to other worlds I fly,  
See angel forms unutterably fair,  
And hear the inexpressive harmony  
That seems to float on air, and warble through the sky.  
(V.1.1-9)

By her own account, Tighe's relationship with the Muse is a sterile one, a claim that is belied by the very existence of the poem itself. Nevertheless, Tighe insists that this story of heterosexual love, told by a woman and aimed at a female audience, can find only a limited voice in the same-sex relationship that she maintains with the Muse. *Psyche*, therefore, is concerned not only with delivering a feminized, epic account of heterosexual love, but also with exploring the difficulties of engaging in such a literary project.

Tighe again foregrounds this theme in *Psyche* when she calls upon the supposedly non-linguistic, intuitive understanding of her female readers to grasp Psyche's overpowering emotions.

Oh, you for whom I write! whose hearts can melt  
At the soft thrilling voice whose power you prove,  
You know what charm, unutterably felt,  
Attends the unexpected voice of love:  
Above the lyre, the lute's soft notes above,
With sweet enchantment to the soul it steals
And bears it to Elysium's happy grove;
You best can tell the rapture Psyche feels
When Love's ambrosial lip the vows of Hymen seals.

(I.51)

Tighe's description of the "unutterable" charm of love's
"unexpected voice," rising "above" the notes of both the
lute and lyre, is representative of the kind of poetic
phrasing that Weller and others see echoed in Keats's works.
But, although this passage may recall for us the "sensuous
ditties of no tone" in Keats's "Grecian Urn," the fact
remains that, thematically, Tighe is dealing with a very
different "flowery tale." Unexpected love, argues Tighe, is
"best" recounted by women who have experienced its silencing
power. Yet, if this supposedly non-linguistic communicative
power is the source of love's strength, it is also the
source of frustration for both Psyche and Tighe herself, who
cannot find the language to express this debilitating
passion.

At first, Tighe's appeals to a lesser Muse and to the
non-linguistic intuitions of her female readers may seem to
establish the kind of gender-based, essentialist division
that we have seen Mellor codify as "male" and "female"
Romanticism. If love poetry, written by a woman,
constitutes the Muse's "lighter labours," then one
implication of Tighe's comment is that the more serious work
of the Muse is devoted to inspiring the aggressive verse of
male writers. But the allegory of love and fidelity
developed in Psyche can also be read as a critique of the
all-encompassing egotism of sublime transcendence. Tighe appears to have reached this allegorical solution by working through the tropes of material sublimity that we have seen in the sonnets of Smith and the aesthetic theories of Baillie. If Psyche is Tighe’s allegorical critique of the aesthetic and cultural discourses of Romanticism, then we might expect to find more direct evidence of Tighe’s concern with these issues in other poems or writings, but it is difficult to assemble a coherent developmental narrative of Tighe's poetic life since she published nothing in her own lifetime. However, we can at least partially reconstruct the autobiographical context of Psyche and its aesthetic concerns by looking at some of the poems that Tighe wrote during roughly the same period.

Tighe printed a limited number of copies of Psyche for her family and friends in 1795, to which she affixed a preface, but the rest of her poetry remained scattered throughout her journals and letters, most of which were burned by her mother after her death in 1810.\footnote{Mary's mother, Theodosia, records that she burned Mary's papers, but she also notes that she and Caroline (Mary's sister-in-law) transcribed portions of the journals, including a number of unpublished poems. In addition, other unpublished sonnets and shorter poems appear in the commonplace books and reading journals of the Tighe family, now in the collections of the National Library of Ireland.} The posthumous edition of Psyche that her brother, William, published in 1811 contains a number of sonnets, not originally intended for publication, which he claims "stand in need of that indulgence which a posthumous work always..."
demands when it did not receive the correction of the author." But in these sonnets, representing the "occasional effusion of her thoughts," we can trace some of the individual strands of Tighe's thoughts on the transcendental sublime and can paint a background against which to view Psyche as promoting the hypothesis for an alternate route to resolving the characteristic alienation of the Romantic self. Two sonnets from the first edition of Psyche in particular are worth considering: "Written at Scarborough" (1799) gives a concise account of Tighe's engagement with the popular tropes of the sublime, and "Written at Rossana" (undated) presents a disturbing view on the limited consolations of domestic love.

Beginning in a moment of quiet reflection that is consistent with the rhetorical technique of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's conversation poems, "Written at Scarborough" blends the productions of memory and imagination to draw a series of parallels between personal experience and natural landscape. But these analogies do not produce the "restoration" that Wordsworth usually finds in nature; instead, Tighe's sonnet underscores the solitude of the narrator's continued suffering.

As musing pensive in my silent home
I hear far off the sullen ocean's roar,
Where the rude wave just sweeps the level shore,
Or bursts upon the rocks with whitening foam,
I think upon the scenes my life has known;
On days of sorrow, and some hours of joy;

Both which alike time could so soon destroy!
And now they seem a busy dream alone;
While on the earth exists no single trace
Of all that shook my agitated soul,
As on the beach new waves for ever roll
And fill their past forgotten brother's place:
But I, like the worn sand, exposed remain
To each new storm which frets the angry main.

Like Smith, Tighe unravels the metaphors that lead to transcendence in much of the male-authored poetry of the period by forestalling a joyful resolution of the sonnet’s tensions and turning instead to a reaffirmation of self that is predicated upon the material reality of her continued suffering. Both Smith and Tighe supplant the apotheosis of the transcendental sublime with an elevated sense of personal, physical endurance. As we have seen, Burkean and Wordsworthian accounts of the sublime necessitate a distancing of the subject from (and a subsequent suppression of) the material object of terror or awe, because the proximity of the physical source of emotional pain would foreground the subject's own bodily danger and thereby forestall the subject's approach to transcendence. For Tighe, however, the source of her grief in this sonnet is found in the absence of the material forces which have caused her "joy" and "sorrow" in the past; her general feeling of self-diminution, a feeling that is usually anticipatory of the self-expansion that characterizes the transcendental sublime, is brought about not by the overwhelming presence of some external force or object, but rather by the realization that "on the earth exists no single trace / Of all that shook my agitated soul." In
fact, her pensive musing is itself initiated by the absence (the spatial, though not aural, displacement) of the violent ocean: "I hear far off the sullen ocean's roar." What results from Tighe's musings is not Wordsworthian "recollection in tranquillity"; instead, she comes to the sober realization that the remembered events of her life now "seem a busy dream alone." In this sonnet, Tighe longs to anchor her ephemeral memories in the tangible world in order to preserve them and to lend them an external, verifiable manifestation.

Is Tighe's sonnet, then, a lament over the tenuous, dream-like nature of memory, or is it a bold assertion of self? Like many of Smith's sonnets, Tighe's "Written at Scarborough" appropriates the initiating tropes of the transcendental sublime to underscore the discursive rootedness of the female subject in the material world. Tighe's lament at the poem's conclusion that, unlike the scenes which have vanished from the earth, she "like the worn sand, exposed remain[s] / To each new storm which frets the angry main," actually fulfills her own desire for some material sign of her past (and continued) presence in the world. The physicality of her presence is stressed by her metaphor of the resilient "worn sand" exposed to the forever new and forever forgotten waves that roll onto the beach. The conclusion, then, represents a determined assertion of self-identity that is neither the product of sublime transcendence nor an expression of what Mellor's "feminine
sublime" identifies as a woman poet's celebration of continuity with nature and the surrounding landscape. Tighe remains in opposition to the natural world, drawing her identity from her continued endurance of time and nature instead of escaping them through sublime transcendence or the dream visions of the imagination.

The negative dialectic that Tighe establishes between self and nature (a self-perpetuating opposition that guarantees the continued tension from which she draws her poetic identity) leads her to a more disturbing meditation in "Written at Rossana." In this sonnet, Tighe moves from a belated appreciation of nature's beauty to a reflection on the qualified beauty of love in the domestic sphere, and this transition is made possible by her recognition of the sexual tensions linking the two worlds. As Wordsworth problematically learns, from his destructive act in "Nutting," to recognize and revere the "spirit in the woods," Tighe also uses a wantonly violent act against nature as an object for a highly personalized realization.

OH, my rash hand! what hast thou idly done?
Torn from its idle bank the last poor flower
That patient lingered to this wintry hour:
Expanding cheerily to the languid sun
It flourished yet, and yet it might have blown,
Hadh not thy sudden desolating power
Destroyed what many a storm and angry shower
Had pitying spared. The pride of summer gone,
Cherish what yet in faded life can bloom;
And if domestic love still sweetly smiles,
If sheltered by thy cot he yet beguiles
Thy winter's prospect of its dreary gloom,
Oh, from the spoiler's touch thy treasure screen,
To bask beneath Contentment's beam serene!
Tighe's despair stems not so much from the recognition of the violence of her act as from her realization that had she left the flower alone, it "might have blown." The major thematic difference between "Nutting" and "Written at Rosanna" (which were written at about the same time) is the distinction between the emphasis on the symbolic loss of virginity in the former and the literal loss of reproductive power in the latter. The reproductive anxiety that sustains Tighe's poem is based on her realization that what she has "destroyed" is not the chaste beauty of the flower, but rather the possibility that the flower "might" have blossomed and spread its seeds to the wind. The poem implies, after all, that the flower has "patient[ly] lingered to this wintry hour" in order to fulfill this procreative goal.

Reading within the parameters of canonical Romantic iconography, we might interpret Tighe's lone flower as a lingering image of beauty amidst the desolate landscape of winter. In the context of such a reading, the flower would serve as a reminder of the promised return of summer and a testimony to the hopeful endurance of life. In Tighe's sonnet, however, the flower functions as a more personalized reference to the self-consuming fulfillment of female reproduction. The act of flowering constitutes the plant's height of beauty and the dawn of its sexual life, the maturation of which is eventually achieved at the cost of the flower itself as it blows to seed. Given the widespread
popularity of amateur botany as a hobby for both men and women of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, Tighe would have been well aware of the anatomical sexual analogies being drawn between plants and humans in the literature of her day, analogies which many moralists of the time believed to be a dangerous threat to female modesty. ⁶ This analogy permits Tighe to shift her view from the natural world to the domestic sphere, where she applies the nature-taught lesson of the poem's first half.

Despite its didactic tone, however, the poem's conclusion generates more questions than answers. Is this sonnet a warning about the consequences of sexual intercourse for women (an extrapolation of the blowing to seed that ultimately destroys a flower's beauty), or does it serve as a consolation to married women, whose physical beauty has already faded, by promising that "contentment" is still possible within the sphere of domestic love? The referent of "thy" throughout the poem is the narrator's "rash hand," metonymically representing Tighe both as author of the poem and as the author of the "sudden desolating power" that forestalls the flower's blowing to seed. It is

this hand that is addressed in the closing lines: "Oh, from the spoiler's touch thy treasure screen, / To bask beneath Contentment's beam serene!" What exactly is this treasure? In the poem's first half, this "treasure" is presumably the flower's ability to reproduce, but at the conclusion, this treasure seems to refer more vaguely to something that the married woman would lose were she to surrender to the "spoiler's touch." In this context, "treasure" suggests a wide range of meanings, including anything from virginity and integrity to physical health.

