

## ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: TEXTUAL SENSIBILITIES: THE PHYSICALITY OF BRITISH POETRY, 1750-1850

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My dissertation argues that key eighteenth and early nineteenth-century poets – including James Thomson and James Macpherson, Thomas Chatterton, Charlotte Smith, and Erasmus Darwin, and William Blake, John Keats, and Percy Shelley – are united by a preoccupation with the physical properties of the text, language, or both. I argue that these writers take the central period concept of sensibility, or the human capacity for sensory perception and emotion, and reconceive it as a textual category, exploring what I call textual sensibility, or the text’s capacity to stimulate the senses relative to its intellectual comprehensibility. In major poems these writers foreground the visual and sonic characteristics of words, punctuation, and space, and use various poetic “units” – from one letter to the entire poem – as physical things or effects that frustrate informational reading and force a more experiential approach to the text. I argue that these techniques arise from the widespread focus on the senses in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century British culture.

The dissertation's first chapter defines the salient techniques of physical poetic practice in a range of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century texts; the other chapters concentrate specifically on Blake, Keats, and Shelley as poets who pursue particularly rich, complex, and self-reflexive forms of physical poetic style. My study fills a gap in coverage in the larger field of interest in material affect, which has tended to focus on virtually every other literary period at the expense of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Jerome McGann's *The Poetics of Sensibility* touches upon "affective" versus "referential" language in certain late eighteenth-century poets, and scholars have addressed Blake's material uses of word and image and some aspects of Keats's sensory style. But my study supplies an in-depth account of the diverse techniques of physical poetic practice in the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century period, and of the important epistemological inquiry that underlies them: is reading, and particularly reading poetry, about gaining "information" from the text or "experiencing" it, and can these two effects be combined?

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by

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Dedicated to my parents, Mike and Janet Wells,  
without whom none of this would have been possible

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## Introduction

Though Wordsworth's poetry could hardly be characterized as preoccupied with the physical character of language, his Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* has much to say on the subject. Amidst the Preface's famous arguments about the poet and poetry and its familiar phrases, "a poet is a man speaking to men" and "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling," Wordsworth obsessively returns to the topic of the autonomous physical power of words. The physical character of language, of course, is an issue on which Pope famously comments decades before in "An Essay on Criticism" when he writes "The sound must seem an Echo to the sense," clearly subordinating what he calls "the pow'r of Music" in poetry to its clear ideational communication.<sup>1</sup> Samuel Johnson offers his view on the same issue in *The Life of Dryden* when he declares that "[words should not] draw that attention on themselves which they should transmit to things."<sup>2</sup>

Yet where Pope and Johnson pronounce with firmness and confidence their verdicts on the proper sensory role of words, this problem hovers unresolved over Wordsworth and his assertions about poetry. The irresolution emerges primarily through Wordsworth's discussion of meter – one of the most physically affective of all poetic devices. This discussion repays our close attention because it defines, at a theoretical level, what the poets addressed in this study deeply explore at the level of stylistic technique: the different kinds of affective use to which a physical tool like meter can be put, as well as the questions about the meaning, value, and cultural function of poetry that are raised by that use.

In a sometimes anxious and defensive tone, Wordsworth presents conflicted and ambivalent arguments about the precise role of meter in poetry. He first admits that language can have a force that is independent of meaning when he suggests that “words . . . [when they are] in themselves powerful” can carry “the excitement [that poetry purposes to create in the reader] . . . beyond its proper bounds.”<sup>3</sup> He then focuses specifically on poetic meter, arguing that it can have the effect of “tempering and restraining” this excitement. This latter effect occurs precisely because of the autonomy of meter: its creation of a “feeling not strictly and necessarily connected with the passion [evoked by the poetry].” Or, Wordsworth suggests, meter holds passion in check by exerting semi-hypnotic effects, or a “tendency . . . to divest language, in a certain degree, of its reality, and thus to throw a certain half-consciousness over the whole composition.”<sup>4</sup> Yet elsewhere in the Preface Wordsworth portrays meter in the opposite way: as a stimulant. He argues that its laws, which ensure its regularity and uniformity, cause it not to “interfere” with the passion that is the subject of the verse but “to heighten and improve the pleasure that co-exists with it.”<sup>5</sup> As if he is not sure that what he has just claimed is true, Wordsworth uses the most hyperbolic form of evidence possible, grandly asserting that the heightening effects of meter have been affirmed by the “concurring testimony of ages” and the “consent of all nations.” He even suggests that the “power of meter in itself” is so great that in what he terms “lighter compositions,” it is “confessedly a principle source of the gratification of the Reader.” What is more, in more “pathetic and impassioned poetry,” it can serve as a kind of insurance policy against the failure of poetic content.<sup>6</sup>

if the Poet's words should be incommensurate with the passion, and inadequate to raise the Reader to a height of desirable excitement, then . . . in the feelings of pleasure which the Reader has been accustomed to connect with meter in general, and in the feeling, whether cheerful or melancholy, which he has been accustomed to connect with that particular movement of meter, there will be found something which will greatly contribute to impart passion to the words and to effect the complex end to which the Poet proposes to himself.<sup>7</sup>