One of the most disturbing aspects of the poem's conclusion is the ambiguity of the referents for "he" and "spoiler." It is unclear whether the "he" who "yet beguiles" refers to a deified abstraction of mythologized Love, or more specifically to a husband. Is the "spoiler" who threatens the poet's "treasure" emblematic of the threat that Tighe sees love presenting to all women, or is it a representative of the false allure of a particular lover? The poem sends a self-contradictory message reflecting the mixed blessings of female beauty and sexuality. The very sources of a woman's limited power in Tighe's culture -- physical attractiveness and the ability to bear children -- are actually at odds, the former often being destroyed by the fulfillment of the latter. If Tighe's lament over the rashly picked flower focuses on the lost power of that flower to reproduce, then, analogously, it appears that in the last half of the poem her own happiness derives from the
preservation of her own reproductive potential (her "treasure") through its prolonged unfulfillment. If we read backwards, then, from the sonnet's concluding prescription for female contentment in the domestic sphere, Tighe can be seen as paradoxically preserving the flower's "treasure" by picking it, thus preventing its blowing to seed.

When we read this sonnet against the background of Tighe's surviving personal papers, its sexual caution takes on an autobiographical dimension that will give us a better insight into the tensions at play in Psyche. In both her poetry and her journals, we find recurring expressions of frustration over the disadvantages that women encounter in their relationships with men. In her reading journal for 1806, for example, Tighe comments bitterly:

-- how true it is that in common opinion the very laws of morality are chang'd in considering the conduct of men towards women -- they may be esteem'd good natured & yet have inflicted needlessly the most terrible anguish that human power can produce -- they may be called true & have deceived -- they may have received the utmost benefits, the most extreme devotion that a friend can give & be absolved from gratitude if love is also added. (8)

According to Tighe, heterosexual love masks an inherent misogyny in patriarchal culture that she can only identify as an unjust paradox, one by which "the very laws of morality are chang'd." Equally as unjust, argues Tighe, is the cultural burden to which physical beauty subjects a woman. In the comment serving as the epigraph to this chapter, she laments: "let a woman be ever so clever & let
her act as she may, her figure is always an obstacle thro' life." Beauty is a double-bind in Tighe's evaluation: it is expected of women and it serves as their greatest limitation. If physical beauty attracts men to women, it also distracts a man's attention from the intellectual attributes possessed by a woman and subordinates these attributes to the appearance of her body.

Tighe apparently experienced the conflict between beauty and intellect firsthand since, by all accounts, she was as well known for her outstanding beauty as for her literary accomplishments.\(^7\) Her sister-in-law, Caroline Tighe, remembers "hearing it remarked that Mrs. Tighe was very pretty but had not much sense." According to Caroline, Mary believed that "learning and talents in women never excited love, and while young, she was willing to pass for having neither."\(^8\) After Mary's death, her mother reflected on the burdens and consequences of her daughter's physical attractiveness:

She was scarcely fourteen when she awakened my solicitude by being noticed by daring and artful young men every way her inferiors & though her openness with me prevented any really serious apprehensions on the subject, yet it made me prematurely anxious to see her well disposed of, nor was it the only evil that

\(^7\)It is worth comparing the stereotypical visual representations of the three poets that this dissertation discusses. Portraits of Smith and Baillie represent them in the staid, reserved demeanor for which they were most often praised, but the portraits of Tighe all present her with long, flowing, wild hair and a loose robe, open to her chest.

\(^8\)Caroline Tighe, Anecdotes of our Family, written for my children (Ms. 4810, The National Library of Ireland, 1820), 33. Mary Anne Caroline Tighe was the sister of Mary Tighe's husband, Henry.
resulted from these addresses, which, however scorned, gave my poor child a relish for admiration.⁹

According to Tighe's mother, the real tragedy of her daughter's beauty was not that it made her the victim of male interests but rather that it fed the weaknesses of both herself and her daughter for praise and admiration. A century later, in her survey of Irish women writers, Catherine Jane Hamilton reaffirms the fame of Tighe's beauty, equating it with her literary talent, when she asserts that "she is doubly interesting from her wonderful beauty, as well as from her poem of Psyche."¹⁰

Given Tighe's personal interest in the cultural burden that physical beauty places upon a woman, particularly within the context of heterosexual love, it is understandable that she would find the mythological tale of "Cupid and Psyche," in which a young woman is unjustly punished for her extraordinary beauty, both an attractive and appropriate subject for an epic re-telling. On the allegorical level, Psyche also explores another dimension of

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⁹The comments of Theodosia Blackford (Mary Tighe's mother) appear under the heading "Observations on the foregoing journal by her mother, Mrs. Blackford" which follows a selection of transcriptions from Mary Tighe's journal in the manuscript of Caroline Tighe's Anecdotes of our family, written for my children, 90. Theodosia's last name by birth was Tighe until she married the Rev. William Blackford. Their daughter Mary became a Tighe again when she married her cousin, Henry Tighe, the son of Theodosia's brother, William.

¹⁰Catherine Jane Hamilton, Notable Irishwomen (Dublin: Sealy, Bryers & Walker, 1904), 104. Hamilton continues her praise of Tighe's beauty with a detailed description of her portrait by George Romney. "The shape of Mrs. Tighe's face in Romney's portrait is a perfect oval, long dark brown tresses fall on her shoulders, and stray across her low but intellectual brow, the deep-blue eyes — very large and pellucid — are raised to heaven. The lower part of the face is exquisitely formed — the mouth a perfect Cupid's bow — the whole expression is sweet, innocent, and refined, though tinged with indescribable sadness."
beauty that we have yet to address here: its aesthetic incompatibility with the sublime. Together with the two sonnets that we have just examined, these accounts help to create an informative backdrop against which to read *Psyche*. They show not only Tighe's interest in issues of the sublime and the difficulties that a woman faces when dealing with an aesthetic dialectic that prioritizes transcendence, but also her interest in the equally problematic dialectic present in male and female sexual relationships. When engaging these issues head-on, Tighe hesitates to offer simple resolutions, but in *Psyche* we will see her attempt to resolve the aesthetic and cultural problems that trouble her by circumventing the popular Romantic tropes of sublimity and recuperating beauty as the position of power from which a female heroine can bridge Romantic dialecticism.

II

We can now begin to discern three strands of thought that Tighe weaves together in her epic; these include: 1) her interest in resolving the kind of Romantic dialectical alienation between self and nature that takes center stage in "Written at Scarborough," 2) her accompanying interest in resolving the specifically misogynist dialectic alienating women from men, particularly in the context of heterosexual relationships, that appears analogically in "Written at Rossana," and 3) her discursive mission to transform beauty
-- specifically female beauty -- from a marker of weakness into the primary agent responsible for the concurrent resolution of the dialectical conflicts just described. In addition to recognizing Tighe's engagement with beauty as a quality or attribute that places women at a disadvantage in heterosexual relationships, we must also consider another burden that the concept of beauty brings with it; beauty also becomes, in the Romantic period, the sign of limitation marking the inability of women to access the discourse of the transcendental sublime. There are, then, a number of interwoven discourses operating beneath the apparent allegorical simplicity of *Psyche*. Far from representing a closed, finite system of meaning, as de Man has characterized the Romantic view of allegory, Tighe's allegorical epic is an assemblage of proliferating meanings, and the multiple rhizomic connections of her poem become more apparent as we delve into her allegory. When we contextualize *Psyche* within the dominant discourses of the sublime and then further complicate this context by taking into account Tighe's personal interests in both the powerless position of women in heterosexual relationships and in her Methodist beliefs in the necessity of introspection and in power of the emotions, we can begin to see *Psyche* 's heroine, who succeeds in her quest for perfect, heterosexual love by remaining true to her passions and to the beautiful forms of the natural world, as promoting an argument with aesthetic, social, and religious dimensions.
Before examining several passages from *Psyche* that support my argument, I want to take a quick look at two things. First, in order to clarify my argument about *Psyche*'s involvement in the discourses of late-eighteenth century aesthetics, I would like to rehearse Peter De Bolla's important distinction between discourses of the sublime and discourses on the sublime, a distinction that will help us to locate Tighe's discursive position within the rhizomic network of Romanticism. Secondly, in order to identify yet another interwoven discourse in *Psyche* linking it to the Romantic movement, I want to discuss briefly the importance of Tighe's early involvement in Methodism.

In *The Discourse of the Sublime*, De Bolla is concerned with mapping the development of modern conceptions of selfhood which, he argues, are the product of a discursive network that emerged in England during the Seven Years War (1756-1763). The idea that the concept of the autonomous subject arose in this particular historical period is not itself new, as De Bolla admits; however, the focus of his investigation is not on the subject as "agent" but rather on the subject as a discursive "position" or "category" that is constructed by a network of intersecting discourses. De Bolla's purpose, as he describes it, is not to generate a developmental narrative to explain the modern concept of the self, or the aesthetic concept of sublimity for that matter; rather, his intention is to describe the nature of
discourses themselves as they interact with and influence each other.

Although it is impossible to come up with an exhaustive list of all the participants in any such discourse network, De Bolla argues that the dominant participants in the network from which the concept of the autonomous self arises can be identified by three types: the "discourse of the sublime," the "discourse on the sublime," and the "discourse of debt." In order to "stabilize the network for analysis," De Bolla makes a categorical distinction between what he calls a "discrete discourse" and a "discourse network," the latter of which subsumes and is composed of members of the former category. "A discourse on something is to be taken as a discrete discourse, a discourse which is to be read in a highly specific way, within a very well defined context."¹¹ A discourse of the sublime refers to a vast network of discrete discourses on the sublime which are enabled by, and in fact only have meaning within, the larger network. De Bolla explains:

"... the discourse of the sublime is a discursive analytic, a discourse that attempts to describe and analyze objects that are exterior to it -- in this case the external world, and certainly no different from the discourse on the sublime -- but which constantly phrases its explanations and analyses in terms that can only be understood as indications of internal effects, which is to say internal to itself. Hence, the discourse of the sublime effectively describes and analyses itself, it explains how sublime sensation

arises in the individual by recourse to the workings of the discourse of analysis. It is distinct from the discourse on the sublime in one crucial respect: it cannot authenticate its statements and analyses through reference to an external authority since its analytic procedure is based upon an internalization of all analysis and description . . . The discourse on the sublime places external authority as the control for its analyses and descriptions, as the reference point that authenticates its findings. This external authority may take many forms, from the theological to the social, but its legitimating power is always present and capable of being summoned up.\(^{12}\)

De Bolla's approach to the discursive formation of the subject shares several similarities with the rhizomic model of intertextuality, and therefore his discussion of the sublime as an aesthetic discourse operating within a larger discursive network provides a useful theoretical context in which to read *Psyche*. The argument in Tighe's *Psyche*, I am suggesting, is a discourse on the sublime, and it is understandable as such only when we read it within the context of the discourse of the sublime. Tighe's argument represents one strand of the rhizomically interrelated discourses that make up the discursive agglomeration that De Bolla identifies as the discourse of the sublime, and we can only fully understand her argument by identifying the various forms of external authority that Tighe implicitly draws into her epic. In the previous section of this chapter, I attempted to sketch out the external authority constituted by the social/cultural context in which Tighe was writing, and before going further, I want to make some

\(^{12}\)Ibid., 34-35.
general comments now on the religious background that informs Tighe's aesthetics.