This key moment suggests more overtly the paradox that has been developing in Wordsworth's other comments. That paradox is that though Wordsworth spends much of his time in the Preface arguing that the definition and essential impact of poetry have nothing to do with meter, lying instead with the "communication of the human passions," the "inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind," and "certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon [the mind],"<sup>8</sup> he ends up suggesting that meter is an indispensable ingredient in what is here ambiguously called "the [Poet's] complex end" and a few lines later "a complex feeling of delight."<sup>9</sup>

Wordsworth's comments, taken together, testify to his belief in the strong effects of metrical language upon the reader and his conclusion, despite suggestions to the contrary, that it is necessary for poetry, including the poems in the *Lyrical Ballads*, to have any hope of appealing powerfully to an audience. But Wordsworth's repetition of the idea that the effects of meter can be autonomous, or independent of the intellectual and emotional meaning of language, and his admission that it can supply affective power where meaning fails to do so, testifies to his uneasiness that the "charm" of meter, which the poet "superadd[s]" to the verse,<sup>10</sup> may end up usurping its substance, or those universal human passions and experiences that are so urgently proposed as the definition of poetry itself. Accordingly, to look too far into a "systematic theory" of how and why

meter produces pleasure, which Wordsworth avoids in the Preface by saying that it is beyond its scope, may uncover just how similar poetry can be to a “charm.”

While the poets addressed in this study do not all consciously seek to define a “systematic” theory of the affective powers of meter or any other formal element, they are united in their interest in the physical character of the text, language, or both, and in the rich body of stylistic techniques that embody that interest. This group of key eighteenth and early nineteenth-century writers – among others, James Thomson and James Macpherson, Thomas Chatterton and Charlotte Smith, and William Blake, John Keats, and Percy Shelley – thus approach in a more practical, open, and experimental (though not always fully endorsing) spirit what Wordsworth considers ambivalently in the poetic theory of the Preface. These poets foreground the visual and sonic characteristics of words, punctuation, and space, and employ some or all “units” of a poem – from one letter to the entire poem – as physical things or effects that frustrate informational reading and force a more experiential approach to the text. They pursue a more complex range of physical poetic practices, and with a greater degree of self-reflection, than critics have previously recognized or discussed. These include the iconification of the text through a striking visual characteristic; kinetic techniques, such as the disruption of informational reading by forcing the reader regularly to move between the different textual spaces and discourses of poetic text and notes; the creation of networks of repetitive, hypnotic sounds across verse sections; and the careful arrangement of words across stanzas and larger verse sections to create a synaesthetic visual, aural, and even tactile experience. To identify these techniques and to demonstrate their complex affective workings is to show how these writers explore a

poetic epistemology of the senses, using their affective style in order to investigate a single rich question: Is reading, and particularly reading poetry, about gaining “information” from the text or “experiencing” it, and are both possible at once?

As several of the poets whom I will address acknowledge through the self-reflexive character of their poems, what is at stake in this question is the very nature and function of poetry. Through characters who function as interpolated poet figures or through different forms of commentary of one literary passage upon another, Blake, Keats, and Shelley, in particular, perform a metacritique of their own physically affective style, contemplating its potentially radical implications for author, reader, and text. Just some of the many questions that organize and fuel this metacritique are: what is the relationship between the authorial self or voice, or the messages the author wishes to convey, and the body of affective language that he or she has produced? Does the author’s use of words as physical effects mean that he or she has relinquished control of the text, staking its signification and power on the reader’s particular individual experience of language? Concerning the reader, does he or she gain knowledge from a physically affective text, and if so what kind? Can a physically affective poem inspire readers to social action, and thus live on in the form of that action, or will it only provide a momentary experience and then, in effect, vanish or fail to be heard? And finally, concerning the poem itself, if it operates primarily as a physical action upon the reader rather than an intellectual communication, is it even poetry anymore? Or, like a good circulated in the market or entertainment to which one seeks admission, is it just a consumable substance or a proffered experience?

When eighteenth and early nineteenth-century poets explore and reflect upon materially affective language, furthermore, they express and negotiate through poetic style the unique cultural conditions of the time in which they are writing, especially the period's pervasive preoccupation with the senses and with the relationship between sensory perception and the idea. The general importance of the senses in the long eighteenth century is expressed across the period in different cultural forms and developments, some of which gain prominence only at the end of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth. But we can observe a single sustained engagement with one aspect of this period's culture of the senses in all the writers this study addresses. They explore the relevance for poetic style of the paradigmatic concept of sensibility, or the human capacity for sensory perception and emotion, which recent critics have shown to be a central concern, if not the center of an entire subculture, in the eighteenth century.<sup>11</sup> These poets, first of all, interrogate the very meaning of the notion of sensibility, as if collectively taking creative advantage of Hannah More's lines in the poem, "Sensibility," "Sweet sensibility . . . thy subtle essence still eludes the chains/Of definition" (1, 5-6).<sup>12</sup> Most of the eighteenth century's meditations on sensibility understand it primarily as a human capacity that influences psychology and behavior, or that is linked to social class, sexuality, or aesthetic taste. To take only a few examples, a philosophical text like Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* roots benevolent social action in sensibility, while literary works such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Heloise* and Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* explore the influence of sensibility upon various aspects of their heroes and heroines, including gender roles, romantic behavior, and aesthetic experience. Numerous poems of the period, such as

More's, are also specifically dedicated to meditating on sensibility, mainly working to define and even lament its sometimes overwhelming power.