Although traces of Methodist teachings are not overtly apparent in *Psyche*, Tighe's journal and many of her shorter poems are filled with references to her Methodist upbringing; given the fervent tone of these writings, it would be difficult to overestimate the effects of this religious background on her poetry. In the portions of Tighe's journal that her mother transcribed before setting fire to the whole of her daughter's personal writings, Tighe frequently repents for having allowed the attractions of vanity, ambition, and a desire for personal fame distract her from prayer and religious meditation. Two examples (from among many similar entries) will serve to give an overall sense of the excessive guilt that pervades Tighe's reflections on what she perceived to be her religious failings.

**Friday, July 18, 1788**
Oh My God! how uselessly do I spend my precious time! how unprofitably do I employ it? day after day & year after year! I go on upbraiding myself, resolving & resolving without the power of fulfilling my resolutions -- Oh Lord! exert thy power over my fickle heart, then shall my feet no longer rove? "settled & fixed in thee" Oh let not the impressions made by thy spirit be as the early dew & morning cloud which quickly vanish --

**21 February, 1793**
How alas! did I rejoice in vanity! Now am I punished in the very way in which I have offended -- I exulted in the pride & folly of my heart & I fell into the snare as a bird into the net of the Fowler. My heart unwillingly owns thee anguish which rends it while occupied with these reflections.
There are many such entries. Although these passages are tantalizing for their biographical intimations, there is, unfortunately, little or no accompanying information to help us determine what actions she is regretting. It is likely that she is referring to relatively harmless transgressions, but what is significant about these entries, and what makes them relevant to this study of Psyche, is the evidence they provide regarding the rigorous self-analysis to which Tighe routinely subjected herself. This kind of relentless introspection, which constitutes one of Methodism's main "methods" of spiritual meditation, is a dominant trait of the heroine of Tighe's epic and explains the self-reflective disposition of Psyche herself and of the narrator. The Psyche that we encounter in Apuleius's version of the story is not the least bit introspective; her self-reflective conscience is entirely Tighe's own creation. In one particular instance, Psyche realizes that she is responsible for her own plight when, after having willingly boarded the chariot that will take her to the castle of Vanity, she realizes her mistake: "With desperate efforts, all in vain she tries / To escape the ills which now too sure she knew / Must from her ill-placed confidence arise: / Betrayed -- Ah! self-betrayed, a wretched sacrifice" (III.54.6-90, emphasis mine).

We find further evidence of Tighe's connections to Methodism in an entry that records a visit paid to her
family, at Gardiner's Row, by John Wesley during one of his trips to Ireland in 1788.

April 11, 1788
Mr. Wesley breakfasted with us in Gardiner's row. I sat next him -- after breakfast he prayed, remembering me in the most tender & ardent manner. when he rose from his knees he took hold of my hand & said "dear Molly, expect that there are blessings in store for you" he turned to my bookcase & said "There are many books here, Molly, not worth your reading" & then observed a good deal on all books, particularly fine poetry. said that History & religious books were the best study . . .

The implied incompatibility of fine poetry and religion is a troubling concern for Tighe, and such a concern appears to direct the didacticism of her allegory. Unlike Joanna Baillie, who wrote a number of devotional hymns, Tighe wrote few such overtly religious poems, but her verse nonetheless incorporates the Methodist emphasis on attaining spiritual grace through the cultivation of intense emotions, through an openness to the beauty of the natural world, and through the practice of rigorous self-analysis that converts the classical lesson of "Cupid and Psyche" into a work of religious didacticism.13

Returning now to Psyche, we can see that one way in which Tighe achieves this didactic end is through her critique of the gratuitous, self-indulgent pleasures of the sublime; to reiterate the opening assertions of this

section, in *Psyche* aesthetic discourse and religious discourse are interwoven with a third discourse in which Tighe laments the difficulties of being a woman, burdened by physical beauty, in a heterosexual relationship. Tighe's goal then, in her Spenserian allegory, is to transform cultural inscriptions of beauty into signs of moral goodness, but not in the weak and fragile sense in which many male writers characterized it in their aesthetic theories. The character of Psyche becomes, in Tighe's hands, a powerful heroine whose inner strength is the moral referent of her external beauty and whose faithfulness to beautiful forms in the *physical* world enables her apotheosis into a *metaphysical* one. The transformation of Psyche from a Classical victim to a Romantic heroine occurs early in Tighe's version, when she aggressively defends the innocence of Psyche's beauty and shows her exhibiting a faithfulness to the ideal of perfect love, long before she ever meets Cupid.

The epic begins *in medias res*, just after Psyche as been cast out of Cupid's palace for committing the unpardonable crime of looking at his face by lamplight:

Though solitary now, dismayed, forlorn,
Without attendant through the forest rude,
The peerless maid of royal lineage born
By many a royal youth had oft been wooed;
Low at her feet full many a prince had sued,
And homage paid unto her beauty rare;
But all their blandishments her heart withstood;
And well might mortal suitor sure despair,
Since mortal charms were none which might with hers compare.
Yet nought of insolence or haughty pride
Found ever in her gentle breath a place;
Though men her wondrous beauty deified,
And rashly deeming such celestial grace
Could ever spring from any earthly race,
Lo! all forsaking Cytherea's shrine,
Her sacred altars now no more embrace,
But to fair Psyche pay those rites divine,
Which, Goddess! are thy due, and should be only thine.
(1.6-7)

In Tighe's account, Psyche is neither insolent nor proud;
what incites Venus's jealous rage is the fact that men have
deified this mortal woman by inappropriately worshipping her
beauty. Although this deification is also the cause of
Venus's anger in Apuleius's version, Tighe emphasizes
Psyche's innocence, drawing attention to the fact that her
beauty is a curse that attracts the envy of her sisters as
well.

But envy of her beauty's growing fame
Poisoned her sisters' hearts with secret gall,
And oft with seeming piety they blame
The worship which they justly impious call;
And oft, lest evil should their sire befal,
Besought him to forbid the erring crowd
Which hourly thronged around the regal hall,
With incense, gifts, and invocations loud,
To her whose guiltless breast, ne'er felt elation
proud.

For she was timid as the wintry flower,
That, whiter then the snow it blooms among,
Droops its fair head submissive to the power
Of every angry blast which sweeps along
Sparing the lovely trembler, while the strong
Majestic tenants of the leafless wood
It levels low. But, ah! the pitying song
Must tell how, than the tempest's self more rude,
Fierce wrath and cruel hate their suppliant prey
pursued. (1.8-9)
The opening stanzas quickly establish Psyche as the victim of her own beauty, suffering from the inappropriate attentions of mortal men and the envious machinations of other women, both mortal and immortal. Aside from the emphasis that Tighe places on Psyche's innocence, the first two cantos of the epic summarize, fairly closely, the plot of Apuleius's story; it is not until the third canto that, as her introductory comments point out, the allegory becomes her own.

In Canto III, Psyche's allegorical quest to reunite herself with the form of ideal love represented by Cupid develops into the kind of argument that De Bolla identifies as a discourse on the sublime. The canto opens in praise of the ideal love that draws Psyche toward her goal.

Oh, who art thou who darest of Love complain?  
He is a gentle spirit and injures none!  
His foes are ours; from them the bitter pain,  
The keen, deep anguish, the heart-rending groan,  
Which in his milder reign are never known.  
His tears are softer than the April showers,  
White-handed Innocence supports his throne,  
His sighs are sweet as breath of earliest flowers,  
Affection guides his steps, and peace protects his bowers. (III.1)

Taking her cue from Apuleius, Tighe has Psyche face a series of challenges, but these challenges are not the specific tasks assigned by Venus, as in the original story; rather, they take the form of Psyche's confrontation with abstract dangers: vanity, fraud, suspicion, jealousy, ambition, avarice, and inconstancy. These distractions, Tighe
explains, are responsible for the absence of love, in its ideal form, on earth.

But scarce admittance he [Love] on earth can find, 
Opposed by vanity, by fraud ensnared, 
Suspicion frights him from the gloomy mind, 
And jealousy in vain his smiles has shared, 
Whose sullen frown the gentle godhead scared; 
From passion's rapid blaze in haste he flies, 
His wings alone the fiercer flame has spared; 
From him ambition turns his scornful eyes, 
And avarice, slave to gold, a generous lord denies.

But chief Inconstancy his power destroys; 
To mock his lovely form, an idle train 
With magic skill she dressed in transient toys, 
By these the selfish votaries she can gain 
Whom Love's more simple bands could ne'er detain. 
Ah! how shall Psyche through such mortal foes 
The fated end of all her toils attain? 
Sadly she ponders o'er her hopeless woes, 
Till on the pillowy turf she sinks to short repose. 

(III.2-3)

What begins to emerge in the opening stanzas of Canto III is not only a metaphysical pursuit of ideal love (i.e. love as it might exist on a spiritual level as revealed through dream visions or through the imagination) but also an exploration of the ways in which the realization of that ideal might be brought about on earth, in its physical manifestation as beauty. Love's realization has been frustrated in the past by those earthy temptations and suspicions that "mock his lovely form" with the illusions of false beauty and "transient toys." This argument, of course, brings us to a central assumption in the long tradition of Keats criticism, in which many critics have argued that the pursuit of dream visions in "Endymion" represents the young poet's naive escapism, and that later
works such as "The Eve of St. Agnes" and the odes represent a mature return to the experiences of the material world. The pursuit of physical pleasures that will be repeated in the hereafter "in a finer tone" comes to represent, for Keats, the realization of the ideal forms of beauty that the imagination "seizes" as "truth."

For Tighe's Psyche, the ideal form of love, realized in the beautiful forms of Cupid, her Knight, and his page, does not require a blending of male and female qualities, in the manner that Keats's twentieth-century "metaphysical critics" argue that Madeline and Porphyro spiritually and physically dissolve into each other through a process of envisioned love made real. Rather, Psyche's love erases the gendered oppositions of male and female altogether within a continuum of feminized beauty. Nowhere in Psyche do we find a masculine antithesis to the heroine's feminine beauty; the love plot does not strive to unify masculine and feminine beauty through sexual union but rather attempts to extend feminine beauty as a sign of moral goodness. The knight and his page (Cupid and a cherub in disguise) who arrive to accompany Psyche on her quest are presented as trustworthy because of their effeminized beauty. "Inspired" by the "majesty" of Psyche's beauty, the knight offers his services "with mildest courtesy" (III.5.2-3).