Yet through their physically affective techniques, the writers addressed in this study explore how *poems* as well as human beings can possess various degrees of sensibility. Crucially, they reconceive sensibility as a textual category. What is more, through their exploratory poetic practice they expound a theory of what I call “textual sensibility,” or the text’s capacity to stimulate the senses relative to its intellectual comprehensibility. Just as eighteenth-century philosophers, spurred on especially by John Locke’s sensationalist theory of consciousness in *Essay on Human Understanding* (1690), debate whether and how ideas are rooted in physical perceptions, the period’s poets explore how materially affective style impacts the conceptual communication of their texts, or whether such a style can itself convey conceptual messages.

But there are still other ways in which the writers discussed in this study collectively define a “textual sensibility.” As we will see, their various physically affective techniques work to gauge, stimulate, create, or inspire revolutionary uses of their readers’ “textual sensibilities,” or capacities to approach the text with an experiential rather than informational mode of reading. The diversity of these techniques, furthermore, is what founds the large range of different textual “sensibilities,” or “personalities,” which I will uncover in eighteenth and early nineteenth century verse that presses language to physically affective ends. Though a few pre-eighteenth-century poets, most notably Herbert, experimented with the physical character of text and language, the accretion of writers who are interested in the latter subject in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and who explore the physical power of language in a particularly

deep way may be regarded as a kind of literary historical crucible, from which emerge various directions of similar interest and experiment in such late nineteenth-century poets as Tennyson, Swinburne, and Hopkins, as well as the generally greater liberties taken by twentieth-century writers in exploiting the materiality of the word.

### I.

Apart from exploring a notion of “textual sensibility,” physically affective verse in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries also investigates within the realm of poetic style central aesthetic techniques and questions that appear in picturesque art of the period. For example, the general technique in picturesque painting of establishing various levels or grounds within the landscape has its analogy in physical poetic style when Chatterton, Darwin, and Smith literally stake out various “grounds” or textual regions within their poetic texts and then explore how each can alternately stimulate the reader’s attention. These poets iconify large blocks of text through a striking visual characteristic, and then, once the reader attempts the process of reading, force him or her regularly to move back and forth between the main text and the liminal space of footnotes. The notes become a locus both for supplying intellectual meaning for the main text that has been obscured by material effects, and for asserting the personality or viewpoint of the author that has been displaced or overshadowed by the iconic power of the poem. Thus, the exploration of the poem as a linguistic landscape with various “grounds” becomes a way of asking larger questions about the author’s proper “place,” literally and figuratively, in his or her productions.

Physical poetic language also registers the problem, discussed in picturesque theory, of how to portray the sensory details and effects of the landscape in relation to



intellectual perspective or commentary. As John Barrell details in *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place*, one view of the matter considers it more proper to assume a perspective of “commanding height” over the subject field, so that the presentation of natural details will produce a general picture of the whole landscape, and often a direct or indirect moral argument about the “order” of nature to boot. The other view places more detailed focus on particular elements of nature, without a clear structure of subordination or priority.<sup>13</sup> Uvedale Price also delineates this conflict in his treatise *On the Picturesque* (1794). He comments upon the potential delights of a painterly or horticultural focus on detail when he writes,

Whoever has been among [the scenery of forests] and has attentively observed the character of those parts, where wild tangled thickets open into glades, -- half seen across the stems of old stag-headed oaks and twisted beeches – has remarked the irregular tracks of wheels, and the footpaths of men and animals, how they seem to be seeking, and forcing their way, in every direction, -- must have felt how differently the stimulus of curiosity is excited in such scenes, and how much likewise the varied effects of light and shadow are promoted, by the variety and intricacy of the objects.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, however, Price suggests that too great a dissemination of focus is dangerous, using the analogies of music and architecture to make his point:

But, on the other hand, should a composer from too great a fondness of discords and extraneous modulations, neglect the flow and smoothness of melody, or should he smother a sweet and simple air beneath a load even of the richest harmony, he would resemble an architect who, from a false notion of the picturesque, should destroy all repose and continuity in his designs, by the number of breaks and projections, or should try to improve some elegant and simple building, by loading it with a profusion of ornaments.<sup>15</sup>

As Angus Fletcher notes, the concern that Price expresses here is that picturesque painters will explore ornament or sensuous excitement for its own sake. Making the

same argument for the picturesque that this study makes for literary texts that explore a physical style, Fletcher writes, “with the picturesque, art begins to deal in “effects” rather than organic form . . . . ‘Effects’ begin to need an aesthetic of their own.”<sup>16</sup>

The conflict about detail that both Barrell and Price discuss emerges on poetic grounds within the work of Thomson, who engages in powerfully sensorial description but then immediately abrogates that activity, as if anxious about the “matter” of language becoming too autonomous in its effects. Thomson follows such descriptions with self-chastisement and the heavy use of abstractions. In Smith, we find a slightly less combative form of opposition between a language of intellectual commentary or interpretation and an absorption in the sensuous language of natural description, which occurs especially in her poem “Beachy Head.” In Clare, as scholars have noted, there is still another kind of absorption in the verbiage of natural detail, which he carries to especially sonic and tactile ends, and upon which he exhibits little need to take an interpretive, abstract, or otherwise recanting stance.<sup>17</sup> And, as I will show in the chapter devoted to him, it is Keats who takes description to perhaps the most affective ends of all, treating it as an opportunity for his or his reader’s spell-like absorption in the physical effects of descriptive verbiage, and undertaking, at the same time, various forms of ambivalent figurative reflection upon that technique.<sup>18</sup>

Like other cultural developments that brazenly focus upon the senses, eighteenth and early nineteenth-century consumerism and a developing visual culture of mass spectacle have an especially concrete bearing upon physical poetic techniques. As Neil McKendrick has shown, eighteenth-century England was the setting for the world’s first major consumer society, whereby manufacturers and shopkeepers, aided by the increased

circulation of new china, clothing, and other goods due to improved trade routes and transportation, hoped that the sensory appeal of these objects would override reason and persuade people aggressively to buy. Though consumerism was developing even by 1700, McKendrick shows that its full emergence in English society had not occurred until 1800.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, as Gillen D'Arcy Wood has recently demonstrated, the period 1760-1860 in England saw the thriving of a visual culture of sensationalized spectacle, consisting in immensely popular exhibits such as that displaying Giovanni Belzoni's collection of tombs, statues, sarcophagi, and other objects in the London Museum, the presentation of the Elgin Marbles at the British Museum, panoramas, and subtler forms of sensationalism such as book illustrations and prints.<sup>20</sup> Wood discusses how such exhibits as Belzoni's based their "gratification of the eye" upon their effect of "the real," which Roland Barthes defines as a "[a sign not needing] any independent justification . . . [that is] powerful enough to negate any notion of 'function' . . . [and] can be expressed without there being any need for it to be integrated into a structure."<sup>21</sup> Wood also discusses the panoramas at Leicester Square and the Strand and their life-like recreation on the canvas of famous sights and scenes; he particularly focuses on Wordsworth's apprehension about the panorama's "mimic sights" and Coleridge's "shock" and "disgust" over its "simulations of nature."<sup>22</sup> Wood places his study in the recent line of criticism that has explored the relationship between canonical Romantic literature and what he calls "commercial, sub-literary" forms of Romanticism such as gothic novels, travel journals, and the periodical press. At the same time, Wood portrays his work as answering to a critical neglect of how Romantic literary culture relates itself to the emerging commercial visual culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century period.<sup>23</sup>

My work shares some of Wood's objectives by showing how eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century explorations of a physically affective style must be seen in the context of this period's cultural appeal to the senses, which occurs in especially acute forms in consumerism and the visual culture of mass spectacle. Yet I specifically demonstrate that poets who pursue such a style do not necessarily embrace it uniformly or unreflectively. Rather, they often figuratively portray their anxieties about a potential complicity of their verse with the status of commercial objects or sensationalized exhibits and experiences, which they suggest might result from using language in an intensely sensory way. Also, Wood focuses on particular types of visual culture that develop over the late eighteenth century and especially the early nineteenth, and on the literary reaction chiefly of Wordsworth and Coleridge. By contrast, I wish to show how the tensions about sensationalism that are implied by the Barthes quote above apply to a longer chronological range of culture and poetry.

It is true that consumerism and mass spectacle do not become fully expressed as cultural phenomena until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Yet as conflicts arising in picturesque theory and in empiricist philosophy suggest, a central subject under debate even in early eighteenth-century culture is the problem of sensory elements that, to use Barthes' words, are "powerful enough to negate any notion of function" and refuse "integra[tion] into a structure," such as the text's intellectual communications. Accordingly, descriptive poetry like James Thomson's, written in the 1720s and 1730s, along with other mid eighteenth-century verse, explores sonic and visual effects in language that seem to have an autonomous existence – just as for Barthes, Flaubert in the late nineteenth century produces dense visual descriptions that

resist integration or subordination to the intellectual contexts of narrative, theme, or symbol.<sup>24</sup> The fact that Blake, Keats, and Shelley, working in the early nineteenth century, explore physically affective language with a particular aggressiveness and self-consciousness must be considered in relation to the particularly pronounced forms of sensationalized culture developing at this time. Poetry, even more in the period that is traditionally named Romantic than in the eighteenth century, appears constrained to define itself in relation to pervasively circulated commercial goods and consumable substances, and increasingly proffered absorbing experiences such as the panorama. This task is performed, for Wordsworth and Coleridge, through theoretical statements such as the Preface and Coleridge's later prose writings. But my study concentrates on its execution in the realm of poetic style, which simultaneously explores and registers poets' anxieties about the potential complicity of verse with the above cultural forms.

At the same time, I am not arguing that a complicity between poetry and commercial goods or sensationalized experience is always an immediately apparent concern of Blake's, Keats's, and Shelley's poetry, although in Keats's case, as I show particularly in the case of *The Eve of St. Agnes*, this complicity is a clear figurative preoccupation.<sup>25</sup> To identify tensions about sensationalism in Blake's obviously physically affective style may seem counterintuitive, especially given the poet's conscious attempts, from the level of a single letter all the way up to an entire illuminated work, to connect sensory experience with intellectual revolution by "cleansing the doors of perception." Yet the latter connection, as I try to show through readings of Blake's employments of affective form in *Jerusalem*, is precisely what is jeopardized by Blake's overwhelming physical style – a jeopardy of which Blake's figural metacritique of his

own style is well aware. In Shelley's case, the question of poetry's potential complicity with other forms of sensationalized cultural appeal emerges in the poet's pronounced and self-conscious exploration of enchantment, as a subject and a stylistic strategy. Yet Shelley attempts to use enchanting style not to the end of appeasing the appetites of a commercially imagined audience, but to the end of increasing affinity for the poet's voice and potentially revolutionizing his readers' perception.