Gently approaching then with fairest speech
He proffered service to the lonely dame,
And prayed her that she might not so impeach
The honour of his youth's yet spotless fame,
As aught to fear which might his knighthood shame;
But if her unprotected steps to guard,
The glory of her champion he might claim,
He asked no other guerdon or reward,
Than what bright honour's self might to his deeds
award.

Doubting, and musing much within her mind,
With half suspicious, half confiding eye,
Awhile she stood; her thoughts bewildered find
No utterance, unwilling to deny
Such proffered aid, yet bashful to reply
With quick assent, since though concealed his face
Beneath his helm, yet might she well espy
And in each fair proportion plainly trace
The symmetry of form, and perfect youthful grace.

Hard were it to describe the nameless charm
That o'er each limb, in every action played,
The softness of that voice, which could disarm
The hand of fury of its deadly blade:
In shining armour was the youth arrayed,
And on his shield a bleeding heart he bore,
His lofty crest light plumes of azure shade,
There shone a wounded dragon bathed in gore,
And bright with silver beamed the silken scarf he wore.

His milk-white steed with glittering trappings
blazed,
Whose reigns a beauteous boy attendant held,
On the fair squire with wonder Psyche gazed,
For scarce he seemed of age to bear the shield,
Far less a ponderous lance, or sword to wield;
Yet well this little page his lord had served,
His youthful arm had many a foe repelled,
His watchful eye from many a snare preserved,
Nor ever from his steps in any danger swerved.

(III.6-9)

Read within the tradition of Spenserian allegory, the
descriptions of the knight and his page as "fair" and
"beauteous" remain consistent with the chivalric idiom of
the Spenserian tradition in which Tighe is writing. But
when we take into account that her appropriation of this
idiom occurs in the wake of Burke's influential work on the
sublime, and that, as a result, her work circulates in an
aesthetic discourse preoccupied with the ideology of the burgeoning Romantic movement, the semantic value of "beauty" undergoes a significant shift.

By the early Romantic period, an author could no longer invoke the term "beauty," whether as an aesthetic category or a personal attribute, simply to denote an external manifestation of internal, moral goodness, without also summoning its opposing qualities, the rugged characteristics of the sublime. In fact, Tighe's description of the knight's beauty is consistent with Burkean definitions of beauty; the heroic knight's "fair proportion" and "symmetry of form" are in direct opposition to the superior masculine qualities that Burke assigns to the sublime.

For sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small; beauty should be smooth, and polished; the great, rugged and negligent; beauty should shun the right line, yet deviate from it insensibly; the great in many cases loves the right line, and when it deviates, it often makes a strong deviation; beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and gloomy; beauty should be light and delicate; the great ought to be solid, and even massive.14

14Burke, "Sublime and Beautiful" 124. Burke is careful to establish the criteria by which the beautiful can occasionally be linked to virtue "with propriety," but for Kant, beauty is the determining factor in moral choices made by women. "Women will avoid the wicked not because it is unright, but because it is ugly; and virtuous actions mean to them such as are morally beautiful. Nothing of duty, nothing of compulsion, nothing of obligation! Woman is intolerant of all commands and all morose constraint. They do something only because it pleases them, and the art consists in making only that please them which is good. I hardly believe that the fair sex is capable of principles, and I hope by that not to offend, for these are also extremely rare in the male." Kant explains, however, that Providence has provided men with "kind and benevolent sensations" to ensure the fulfillment of moral principles. "Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime," 81.
How are we to read a poem that elevates beauty, as an attribute of both sexes, in a historical aesthetic context that gives the ascendant position to sublimity as the mode of discourse through which the transcendent resolution of the self/other dialectic is to be achieved? Tighe increases our awareness that some women writers did not simply accept the inferior position to which the circulating discourses of sublimity subjected them, but rather found a means of empowering themselves through embracing the beautiful as an alternate means of achieving the kind of apotheosis exclusively promised by sublime transcendence in male-authored texts. As Psyche pursues her quest, this is the argument that we can see unfolding.

In effect, the obstacles that Psyche encounters on her quest require her to choose between allegorical representations of the sublime and the beautiful. Accordingly, as the quest begins Tighe's own relationship to the Muse undergoes a shift. Recall that *Psyche* opens with Tighe's apologetic invocation of a lesser Muse for her tale of love, but in Canto III, as Psyche prepares to set out on her quest, Tighe intervenes in the narrative to describe her exclusive relationship to the Muse, a relationship that is predicated on love.

Oh! have you never known the silent charm
That undisturbed retirement yields the soul,
Where no intruder might your peace alarm,
And tenderness hath wept without control,
While melting fondness o'er the bosom stole?
Did fancy never, in some lonely grove,
Abridge the hours which must in absence roll?
Those pensive pleasures did you never prove,
Oh, you have never loved! you know not what is love!

They do not love who can to these prefer
The tumult of the gay, or folly's roar;
The Muse they know not; nor delight in her
Who can the troubled soul to rest restore,
Calm contemplation: Yes, I must deplore
Their joyless state, even more than his who mourns
His love for ever lost; delight no more
Unto his widowed heart indeed returns,
Yet, while he weeps, his soul their cold indifference
spurns. (III.38-39)

By plotting an alternate course that circumvents the rugged
spectacles of sublimity altogether, Tighe establishes a path
to the tranquillity usually found only in the transcendental
sublime. Such rugged scenes, she implies, are the province
of "active minds" that do not know the "delicious charm / Of
sympathising hearts."

There are who know not the delicious charm
Of sympathising hearts; let such employ
Their active minds; the trumpet's loud alarm
Shall yield them hope of honourable joy,
And courts may lure them with each splendid toy:
But ne'er may vanity or thirst of fame
The dearer bliss of loving life destroy!
Oh! blind to man's chief good who Love disclaim,
And barter pure delight for glory's empty name!

Blest Psyche! thou hast 'scaped the tyrant's power!
Thy gentle heart shall never know the pain
Which tortures pride in his most prosperous hour:
Yet dangers still unsung for thee remain;
Nor must thou unmolested hope to gain
Immortal beauty's never failing spring;
Oh! no -- nor yet tranquillity attain:
But though thy heart the pangs of doubt may sting,
Thy faithful knight shall yet thy steps in safety
bring. (IV.2-3)

The traditional associations of material wealth and physical
pleasure with error and immorality, as opposed to the
spiritual superiority represented by sublime transcendence,
is realigned by Tighe as she presents the paradigms of the sublime as a mask for physical indulgence. One of the most technically sublime descriptions in *Psyche*, in fact, serves as a facade for the worshippers of Vanity and Ambition.

In order to show how Tighe interweaves Romantic images of sublimity into the traditional Spenserian representations of moral danger, I want to look at the language she uses in describing the first two challenges that Psyche faces. Psyche's brief visit to the castle of Vanity and the night she spends in the bower of Credulity are both initiated by the false allure of appearances usually associated with the discourse of transcendental sublime. Psyche stumbles into the first of these two tests when, despite her knight's warnings, she is tempted by the mysterious Lusinga to step into the chariot that whisks her away to the palace where Vanity and Ambition dwell. The descriptive passage that follows is an assemblage of images that usually initiate the highly individualized and internalized experiences of sublime transcendence in most male-authored texts of the Romantic period.

High o'er the spacious plain a mountain rose,
A stately castle on its summit stood:
Huge craggy cliffs behind their strength oppose
To the rough surges of the dashing flood;
The rocky shores a boldly rising wood
On either side conceals; bright shine the towers
And seem to smile upon the billows rude.
In front the eye, with comprehensive powers,
Sees wide extended plains enriched with splendid bowers.

Hither they bore the sad reluctant fair,
Who mounts with dizzy eye the awful steep;
The blazing structure seems high poised in air,
And its light pillars tremble o'er the deep:
As yet the heavens are calm, the tempests sleep,
She knows not half the horrors of her fate:
Nor feels the approaching ruin's whirlwind sweep:
Yet with ill-boding fears she past the gate,
And turned with sickening dread from scenes of gorgeous state.

In vain the haughty master of the hall
Invites her to partake his regal throne,
With cold indifference she looks on all
The gilded trophies, and the well-wrought stone
Which in triumphal arches proudly shone:
And as she casts around her timid eye,
Back to her knight her trembling heart is flown,
And many an anxious wish, and many a sigh
Invokes his gallant arm protection to supply.

(III.56-58)

To the twentieth-century reader, these images may now appear
to be tired Romantic clichés, but the dizzying height of the
mountain, the rugged outline of the cliffs, and the
threatening power of the wind and waves are all consistent
with Burkean images of the sublime which can likewise be
found in Wordsworth and other male poets of the period. In
Tighe's hands, however, this sublime setting is the locus
where Vanity and Ambition have built their stately castle, a
structure that Psyche's "timid eye" looks on with "cold
indifference." Though unaware of the impending, ritualistic
destruction of the castle (which is continually being
rebuilt upon its weak foundations), Psyche's ill-boding
fears prevent her from being taken in by the false
representations of power surrounding her.

The semantic value attributed to the language of
sublimity by late-eighteenth century theorists is
effectively dissipated here as these signifiers themselves are cut loose from any referent in the material world. In Tighe's text, the linguistic signifiers of the sublime are nothing more than that, empty signifiers that are unproductive of transcendence both intratextually, with respect to Psyche herself, as well as extratextually, with respect to the reader. The effect of this process of signification is to reveal the language of sublimity (and analogically the moral system with which it is interwoven), as a bankrupt discourse. In the "sweeping gusts" of an approaching storm, the "bright" towers of the "blazing structure" prove to be a vain illusion of "light built fabric" and "insecure foundations" that "ne'er can stand the blast" (III.59.6-7). Amidst the chaos, the giant Prince of Vanity seizes Psyche from the rubble and carries her out to sea where, after he foolishly "shuns with proud disdain" the "sheltering shore," he is slain by Psyche's beautiful and faithful knight.

The second episode that I want to bring to attention begins on the foreboding "dark unlovely night" (IV.8.2) following Psyche's rescue from the castle of Vanity. In this canto Tighe describes Psyche's encounter with Credulity and Suspicion, at whose hands she is made to feel the power of jealousy. These two creatures tell Psyche that her guardian Knight is actually Cupid in disguise (a suspicion which proves to be true at the poem's end) and then they convince her that Cupid has deserted her for the Bower of
Loose Delight, where he selfishly indulges his other desires. Psyche is led by Credulity, who takes the form of an ugly, misshapen old woman, to the castle of Disfidia, the melancholy princess of Suspicion, who reigns from within a dark, secluded forest. Once again, the landscape description that follows boasts many of the qualities of mystery and obscurity that resonate with what Burke identifies as sources of the sublime in nature.

In the deep centre of the mazy wood,
With matted ivy and wild vine o'ergrown,
A Gothic castle solitary stood,
With massive walls built firm of murky stone;
Long had Credulity its mistress known,
Meagre her form and tawny was her hue,
Unsociably she lived, unloved, alone,
No cheerful prospects gladdened e'er her view,
And her pale hollow eyes oblique their glances threw.

Now had they reached the sad and dreary bower
Where dark Disfidia held her gloomy state:
The grated casements strong with iron power,
The huge port-cullis creaking o'er the gate,
The surly guards that round the draw-bridge wait,
Chill Psyche's heart with sad foreboding fears;
Nor ever had she felt so desolate
As when at length her guide the porter hears,
And at the well known call reluctantly appears.

In hall half lighted with uncertain rays,
Such as expiring tapers transient shed,
The gloomy princess sat, no social blaze
The unkindled hearth supplied, no table spread
Cheered the lone guest who weetless wandered,
But melancholy silence reigned around,
While on her arm she leaned her pensive head,
And anxious watched, as sullenly she frowned,
Of distant whispers low to catch the doubtful sound.
(IV.17-19)

The account of Disfidia's environs as "deep," "mazy," and covered over with "matted ivy and wild vine" blend seamlessly into descriptions of the "gothic" castle as
"solitary," "massive," and "murky," as Tighe elides the boundary between a scene of sublimity and a scene of gothic sensationalism. Both types of scenery, in Tighe's allegory, are temporarily seductive but ultimately reveal their own illusory foundations.

We can find numerous examples from Burke to confirm that Tighe's passage here is part of the discourse of the sublime. According to Burke, as we have already seen, obscurity and darkness, in addition to the degrees of size and shape, are both prerequisites of the sublime in nature:

the passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. . . . To make any thing very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary.  

Furthermore:

mere light is too common a thing to make a strong impression on the mind, and without a strong impression nothing can be sublime . . . darkness is more productive of sublime ideas than light.  

The obscurity and mystery that surrounds Disfidia's castle corresponds to these Burkean qualities, but again these sublime descriptions are ineffective in resolving Psyche's alienation. The description of this setting may provide the reader with the temporary thrill associated with the gothic, but for Psyche herself, the horror of her setting serves

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15Ibid., 57-58.
16Ibid., 80.
only to distract her from her quest to resolve the dialectic of self and other by reuniting herself with Cupid.

The sullen bell had told the midnight hour,  
And sleep had laid the busy world to rest,  
All but the watchful lady of that bower  
And wretched Psyche: her distracted breast  
The agony of sad suspense opprest,  
Now to the casement eagerly she flies,  
And now the wished-for voice her fancy blest:  
Alas! the screaming night-bird only cries;  
Only the drear obscure there meets her straining eyes.

Has thy heart sickened with deferred hope?  
Or felt the impatient anguish of suspense?  
Or hast thou tasted of the bitter cup  
Which disappointment's withered hands dispense?  
Thou knowest the poison which o'erflowed from hence  
O'er Psyche's tedious, miserable hours.  
The unheeded notes of plaintive Innocence  
No longer sooth her soul with wonted powers,  
While false Disfidia's tales her listening ear devours.

Of rapid torrents and deep marshy fens,  
Of ambushed foes and unseen pits they tell,  
Of ruffians rushing from their secret dens,  
Of foul magicians and of wizard spell,  
The poisoned lance and net invisible;  
While Psyche shuddering sees her knight betrayed  
Into the snares of some enchanter fell,  
Beholds him bleeding in the treacherous shade,  
Or hears his dying voice implore in vain for aid.  
(IV.21-23)

As in the first episode examined above, Psyche discovers that the attractive illusions of the sublime only lead her away from her true quest. Again, she realizes that her only hope for salvation rests upon her fidelity to Cupid and to the knight who has pledged his loyal assistance to her.

The extent to which the overwhelming sensations of the sublime interfere with Psyche's quest is underscored by Tighe's comparison of calm dispositions with those personalities that are easily excitable. Trapped in
Geloso’s cave (which occasions yet another catalogue of sublime attributes), Psyche is led by the demon of jealousy from her placid frame of mind into one that borders on hysteria.

For there are hearts that, like some sheltered lake, Ne'er swell with rage, nor foam with violence; Though its sweet placid calm the tempests shake, Yet will it ne'er with furious impotence Dash its rude waves against the rocky fence, Which nature placed the limits of its reign: Thrice blest! who feel the peace which flows from hence,

Whom meek-eyed gentleness can thus restrain; Whate'er the storms of fate, with her let none complain!

That mild associate Psyche now deserts, Unlovely passions agitate her soul, The vile magician all his art exerts, And triumphs to behold his proud control: Changed to a serpent's hideous form, he stole O'er her fair breast to suck her vital blood; His poisonous involutions round her roll: Already is his forked tongue imbrued Warm in the stream of life, her heart's pure purple flood.

Thus wretchedly she falls Geloso's prey! But her, once more, unhoped for aid shall save! Admitted shines the clear blue light of day Upon the horrors of that gloomy grave; Her knight's soft voice resounds through all the cave,

The affrighted serpent quits his deadly hold, Nor dares the vengeance of his arm to brave, Shrunk to a spider's form, while many a fold Of self-spun web obscene the sorcerer vile enrolled.

(IV.45-47)

In making her case for the benefits of a calm state of mind, Tighe does not rule out the importance of strong emotions for effecting the union of self and other, but she does indicate that "unlovely passions" work against the kind of dialectical resolution that she is trying to achieve. For
Tighe, terror is productive of hysteria, not sublime transcendence.

If scenes of terror and overpowering emotions lead away from the resolution that Psyche seeks, how then do beauty and love, in Tighe's argument, lead Psyche to the kind of union between the physical and metaphysical worlds that most male-authored Romantic poetry achieves only through sublime transcendence? The answer lies in the apotheosis that Psyche achieves at the poem's conclusion, an apotheosis in which she achieves immortality as the goddess-wife of Cupid. Psyche undergoes this transformation in Apuleius's version as well, but Tighe grants Psyche greater (though still limited) agency in bringing about her own apotheosis. In Apuleius's version, Psyche is fed ambrosia by Jupiter because Venus is outraged over the idea that the already-pregnant Psyche will bear her mortal grandchildren. In Tighe's version, Psyche achieves immortality solely as a result of her faithful love of Cupid.

Two tapers thus, with pure converging rays,
In momentary flash their beams unite,
Shedding but one inseparable blaze
Of blended radiance and effulgence bright,
Self-lost in mutual intermingling light;
Thus, in her lover's circling arms embraced,
The fainting Psyche's soul, by sudden flight,
With his its subtlest essence interlaced;
Oh! bliss too vast for thought! by words how poorly traced! (VI.53)

By negating the illusory attractions of the sublime, produced by the "active mind," and trusting in the natural forms of beauty, Psyche achieves the union of the physical
and spiritual worlds that twentieth-century critics such as Marlon Ross and Greg Kucich, in accordance with the metaphysical tradition of Keats criticism originating with Earl Wasserman, identify as the spiritual/metaphysical goal of Keats's later poetry. In both Keats and Tighe, apotheosis is achieved not through personal transcendence, but rather through the realization of ideal forms, in the physical world, as beauty.

Even Venus's anger is eventually softened by Psyche's beauty and her faithfulness to the goddess's son.

With fond embrace she clasped her long lost son, And gratefully received his lovely bride, "Psyche! thou hardly hast my favour won!" With roseate smile her heavenly parent cried, "Yet hence thy charms immortal, deified, "With the young Joys, thy future offspring fair, "Shall bloom for ever at thy lover's side; "All ruling Jove's high mandate I declare, "Blest denizen of Heaven! arise its joys to share."

She ceased, and lo! a thousand voices, joined In sweetest chorus, Love's high triumph sing; There, with the Graces and the Hours entwined, His fairy train their rosy garlands bring, Or round their mistress sport on halcyon wing; While she enraptured lives in his dear eye, And drinks immortal love from that pure spring Of never-failing full felicity, Bathed in ambrosial showers of bliss eternally! (VI.58-59)

Quite clearly here, the immortal drink responsible for Psyche's transformation is not the magical ambrosia of the gods, but the "pure spring / Of never failing full felicity" that she finds in the eyes of her lover. This conclusion may seem to contradict the cautious view of love that Tighe presents in "Written at Rosanna," and the fact that Psyche
does achieve a resolution to the self/other dialectic also seems to run counter to the continued dialectical tension that she sustains in "Written at Scarborough." To these inconsistencies I would offer two responses. First, whereas "Written at Rossana" deals with domestic love, *Psyche* operates in the realm of fantasy and explores the possibility of **ideal** love, the kind of love that, as Tighe acknowledges at the start of Psyche's quest, is usually unknown on earth. Secondly, although Tighe poetically enacts a dialectical resolution in *Psyche*, unlike in "Written at Scarborough," in both poems she is consistently expresses the belief that for her, as perhaps for other women as well, the initiating tropes of the Romantic sublime are not productive of a transcendental resolution to this dialectic but lead only to hysteria, misery, or sustained alienation.

Having seen that *Psyche* can be taken as a discourse on the sublime when read within the network of tropes that comprise the late-eighteenth-century discourse of the sublime, we should also take into account a particular ambiguity regarding the sublime as a term itself. Specifically, what I want to clarify is not the definition of sublimity (a complicated matter that has already been discussed) but rather its referentiality in the foregoing argument. The question that arises falls into three parts as follows: 1) does the term "sublime" refer to an aesthetic category -- as established by the discursive network in
which *Psyche* is a participant -- to which the tropes that Tighe uses belong, 2) does the term "sublime" refer to effects of the settings or events of which Tighe's language is descriptive, or 3) does the term "sublime" refer to the effects, extratextually, that Tighe's own language has on the reader? I have been using the term in the manner suggested by the first question, as denoting a discursive category, the language of which Tighe's allegory, whether consciously or unconsciously, appropriates and subverts into a polemic against itself. However, the difficulty of using the term sublime in this critical manner is amplified by the fact that in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discourse of the sublime, these three types of referentiality are inextricably bound up with one another. In other words, to produce a discourse on the sublime, particularly in verse, during the Romantic period is often to accomplish simultaneously all three of these goals.

Once again, De Bolla is useful in helping us make this distinction.