Wood's study of Romantic visual culture raises the particular problem of the attitude of various Romantic poets toward visual representation. Although the chapter descriptions at the end of this Introduction show my argument about each of the poets I treat in more detail, suffice it to say now that Blake, Keats, and Shelley each engage the question of the visual in more complex ways than simply, as Wood suggests, taking a skeptical or hostile stance.<sup>26</sup> Blake's extensive exploration of physical style takes the form of an interpenetration of visually shocking "word walls," or densely packed blocks of language on illuminated plates, with hypnotic usage of sound. Keats investigates how poetic language, particularly highly sonic and tactile descriptive forms that tend to de-visualize the focal object, can become a charm – a physical action upon the reader that attempts to manipulate his or her understanding and experience of the text. In Shelley, the spell of style is pursued even more boldly and self-consciously, in the hope of inspiring a sublime revolution in the reader's social vision, whether in the form of combined hypnotic and invigorating sonic languages, or, in Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound*, of the mixture of sonic effects with the kinesthesia of visually expressive enjambments and line arrangement. These poets, then, explore visual affective strategies alongside or even in the midst of experiments with sonic or tactile language, and

investigate the potential conflicts or harmonies between visual and sonic or tactile forms of affect.

The potential implications for poetry of a culture that is characterized by consumerism and mass sensationalism especially emerge in the metacritical passages of physically affective poems by Blake, Keats, and Shelley. These textual sites reflect upon the fault line and potential compatibility between two contrasting models of verse: a humanistic model, characterized by the notion of the poet “speaking” to the audience, and a mechanistic model whereby the poetic text, operating as a physical thing, or poetic language, operating as a series of physical effects, potentially approaches the status of non-poetry in the form of a commercial good or a sensational experience. These poets question how their language, apart from or even by means of its function as a physical object to be viewed or an enchanting experience of sound, can still serve as a vehicle for the clear expression of the authorial voice, the teaching of readers, and the inspiration of individual or collective action. Despite these ideals, however, we will also see that a deep engagement with material affect in Blake, Keats, and Shelley leads ultimately to questioning the efficacy or the very definition of concepts like authorial voice and poetic teaching. Where such reflection is subtly present in the earlier poets such as Chatterton, whom I discuss in Chapter One, it is more urgent in Blake, Keats, and Shelley, whose intense idealism that poetry can serve a humanistic role is as acute an advertisement as any of the difficulty of attaining that goal in the cultural milieu of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

## II.

By arguing that major eighteenth and early nineteenth-century poets evince a common interest in physically affective style and by grounding that interest in the period's widespread cultural focus on the senses, my study enters several critical conversations about literary history. The first such conversation focuses on the larger history of physical poetics, which scholars have detailed for the medieval, early modern, modern and postmodern periods at the expense of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Richard Bradford, for example, has written comprehensive literary histories of both visual and sonic interests that skip over physical poetic practice in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>27</sup> Bradford's study of visual technique, *The Look of It: A Theory of Visual Form in English Poetry*, concentrates entirely on Modernist visual poetics except for a brief treatment of seventeenth-century figure poems. Though his book on sound, *Silence and Sound: Theories of Poetics from the Eighteenth Century*, does address some eighteenth-century writers, they are stylistic theorists, not poets, and after only a brief chapter on Milton, Wordsworth, and blank verse, Bradford moves to the twentieth century. Criticism on physically affective techniques in particular texts or authors has also tended to overlook the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Mary C. Olson, for example, addresses visually expressive techniques in *Fair and varied forms: visual textuality in medieval manuscripts*; several critics discuss the obvious physical poetic strategies in George Herbert's figure poems,<sup>28</sup> and, many commentators identify the physical poetic techniques in modernist and postmodernist texts, as in Jerome McGann's study *Black Riders: The Visual Languages of Modernism*, or the significant body of scholarship on Language poetry.<sup>29</sup> This absence of focus upon the eighteenth



and early nineteenth centuries, in both comprehensive works and author and period-specific studies, gives the impression that the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were not a fertile time for physical poetic practice. I argue, on the contrary, that examples of physical poetic practice abound in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and that they reflect this era's culture of the senses.

My work also participates in the recent critical conversation about the role of sensibility in the literary and cultural history of the eighteenth century. In *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*, G.J. Barker-Benfield argues that sensibility becomes a key concept in a new culture that develops in the eighteenth century. Centered in what Barker-Benfield terms "the nerve paradigm," which locates ideas, emotions, character, and behavior as rooted in the physical sensitivity of the nerves, this culture is composed of philosophical and aesthetic developments like those I have mentioned. It is also made up by arguments over education, culminating in Mary Wollstonecraft's critique of the overcultivation in women of sensibility at the expense of reason; moral campaigns attacking sensibility as the root of excess sensuality in male manners; and the period's thriving consumerism, which sought to appeal to the senses and the emotions over reason. Other major commentators agree with Barker-Benfield that sensibility is crucial for characterizing both eighteenth-century culture and literature. Focusing on the Enlightenment, especially as it develops in the medicine and literature of France, Anne C. Vila, in *Enlightenment and Pathology*, reads sensibility as the foundational concept for how Enlightenment thinkers and literary writers understood human nature, and for their attempts to conceive of perfect human beings and societies. Furthermore, Chris Jones, in *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Revolution in the 1790s*,

emphasizes the importance of sensibility from a political perspective, showing how conflicting opinions about sensibility's proper societal role constituted coded expressions of radical and conservative political positions. Finally, Adela Pinch's *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion from Hume to Austen*, although not a work explicitly on sensibility, argues that writers of the late eighteenth century, including Wordsworth in his early writings, are preoccupied with understanding emotion, particularly the origin of and sense of ownership for feelings.<sup>30</sup>

Yet these studies display a bias toward an historical and cultural studies methodology and against poetry as a field of inquiry. Barker-Benfield and Vila, for example, are interested in characterizing the culture of the eighteenth century through the lens of the idea of sensibility, and literary texts – namely novels – become just one type of documentary evidence of the cultural trait or trend being emphasized. Jones' study, similarly, focuses primarily upon prose literature, which he reads alongside philosophical texts. While Pinch emphasizes some poetry – the early Wordsworth – it is not with a focus on the important question of how poetic form is influenced by the perspective or idea of sensibility. Also, these critics have a tendency not to extend their focus beyond the year 1800, thus implying that the eighteenth century is a separate literary and cultural age from the beginning of the nineteenth and that the term “sensibility” has little or no explanatory power for early nineteenth-century literature.

Jerome McGann's *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* more extensively engages the question of how sensibility influences poetic form and style in both the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. McGann argues that the concept of sensibility and the related concept of the sentimental are at the center of a momentous

shift in literary style that begins with mid to late eighteenth-century poetry. He portrays a range of both late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century verse as engaging with the concept or perspective of “sensibility,” which he associates with the stimulations and responses of the body, and “sentimentality,” which he characterizes as feeling refined by reflection.<sup>31</sup> McGann is especially concerned to recover a large body of neglected verse by women that meditates upon emotion or is written according to what McGann calls “the determinate rhetorical conventions” of verse that is composed from the perspective of intense feeling. These conventions include, as McGann observes of the anonymous writer calling herself the “Amorous Lady,” a style that proceeds through abrupt changes in topic, tone, and mood, or that evolves by “feeding on its own circumstances” of feeling, or, for more sentimental poetry, a more self-conscious display of the fact that emotion is the verse’s impetus and organizing force.<sup>32</sup> McGann includes a chapter, for example, tracing out the line of “sentimental” style into the work of the nineteenth-century poets Laetitia Elizabeth Landon and Felicia Hemans, and, along with a chapter suggesting sentimental strains in Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley, makes passing references throughout the book to the work of these poets as well as that of Blake.

McGann’s study also addresses the way in which poets of the late eighteenth-century period use language “performatively” or “affectively,” as opposed to “referentially.” In a chapter on the Della Cruscan poets, for example, he discusses how the exchanges between Della Crusca and Anna Matilda become linguistic worlds of their own through the force of consciously exploited like sounds or visual similarities between one word and another. McGann finds similar affective styling in the works of Ann Batten Cristall, to whom he devotes his last chapter. He argues that Cristall’s sequences

of poems in the only volume she ever published, *Poetical Sketches*, use a self-conscious “massively assonantal” style that in itself, rather than by conceptual means, contends for the authority of feeling as the basis of verse.<sup>33</sup>

McGann’s readings of the Della Cruscans and Cristall provide essential treatments of physically affective style in key exemplary poets. Yet there are limitations on the writers McGann can treat due to the multiple objectives of his study (for example, addressing poetries of both sensibility and the sentimental), and due to the emotional definition of sensibility that the study foregrounds. Key practitioners of physically affective style in this period are touched upon only briefly or in passing, or addressed chiefly in terms of a sensibility defined as the human capacity for emotion rather than for physical sensation. This means that while certain poets like the Della Cruscans or Cristall might be addressed more fully in terms of their sensory poetics, poets like Gray, Macpherson, Darwin, or Smith are read either not at all or only partially through this lens; other poets who explore a physically affective style, like Chatterton, are not addressed; and the rich, complex physically affective style that this study claims in Blake, Keats, and Shelley is not examined. McGann’s study does not have room to supply an in-depth account of the many techniques by which performative or affective style operates in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century works, nor to address the richly self-reflexive nature of many of the period’s most physically expressive poems, the relationship between physical techniques and their cultural context, or the larger questions about the definition and function of poetry that are raised when poets explore material affect in especially complex ways.

By focusing specifically on physical poetic style in this period, I wish to account for a range of techniques used across the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and to explain them in detail. I also show how the poets who most aggressively use such a style perform their own metacritique of it, specifically questioning its value and its impact upon other poetic objectives. I discuss, furthermore, the larger inquiries about reading that these poets are making when they use language as a system of sights and sounds: specifically, their investigation of what approaches, perceptual processes, and effects are involved when a text is “read” or “understood” on an ideational level versus experienced primarily by the senses. My study concentrates upon the sensory definition of sensibility that critics such as Barker-Benfield and Vila have seen as so important for characterizing eighteenth-century culture. Yet I contend that the sensory definition of sensibility possesses explanatory power for a wider range of both culture and literature than previous commentators have suggested. As I discuss above, the senses remain a central cultural focus in the early nineteenth century, either in fresh forms such as the newly developing sensationalized visual culture, or in inherited but intensified forms, as in a consumerism that had developed across the 1700s but reached full throttle by 1800. Within literature, it is true that writers’ overt preoccupation with sensibility as a human capacity largely runs its course by the end of the eighteenth century, whether through the creation of literary characters who are clearly studies of excessive feeling, or through a first-person poetic voice who explores the fine contours of the subject and the experience of emotion. As Jennifer Keith has argued, by the early nineteenth century, sensibility in this respect, though a foundational presence in many poems, is no longer a foregrounded subject. Keith suggests that it fades into the background or is absorbed into the poem so