The [sublime] experience was itself defined as one that broke through a boundary, which was, in some sense at least, excessive. Hence the discourse on the sublime, in its function as an analytic discourse on excessive experience, became increasingly preoccupied with the discursive production of the excess: once it had begun to describe how an experience is sublime and what caused it, it began to create a discourse which not only explained the effect or demonstrated the mechanism by which it is produced, but also created the experiential possibility for sublime sensations. There is, then, a natural tendency for the discourse on the sublime to produce the conditions necessary for the
construction of a discourse of the sublime, a discourse which produces from within itself sublime experience.\textsuperscript{17} Although Tighe's epic, as I have been arguing, is a discourse on the sublime, it is not productive of what de Bolla here identifies as "the conditions necessary for the construction of a discourse of the sublime." This is one of the reasons why twentieth-century criticism, to a great extent, remains unable to recognize and identify moments in the texts of women writers that engage the discourse of the transcendental sublime. Usually the discourse of these women does not attempt to produce sublime experiences in the reader but instead treats the discourse of the sublime as a discourse. This is not the case with Joanna Baillie, whose concept of the "sympathetic curiosity" aims at arousing in the reader feelings of compassion and self-importance through the depiction of human suffering. But several of Charlotte Smith's sonnets, as we have seen, invoke the language of the transcendental sublime only to turn away from it in order to focus on her own physical misery.

The textual boundary that separates the character of Psyche from the reader in their mutual encounter with the sublime tropes constructed by the narrative is one that Tighe frequently crosses through narrative interventions that directly address the reader. Through these rhetorical turns, Tighe aligns Psyche's dilemma with the reader's

\textsuperscript{17}de Bolla, 12.
experience, and at such moments, the didactic orientation of argument against the sublime carries its greatest force.

Let the vain rover, who his youth hath past
Misled in idle search of happiness,
Declare, by late experience taught at last,
In all his toils he gained but weariness,
Woed the coy goddess but to find that less
She ever grants where dearest she is bought;
She loves the sheltering bowers of home to bless,
Marks with her peaceful hand the favourite spot,
And smiles to see that Love has home his Psyche
brought. (VI.49)

The confusion that arises from our critical attempts to tell the difference between sublimity for the reader and sublimity for the text/writer/character is not a product of Tighe's text or our own approach to it, but rather is a curious effect of the discourse of the sublime itself.

III

The few twentieth-century critics who give attention to Tighe's poetry avoid the central question that we have been considering, namely, "how are we to read the opposition of beauty to sublimity that Tighe repeatedly presents in her allegory?" They focus instead upon Tighe's Spenserian style and its effect upon canonical male writers. This critical approach is the product of the residual influence of Tighe's early critics and the persistent dominance of Bloom's model of Oedipal influence. It is, in part, this uninterrogated adherence to Bloom's model that leads twentieth-century critics to overlook the historical/contextual significance of Tighe's allegory, just as her early reviewers did.
Kucich, for example, brings nominal attention to Tighe's active participation in the phenomenon of Romantic Spenserianism, but he relies heavily upon Bloom as the codifier of "the normal pattern of influence dynamics," and he overlooks the problematics of gender when he includes Tighe, along with Thomson, Beattie, Campbell, Wordsworth, and Byron, within the revisionary framework through which Keats encountered Spenser. Early-nineteenth-century reviews of *Psyche* were unanimous in their praise of Tighe's descriptive language and versification, and critics nodded approvingly at her adaptation of the Spenserian stanza. However, none of Tighe's reviewers addresses the significance of *Psyche*'s thematic concerns.

Despite initial apprehensions over the very idea of a female poet taking on the erotic subject of Apuleius's story, her readers nevertheless admit to being pleased by the end result and they compliment Tighe for her restraint and propriety. The *Quarterly Review*, for example, focuses its praise primarily upon Tighe's versification.

The most obvious characteristics of the poem before us, are, a pleasing repose of style and manner, a fine purity and innocence of feeling, and a delightful ease of versification . . . nor would it be difficult to extract from the poem many passages as flowing and as musical as the finest in the Fairy Queen or the Castle of Indolence.

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18 Kucich, 191.
19 *Quarterly Review* May 1811: 5, 478
Such complimentary reviews not only praise her virtuosity but also attempt to coordinate her position within the established lineage of Spenserian imitators.

So far from thinking that the stanza, as managed by this writer, is tiresome, we are delighted with the variety and beauty of its construction. If it was indeed difficult to her in the composition, we can only say that she has completely concealed that difficulty; and that she has added another example to the scanty list of writers whose works, from the apparent facility of their execution, flatter their imitators with the hopes of arriving at an unattainable excellence.20

The defensive tone of this particular review is a symptom of the disfavor into which Spenserian imitations were already beginning to fall at the beginning of the nineteenth century, despite the continued fascination of Romantic poets with Spenser. In addition to losing interest in Spenserian imitations, the reading public had also begun to frown upon allegorical poetry as well, and this had the greatest impact upon critical reviews of *Psyche*.

In contrast to their approval of Tighe's style and diction, when critics attempt to discuss Tighe's use of allegory a certain ambivalence creeps into their reviews. The *Monthly Review* heaps praise upon Tighe's versification and judges her prefatory apology to be "perfectly unnecessary" and a "tribute to female timidity," but the reviewer balks in his assessment of her allegory:

We wish that it were equally possible to anticipate the acquiescence of our readers in the apology subsequently offered for the allegorical texture of the story. That

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story, in our opinion, is very interesting, and not the less for the moral and instructive allegory which it so slightly yet elegantly veils: but on this subject we shall not dispute: it is obviously and entirely such a matter of taste, as cannot be decided by any criterion of judgment.21

Reviewers only draw attention to Tighe's allegory in order to debate the generic viability of the allegorical form and not to explore the possible significance of Tighe's argument. Both the Quarterly Review and The Eclectic Review include lengthy digressions on the limitations of allegory, and the latter makes use of an explicitly misogynist image to convey its ambivalence toward Tighe's use of this form: "Mrs. Tighe's second part is almost pure allegory; and as we can make no allegory of the first part, the story in this form appears half real, half shadowy, and her Psyche is 'A handsome woman with a fish's tail.'" This review continues:

In all allegories of length, we grow dull as the story advances, and feel very little anxiety about the conclusion, except for its own sake, as the conclusion. Beautiful and diversified as the allegory before us is, we believe few readers when they lay it down will be sorry that it is done; and, if we are not mistaken, most minds, in recalling the pleasures of the perusal, will principally dwell on the scenes of the first part as poetical realities, and ruminate on those of the sequel as images of a wild and exhausting dream, from which they do not repine at being awakened to ordinary sights and sounds, however astonished and entranced they may have been while it lasted. And this is the inevitable effect of all allegories, -- they never leave the impression of truth behind.22

None of Tighe's reviewers seemed particularly troubled by the argument of her allegory, which they assumed was continuous with the popular interpretations of Apuleius's

21Ibid., 140.
22The Eclectic Review, March 1813: 217, 226
story that masked its blatant eroticism with a moral tale recounting the triumph of spiritual love. Tighe's critics objected only to the allegorical form itself, which they viewed as an outmoded format limited to the transmission of simple moral lessons that fade once the reader has finished the story. What is most interesting about this critical dismissal is that the few twentieth-century treatments of "Psyche," which strive to place her in the Romantic canon, unconsciously participate in this dismissal of the allegorical form, and thereby overlook the distinctive aesthetic/ideological critique of the transcendental sublime imbedded within Tighe's epic.

If Tighe's early critics couch their appraisals within a male literary tradition that links her to Spenser, her twentieth-century critics have more narrowly dealt with her by reading her through Keats, in order to attempt a feminist revision of Bloom's revisionary ratios. Tighe's major critics in the twentieth century, Ross, Mellor, and Kucich, all use Tighe as a foil against which to examine Keats's own "anxiety of influence" and the role that gender plays in his development of poetic selfhood.\footnote{I have not included Weller in this list of Tighe's twentieth-century critics because his concordance of parallel passages in Tighe and Keats, although technically the first formal intertextual study of the two poets, offers no critical or theoretical interpretations or annotations. Most critics, however, still cite Weller as having first brought their attention to the Keats-Tighe connection.} What these modern studies of Tighe's influence on Keats have in common is that they all remain within the framework established by Keats.
himself. Most often, these studies point to several signposts along the path of Keats's poetic career. His early interest in Tighe is signaled by his praise of her in his 1815 poem, "To Some Ladies," where he likens her poetry to the gems of heaven:

If a cherub, on pinions of silver descending,  
Had brought me a gem from the fret-work of heaven;  
And, smiles with his star-cheering voice sweetly blending,

The blessings of Tighe had melodiously given; (17-20)

In addition, the flowery language of "Endymion," in which Keats's adolescent hero wanders through woods and bower in pursuit of the image of ideal love that manifests itself only in his dream-visions, is also seen as a strong indication of Tighe's early influence.

But by 1818, in the wake of the harsh reviews of "Endymion's" effeminate expressions, sensuous bower, and erotic dreams, we find Keats dismissively commenting, in a letter to George and Georgiana Keats, that

Mrs. Tighe and [James] Beattie once delighted me -- now I see through them and can find nothing in them -- or [but?] weakness -- and yet how many they still delight! Perhaps a superior being may look upon Shakespeare in the same light-- is it possible? No -- this same inadequacy is discovered . . . in Women with few exceptions -- the Dress Maker, the blue Stocking and the most charming sentimentalist differ but in a slight degree, and are equally smokeable . . .

Feminist criticism has concentrated on proving that Keats's sudden dismissal of Tighe is evidence of the powerful

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influence that her poetry had on his own poetic development and is suggestive of Keats's attempt to suppress her continued presence behind his work. As a result, the intertextual studies of Mellor and Kucich bring little attention to Tighe's poetry itself, using her instead as a means of bringing to light Keats's own creative anxieties and the gender politics that infuse them.25

Kucich places Tighe in the continuing tradition of Spenserian allegory, practiced by writers such as Thomson and Beattie, and he holds that Tighe extended "Spenser's own psychological dualities," and developed them into "dramas of the conflict between material experience and imaginative idealism."26 This same formula, however, could be easily superimposed upon the metaphysical readings of Keats's poetry, and this is exactly what Kucich does. He makes the accurate observation that Keats's "Lamia" appropriates the story of Tighe's Psyche and reverses the gender roles, turning Tighe's narrative of a female quest for love into a male quest for dream-fulfillment. However, Kucich does not use this intertextual relationship to produce a new reading.

25 For Mellor, Tighe is part of the background against which feminist criticism can read Keats's interest in lesser poetic genres as an example of his "ideological cross-dressing." "Occupying the position of a woman in the poetic discourse of the early nineteenth-century was however a source of anxiety for Keats. During the early 1800s in England, the production of the less prestigious forms of poetry -- of sonnets, odes and romances -- was dominated by women, by such popular poets as Felicita Hemans, Charlotte Smith, Mary 'Perdita' Robinson, Anna Seward, Joanna Baillie, Anna Laetitia Barbault, Hannah Cowley, Hannah More, Mary 'Psyche' Tighe, and Helen Maria Williams," Romanticism and Gender, 179.