that other interests, such as the sublime or the imagination, can take center stage.<sup>34</sup> Yet this study contends that as a textual category explored under the rubric of physical poetic form and style, sensibility is alive and well not only throughout the eighteenth century but into the nineteenth.

In making this argument, my study also enters recent debates about periodization, particularly those concerning the question of a literary or cultural “long eighteenth century.” The increased deployment of the latter notion, everywhere from criticism to calls for papers to job advertisements, could suggest that cultural and literary historians are more open than ever before to questioning the labels that have been used to characterize the developments of this time (“the Augustan age,” “the Age of Sensibility,” “Pre-romanticism,” “Romanticism”), and to finding cultural and literary continuities across the late seventeenth, the eighteenth, and the early nineteenth centuries. Indeed, taking a “long” historical view of this period, or investigating how pivotal developments in English society in the eighteenth century originate in the late seventeenth century and extend their influence well into the nineteenth, has greatly enriched our understanding of cultural history. The work of scholars such as McKendrick, Barker-Benfield, Wood, and Altick, as well as Jon Klancher, has helped us to see how this period hosted not only the burgeoning of consumer society and of visual culture, but also increased literacy and dissemination of books and the explosion of newspaper culture.

The idea of a cultural long eighteenth century shows its influence, too, on the long-debated problem of defining “Romanticism,” as can be seen in the recently published *Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832*. Though this book uses the boundaries of political events to mark off the “Romantic age” and then

works within those historical constraints to discuss cultural and literary developments, its method for approaching those developments is topical and not chronological. Pieces in the companion, of course, address subjects which are more particular to the period 1776-1832, such as the American and French Revolutions and the Napoleonic Wars, and which obviously heavily influenced the writers of the time. Yet beyond these, the companion offers a rich set of essays on subjects such as consumerism, sensibility, industrialization, and viewing, locating the seeds of these phenomena in the eighteenth century and suggesting that the early nineteenth century sees their flowering.

Yet this view, which recognizes differences between authors and texts without disavowing continuities, has not found as strong a following when it comes to the drawing of literary historical boundaries. The tendency has been to widen such boundaries by way of dates or period labels that are often named in book titles or introductions, but not always in a way that is clear and well-rationalized. Such expansion, for example, occurs when scholars append terms like “Romantic” and “sensibility” to particular works or to authors who might not have received such distinctions before. Stuart Curran’s edition of Charlotte Smith’s poems, for example, declares that Smith “was the first poet in England whom in retrospect we would call Romantic.”<sup>35</sup> A collection entitled *Early Romantics: Perspectives in British Poetry from Pope to Wordsworth* includes essays that mostly focus on portraying poets of the mid to late eighteenth century as “early Romantics,” as in pieces on Christopher Smart and the “poetic language of ‘Early Romanticism’” and on Christopher Smart and William Blake; a piece on “the early Romantic poetics” of Thomas Gray and Charlotte Smith; and one essay, making perhaps a more conventional and longer-held association, on Cowper and

Wordsworth.<sup>36</sup> Yet the collection's title, taking in the period ranging from Pope to Wordsworth, makes an even bolder literary-historical claim than the essays about what counts as "early" or proto-Romantic, since Pope can hardly be considered to have many affinities with writers who are commonly seen as Romantic.<sup>37</sup> This mismatch between the arguments made by the essays and those implied in the book's title only increases the reader's confusion about what claims of periodicity are actually being made.

The central claim of periodization propounded by this study is that whatever appears in "Romantic" writers – especially the acute preoccupation with the physical character of text and language that I reveal in Blake, Keats, and Shelley – must be seen in the context of previous and concurrent literary and cultural developments. This study argues that the proper literary context for viewing physical style in Blake, Keats, and Shelley is the exploration of physicality that occurs in eighteenth-century poetry and in other early nineteenth-century verse. Just as crucial is placing these Romantic poets' work in the cultural context of an increased focus on the senses, which occurs throughout the eighteenth century and continues in various manifestations into the nineteenth. Such a contextualizing move is particularly important with respect to Blake, whose materially affective techniques have been variously acknowledged and studied by critics, but usually not in terms of their various analogues in eighteenth-century or other Romantic poetry.<sup>38</sup> Yet Blake's formation of words into visually striking blocks of text must be viewed in light of Chatterton's or Darwin's earlier use of similar techniques. Furthermore, his less-often studied networks of overwhelming, incantational sound, which in *Jerusalem* he interweaves with his visual blocks of words, must be seen as an interest explored in the work of earlier poets such as James Macpherson, as well as in the major poems of



contemporaneous writers such as Keats and Shelley. Furthermore, Blake's intense figurative reflection in *Jerusalem* about how the physical effects of poetic language impact the communication of the poet's voice turns out, as we will see, to appear in various ways in Keats's work, especially in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, and in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. When considered in these ways, Blake looks less like a unique practitioner of materially affective techniques and more like one participant in lines of style and poetic self-reflection that are just as deeply explored by other writers. At the same time, the attempt to portray an interest in the physicality of language as a period preoccupation of the long eighteenth century cannot occlude the extent to which Blake, Keats, and Shelley bring this preoccupation to a particularly intense and complex fruition. As my individual chapters on these poets demonstrate, Blake, Keats, and Shelley must be distinguished as Romantic poets who pursue adventuresome and radically affective forms of physical style, and at the same time bring to that style sophisticated metacritical perspectives about how it assists or compromises their other poetic objectives.