26 Kucich, "Gender Crossings: Keats and Tighe," 34.
of Tighe's poem, but instead uses Tighe as a means of arriving at a more gender-sensitive reading of Keats's poetry.\textsuperscript{27}

The other recent approach to Tighe, represented by Ross, argues that her epic is predicated on feminine restraint and rationality and therefore representative of the kind of poetry that women were expected to write.

Tighe's poetry puts her audience, both male and female, at ease with their own feelings by formalizing and rationalizing those feelings. But in order to create this aura of ease, Tighe must sacrifice the risk-taking ambition and empire-building vision that Wordsworth makes the groundwork of poetic greatness. . . . Tighe limits herself to (in)sight, which is detailed, fragmentary, evanescent, profound only in its depth of feeling and breadth of description, beautiful not in the Platonic sense that Keats appeals to but in the sense of delicacy, tenderness, gracefulness, refinement. . . . The purpose of her verse is to elucidate that state of calm, stable, constant maturity, rather than to move from one stage of development to a higher one.\textsuperscript{28}

The fact is, however, that if we pay close attention to Tighe's allegory we find that Psyche does move from one state to a higher one; she is, after all, transformed from a mortal woman to a goddess.

Ironically, what blinds most feminist readings of Keats and Tighe from gaining insight into Tighe's own work in comparison to Keats's is an overwhelming concern with gender

\textsuperscript{27}Although Kucich's essay represents the most sustained piece of criticism on Tighe to date, this essay is nonetheless directed not at recovering Tighe, but rather at recuperating Keats in the wake of feminist criticism: "If Keats studies are to enjoy the kind of revitalization we have witnessed in recent work on Shelley's politics and language, it will most likely spring from our deepening interest in the gender dynamics of his form of Romanticism" (29).

\textsuperscript{28}Ross, 158.
itself. While this is certainly an undeniably important
aspect of Keats's response to Tighe, its dominance in recent
criticism prevents us from seeing the idiom in which this
similarity is most often articulated, namely, their
recuperation of beauty as a viable aesthetic concept. We
have seen how Tighe's Psyche achieves this, but the
elevation of beauty in Keats's poetry has become enough of a
commonplace to go almost unnoticed; assertions of Keats's
devotion to beauty run the risk of sounding pithy, at best.
Kucich and Ross both draw attention to Keats's similarities
to Tighe in "Endymion," "Lamia," and the "Eve of St. Agnes,"
but we can also see how his concern with beauty as an ideal
form continues well into the odes, in some of the most
often-quoted passages of his poetry. The highly qualified
descriptions of beauty in "Ode to a Nightingale" (in which
the physical world is a place "Where Beauty cannot keep her
lustrous eyes"), and in the "Ode on Melancholy" (where the
male reader is reminded that his mistress "dwells with
Beauty -- Beauty that must die"), offer a solemn account of
the temporal limitations of beauty, but beauty is
nonetheless presented as a desirable trait while it lasts.

Prominent Keats critics such as Jack Stillinger and
Helen Vendler see this recuperation of beauty as signaling
Keats's growing skepticism toward a theology of sublimity
and his turning toward the physical world, an acceptance and
embrace of the mutability of physical beauty that begins
with the "Eve of St. Agnes" and culminates in the ode "To
Autumn." But Keats's skepticism toward metaphysics and his acknowledgment of the mutability of the physical world never produces a concept of beauty that is as self-contradictory as Tighe's. Beauty is never a mixed blessing for Keats; it is subjected only to the laws of its own mutability, a small consolation for Oceanus, in "Hyperion," as he faces his dispossession by the young and beautiful Neptune:

\[ \ldots \ 'tis \ the \ eternal \ law \\
That first in beauty should be first in might: \\
Yea, by that law, another race may drive \\
Our conquerors to mourn as we do now. (228-231) \]

For Keats, physical beauty is, in fact, naturally aligned with the powerful. But for Tighe, as we have seen, beauty is a category inseparable from the feminine, even when it is associated with Cupid, and likewise inseparable from the disadvantages and limitations to which it subjects the members of her sex who are (un)fortunate enough to possess it. This is the solemn awareness that fuels Tighe's allegory, whereby she attempts to rewrite beauty into a position of power, discursively re-figuring it as a material alternative to the transcendental sublime that is capable of achieving the desired union of the real and the ideal.

Having already shown the multiple intersections that Tighe's allegory maintains with Romantic aesthetic theories of the beautiful and the sublime, I too would now like to map some of the specific intertextual connections between Keats and Tighe, but I would like to do so in a manner different from those of Ross, Kucich, and Mellor. Rather
than emphasize Keats's appropriation of Tighe for the purpose of coming to a greater understanding of the role that gender-anxiety plays in his poetry, I would like to examine the extent to which Tighe functions as one of many voices that are interwoven in Keats's text in order to argue for the usefulness of reading Romantic poetry within a rhizomic model of intertextuality. I would like to focus on a less prominent poem by Keats, his "Sonnet to Sleep," and its intertextual relationship to Canto II.54 of *Psyche* in order to show that Tighe's influence on Keats not only extends well beyond the dismissal of 1818, but well beyond the rigid revisionary ratios established by Bloom.

The "Sonnet to Sleep" is a good poem for demonstrating the usefulness of reading rhizomically, not only because its tangential connections to Tighe have escaped all but Weller's methodical documentation, but also because critics have already documented a wide range of disparate intertextual ties to its canonical *male* precursors.

O soft embalmer of the still midnight,
Shutting with careful fingers and benign
Our gloom-pleas'd eyes, embower'd from the light,
Enshaded in forgetfulness divine:
O sootherest Sleep! if so it please thee, close,
In midst of this thine hymn, my willing eyes,
Or wait the Amen ere thy poppy throws
Around my bed its lulling charities.
Then save me or the passed day will shine
Upon my pillow, breeding many woes:
Save me from curious conscience, that still hoards
Its strength for darkness, burrowing like the mole;

Turn the key deftly in the oiled wards,
And seal the hushed casket of my soul.
Morris Dickstein has argued that "Sonnet to Sleep" can be read as Keats's outright rejection of Wordsworth's formula for poetic composition. Memory and tranquillity do not provide Keats with "life and food for future years" (as they do for Wordsworth in "Tintern Abbey") but represent a kind of torture from which only deep sleep can rescue him. Dickstein argues that Keats's sonnet is the negation of Wordsworthian reciprocity, not only because it shows nature at a moment of destructive interplay, but because it inverts Wordsworth's assertion of salvation-by-memory, by which some experiences achieve a healing, consoling permanence in the mind. But here . . . it is precisely by memory that Keats is wracked.\textsuperscript{29}

Although Dickstein's reading pre-dates Bloom's work on the anxiety of influence, we can nonetheless see the kind of revisionary framework -- involving strong, male poets -- that dominated the critical discourse from which Bloom's model would arise. With this in mind, we can extend Dickstein's argument to suggest that Keats's closing sestet announces a relinquishment, or what Bloom calls "kenosis," of Wordsworth's central premise that "recollection in tranquillity" provides both spiritual rejuvenation and poetic inspiration. As a developmental narrative in miniature, "Sonnet to Sleep" shows how Keats's own anxiety of influence -- with respect to his poetic father, Wordsworth -- leads him to establish a poetic theory that distinguishes him from his precursor.

But Bloom's father/son paradigm is unable to account for the host of muffled voices present in Keats's sonnet. More recently, Stillinger has tried to argue, in *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius*, that literary texts are the products of neither a single author, working in isolation, nor of a self-contained revisionary process involving poetic fathers and sons, but rather of the interplay of numerous creative voices. As an example of this multiple authorship, Stillinger points out that in "Sonnet to Sleep" there are discernible verbal echoes of passages from Burton, Dante, and, most clearly, Shakespeare, whose *Henry IV* is the source most often cited by Keats scholars:

O sleep! O gentle sleep!  
Nature's soft nurse, how have I frightened thee,  
That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids down,  
And steep my sense in forgetfulness? . . .
(3.1.5-31)

According to Stillinger, we can also "place this sonnet in a long tradition of poems invoking sleep, relating it to and comparing it with similar apostrophes by Statius, Sidney, Daniel, Drummond of Hawthornden, Thomas Warton, Wordsworth, . . ." 

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30. Jack Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). Harold Bloom, of course, is the unidentified target of Stillinger's polemic. It is very interesting, however, that Stillinger never draws Bloom into his argument by name, except when he (Stillinger) ventriloquizes his own critique of the *Anxiety of Influence* through a quick summary of Thomas McFarland's argument: "In *Originality and Imagination* McFarland comes closer to exploding the unitary-author theory by his proposal to add plagiarism 'as an ugly duckling seventh' to the six types of 'revisionary ratio' that Harold Bloom had devised to account for writers' responses to their literary precursors," (113).

31. Stillinger, 15.
and Hartley Coleridge."  However, despite his stated intention of debunking unitary-author theories of literary creation, Stillinger is nonetheless intent on preserving the boundaries of the established canon. As he roots out the multiple sources that Keats weaves together to form his sonnet, Stillinger turns only to already well-documented major figures of the canon, such as Dante, Milton, and Shakespeare, in order to carry out his supposedly revisionist reading of the "myth of the solitary genius."

Stillinger's canon-preserving agenda reveals itself when he dismisses one of the most rhetorically intriguing moments in the sonnet because it does not fit into his interpretative model. He claims that, among other flaws in the poem, the "mild silliness of statement in the second quatrain" is "much more tolerable -- and perhaps even interesting . . . -- when we know that the poem was a work still in process or one that was only provisionally complete."  Understanding the passage that Stillinger dismisses as "mild silliness," however, is the key to understanding the complex intertextual position of this sonnet.

To begin with, I would like to consider the passage in question as a "speech act" that, to borrow the terms of Austin, exemplifies the "performative" or, in this case, the self-reflexively "perlocutionary" dimension of language; by

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32 Ibid., 10.
33 Ibid., 12.
reading this passage as a speech act, we can see how Keats's text attempts to bring about the very conditions it describes. In the midst of its creation, the poem invites its own self-destruction: "O soothest Sleep! if so it please thee, close, / In midst of this thine hymn, my willing eyes" (5-6). The tension that sustains the poem derives from the paradox that the fulfilment of the poetic invocation would preclude the completion of the perlocution itself.

However, there is a simple but crucial problem with treating a text such as Keats's "Sonnet to Sleep" as a speech act in the way that Austin defines it. Derrida has pointed out that Austin's speech-act theory is admittedly incapable of accounting for poetic or figurative language, which, according to Derrida, deconstructs the Austinian binaries of the constative/performative and illocutionary/perlocutionary uses of language, collapsing these "serious" utterances into "parasitic" uses of normal language. Speech-act theory excludes poetic language, Derrida argues, because the foregrounded citationality of poetry draws attention to the iterability of all language and thereby topples Austin's rigid hierarchy of meaning based on action. For Derrida, linguistic meaning in all forms of use, not just the poetic, relies upon its iterability, its potential for "parasitically" repeating other texts and being repeated by them.

My communication must be repeatable -- iterable -- in the absolute absence of the receiver or of any
empirically determinable collectivity of receivers. Such iterability... structures the mark of writing itself, no matter what particular type of writing is involved... What holds for the receiver holds also, for the same reasons, for the sender or the producer. ... For a writing to be a writing it must continue to "act" and to be readable even when what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written, for what he seems to have signed, be it because of a temporary absence, because he is dead or, more generally, because he has not employed his absolutely actual and present intention or attention, the plenitude of his desire to say what he means, in order to sustain what seems to be written "in his name."34

Writing always involves re-writing and the capacity for being re-written; far from being the exception, poetry is the epitome of this rule, replete with citations and allusions that perpetually frustrate the author's desperate claims to originality.

Derrida's deconstruction of Austin presents us with a productive context within which to re-read Bloom's theory of influence, which, as we have seen, reduces the anxieties of poetic misreading, revision, and re-writing to a psycho-sexual desire to usurp the father and mate with the maternal Muse. What if this anxiety, an anxiety of iteration, is directed not solely at the poetic father over the Muse's affections, but rather, more generally, at the realization of the infinite iterability of his poetic creation? What if, in other words, a poet's anxiety is directed not only behind, at a precursor, and forward, at a usurping ephebe, but rhizomically in all directions at once: anxiety

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unbounded by gender and genre? In this model, repetition itself, the simultaneous attraction and repulsion of citationality, becomes the source of this anxiety, and this is precisely what "Sonnet to Sleep" seems to want to contain.

By attempting to bring about the very act of sleep that "Sonnet To Sleep" is describing, the poem would not only forestall its own completion, but also its own iterability, bringing to an end a long line of citations, from Shakespeare, Dante, Burton, Wordsworth (and perhaps from others of whom we are still unaware). However, we cannot ignore the intrusive textual fact that the poem does continue, beyond the invocation in the second quatrains, and critics have, in fact, mapped the numerous citations that Keats makes with respect to his precursors. If Dickstein can argue that "Sonnet to Sleep" represents Keats's successful revisionary struggle with Wordsworth, and if Stillinger can argue that the "myth of solitary genius" embedded in influence-theories such as Bloom's obscures the multiple authorship of "Sonnet to Sleep," then what happens if we read Keats's poem rhizomically, as a poem constructed to foreclose, through a perlocutionary speech act, the ongoing citationality in which it is being composed? In the context of the rhizomic model, the textual field is thrown open, and we can look for iterations where we had not been permitted to look before. One such iteration can be found in Canto II.54 of Tighe's "Psyche." In fact the rhizomic
connections between Keats's poem and Tighe's are, textually, even closer than those that his sonnet maintains with any of the male writers previously mentioned.

In the intertextual dialogue between "Psyche" and "Sonnet to Sleep," both poems praise sleep for its anesthetic effects, but Tighe's stanza promises the kind of rejuvenation that Keats's sonnet ultimately denies. Tighe's stanza begins when the despairing Psyche, who has been cast out of Cupid's palace after betraying his trust, falls into a deep sleep.

Oh! thou best comforter of that sad heart Whom fortune's spite assails; come, gentle Sleep, The weary mourner sooth! for well the art Thou knowest in soft forgetfulness to steep The eyes which sorrow taught to watch and weep; Let blissful visions now her spirits cheer, Or lull her cares to peace in slumbers deep, Till from fatigue refreshed and anxious fear Hope like the morning star once more shall re-appear. (Psyche II.54)

Tighe's characterization of sleep as a "gentle" "comforter" providing "soft forgetfulness" for "eyes which sorrow taught to watch and weep" is reiterated by Keats's description of sleep as a "soft," "gentle," and "benign" embalmer that enshades "gloom-pleas'd eyes" in "forgetfulness divine."

Like Tighe, Keats begins with a direct address, an invocation, to a personified image of sleep itself, followed by a list of all the comforts that it brings to the "weary mourner":

O soft embalmer of the still midnight, Shutting with careful fingers and benign Our gloom-pleas'd eyes, embower'd from the light,
Enshaded in forgetfulness divine: (1-4)
Recognizing the repetition of Tighe's language and theme in "Sonnet to Sleep" forces us to read the break (Bloom's "kenosis") initiated by Keats's closing sestet as a turn not only from Wordsworth but from Tighe as well.

Until the closing sestet, Keats's opposition to Wordsworth's valorization of memory does not preclude sleep's restorative power. But at its conclusion, the sonnet turns inward as Keats moves away from such Wordsworthian optimism; "Keats, even Keats," to borrow Bloom's characterization, "must be a prophet of discontinuity, for whom experience at last is only another form of paralysis." 35 If "discontinuity" characterizes the poet's response to male power in Bloom's model, the response to female power is more directly one of rejection. In the context of his sonnet, Keats tropes "sleep" as feminine and then forestalls his own acceptance of her restorative power until an unspecified point beyond the poem's conclusion. Acceptance of this feminine power would, as we have seen, bring Keats's poem to an abrupt end in the midst of its very composition ("O sootherst Sleep! if so it please thee, close, / In midst of this thine hymn, my willing eyes"). Even Keats's attempt to foreclose his iteration of a female precursor is frustrated by the fact that his sonnet can only do so by submitting to another feminized entity: sleep. The poem continues only to allow Keats to deny the ability of

35 Bloom, 85.
sleep to restore him to a state beyond that of sleep itself. Unlike Keats, Tighe optimistically concludes with a hopeful vision of the morning in which the poet's spirit will arise "refreshed" from "slumbers deep." Keats remains within the numb security of the night, and asks sleep to "seal" his "soul" in a "hushed casket" as one secures a treasure in a locked jewel box.

A quick look at the original manuscript of Keats's sonnet provides us with additional evidence of Keats's attempt to sever his connection to Tighe. If the dread that Keats feels toward memory in the first half of the sonnet represents his rejection of Wordsworthian "recolletion in tranquillity," then he more aggressively suppresses his reiteration of Tighe by choosing to delete the original conclusion of "Sonnet to Sleep."

Then shut the hushed Casket of my soul
And turn the Key round in the oiled wards
And let it rest until the morn has stole
Bright tressed from the grey east's shuddering bourn

In its first version, the sonnet's conclusion implies that Keats's desire for sleep is not synonymous with a desire for oblivion, as we might infer from the revised conclusion; instead, the sleep that he invokes here will last only "until" the approach of the "bright tressed" morning. This closing image is a more positive, forward looking one, suggestive of a belief in the power of sleep to bring restoration, a belief that aligns him with the optimistic
view of sleep held by Tighe. Keats's decision to erase the conclusion of the first draft not only changes the argument of the poem, it also effects his discontinuity with previous poetic arguments on the subject. If "Sonnet to Sleep" signifies a break with Wordsworth, as Dickstein and Stillinger have argued, then it simultaneously signifies a break with Tighe.

In Bloom's patriarchal hierarchy, Tighe paradoxically fills the dual roles of an influential poetic father, with whom Keats must break, and an inspirational maternal Muse, to whom Keats must turn for salvation. But what Keats turns toward in the final sestet of "Sonnet to Sleep" is an isolated, self-contained poetic identity that is both fragmentary -- in its rejection of the totalizing optimism of Wordsworth and Tighe -- and self-destructive -- in its desire for self-annihilation at the inspirational moment just prior to poetic creation. However, the fact that Bloom's dominant model is unable to account for any poetic influence, in this crucial stage of Keats's development, other than the strong male voice of a poetic father such as Wordsworth, suggests that a new critical model, a rhizomic model, is necessary if we are to explore more thoroughly the polyvocal authorship that crosses the divisions of gender and canonicity in the Romantic period.
EPilogue

You, who already
Are gentle, remain so; and you, who would steady
Your natures, and mend them, and make out your call
To be men's best companions, be such, once for all.
And remember, that nobody, woman or man,
Ever charm'd the next ages, since writing began,
Who thought by shrewd dealing sound fame to arrive at,
Had one face in print, and another in private.

Leigh Hunt, "Blue-Stocking Revels; or, The Feast of the Violets"

To return to the image evoked by the title of this
dissertation, there are many "invisible" lines separating
the texts and ideologies espoused by women writers of the
Romantic period from those embraced by their male
counterparts, and this dissertation has attempted to bring
these invisible lines to light in order to expose the
illusory oppositions that they have generated in the
tradition of Romantic criticism. In contrast, there are
other lines, separating the texts from the lives of the
women who wrote them, that are too often erased by this same
critical tradition. Biographical criticism can be a
productive mode of interpretation in its own right, but
whereas such criticism of male writers has usually focused
on the man as poet in an attempt to understand the poetic
persona that he has created for himself, biographical
readings of women writers, on the other hand, tend to focus
on the disparities between a woman's writing and her social
identity as a mother, a wife, a daughter -- in short, as a woman.

The many critical reviews that we have examined in the preceding chapters share a consistent inability to avoid conflating a woman's writing with her life. Although critics heap praise upon Smith's sonnets, they harshly criticize her for her autobiographical complaints and reprimand her for maintaining what they considered to be a too-visible public persona. In addition, we have also seen the desperate attempts of biographers to insist that Smith's literary aspirations did not in any way distract her from her burdensome maternal duties. Conversely, reviewers praising Baillie's works elevate Baillie herself as a model of proper womanhood because she avoided the public attention that was her due and led a reserved private life. Baillie never married or had children, but reviewers could not resist the temptation to describe her as a "mother" of literature whose textual productions took the place of children. Even Tighe, who was little known until after her death, could not escape this conflation of author and text; after the posthumous publication of Psyche, Tighe's fame still rested as much on descriptions of her personal beauty as on her popular poem. The pressure exerted by the aesthetic discourse that elides the division between a woman writer and her social body is, in part, responsible for the
choice made by many women to express their encounters with the popular tropes of the natural world through the material sublime, instead of through the transcendental expressions of sublimity preferred by male writers.

The "line invisible" dividing male and female Romantic poets, like the illusory division between the noumenal and phenomenal worlds in Wordsworth's "Home at Grasmere," is a discursive construct. Critical approaches that accept this division as an essential aspect of Romantic aesthetics overlook an important conflict: despite the male critics who dismissed women's writing as inferior or derivative, many male writers continued to praise, to evaluate, to imitate, and to feel threatened by the productions of their female contemporaries. And, as in the case of Byron's advice to Baillie on how to successfully revise De Monfort, we can even find examples of collaboration between male and female writers. These intertextual connections, in the midst of critical discourses arguing for the uniformly separate ideological concerns of male and female Romantics, are the paradoxes that the rhizomic model gives us the freedom to explore.


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