As to comparing the long eighteenth-century interest in the materiality of text and language with that in other periods, this study does not argue, of course, that such an interest originates in eighteenth-century texts. Poets have explored the sensory effects of poetic language at least since Horace suggested that literature should both instruct and delight, with an aim to "delight" being the license for exploring the pleasing effects of tools like meter and rhyme. Over time, poets have experimented with tipping the scales more or less toward instructing or delighting or with invoking these motifs, as when a text like Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* sets itself to shape the reader's morals, when Shakespeare has Prospero suggest that his hope was to "please" and "enchant" at the end

of *The Tempest*, or when Pope advocates a precise balance between didacticism and pleasure in “The Essay on Criticism” by critiquing those poets “who haunt Parnassus but to please their ear/Not mend their minds” (341-42).<sup>39</sup> The problem of the proper balance between delighting and instructing, however, appears in especially sharp relief and in a particular accretion of writers in the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century period. As we will see, many of the writers whom I address in Chapter One – Thomson, Chatterton, and Darwin in particular – directly or indirectly reflect on this problem as they are experimenting with the physical character of language. What is more, Blake, Keats, and Shelley emerge as the poets of this period who explore the problem of instruction and delight most deeply because they investigate a particularly intense form of poetic delight: the ability of physical language to work incantational effects upon the reader. Each of these poets, that is, in his own ways and to differing degrees, explores how poetry can work as a charm, or a deployment of words as physical action upon a listener.

Another factor that distinguishes physical poetic style in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century writers is the particular effects they create. When pre-eighteenth century writers explore the materiality of the word, they most often do so in such a way as to enhance intellectual meaning, not to obscure or replace it. For example, Mary C. Olson recounts how Christian scribes and illustrators in the Harley Psalter of the Anglo-Saxon period placed illustrations relative to text in such a way as to have them specify each other’s meanings, and to encourage the reader/viewer’s movement between the two but without the loss of his or her place or disruption of the process of memorizing psalms.<sup>40</sup> In the seventeenth-century example of Herbert, Stanley Fish shows in *Self-Consuming Artifacts* how the visually striking form of “The Altar,” after first drawing

attention to itself as a cleverly constructed textual object and to Herbert as its creator, uses its material form then to make the opposite argument: that God is the creator of Herbert, of the altar, of the psychological and spiritual desire to build the altar, and of the poetic tools necessary for the job. This meaning, rather than being contravened or frustrated by the material effects of text and word, is precisely supported by them through the placement of certain particularly meaningful words at key syntactical points in the poem, which simultaneously are key structural or “weight-bearing” points in the physical structure of an altar.<sup>41</sup> In Shakespeare’s sonnets, finally, sound acts mainly as a subtle binding force for the words whose main service is the delivery of dense intellectual meaning, and not as a foregrounded affective agent. To take a famous example: “Let me not to the marriage of true minds/Admit impediments. Love is not love/Which alters when it alteration finds,/Or bends with the remover to remove” (Sonnet 116, 1-4).<sup>42</sup> The heavy alliteration of “m” in the first two lines comes in aid of ideational sense by carrying the reader smoothly through line one and heightening the momentary suspension of meaning, which is brought over the enjambment into line two. Furthermore, word repetitions, which often work toward hypnotic ends in more experientially-oriented verse, here serve as a means of intellectual play, as the speaker forces the reader to compare semiotically the words “remover” and “remove,” and “alters” and “alteration” in lines three and four. When we place these examples from across several centuries next to the relative plenty of later writers who explore the physicality of language, the difference between uses of materiality in earlier versus eighteenth and early nineteenth-century poets appears both in the accretion of writers in the latter period who are interested in materiality, and in the type of materiality they explore: one that frustrates the gleaning of

intellectual sense and works to explore or define a more experiential model of the poetic text.

Within the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there are also writers who are preoccupied with other forms of materiality besides exploiting the experience-inducing power of the visual and sonic elements of language. Alexander Pope, for example, exploited the semiotic value of nearly every aspect of the physical character of his published text, from typography to layout to images, and painstakingly revised his texts with these elements in mind. As Vincent Caretta shows in “Images Reflect from Art to Art: Alexander Pope’s Collected *Works* of 1717,” Pope uses his volume’s frontispiece, headpieces, other forms of illustration, and engraved initial letters, as well as the weighty title *Works* itself, to suggest his distinguished place in literary history.<sup>43</sup> Yet as we have seen, alongside these bibliographical, semiotically-oriented interests in materiality, Pope finds exploitations of the physical powers of language, as in sonic device, an important enough topic for the age to comment upon it in “The Essay on Criticism.” There are, furthermore, writers in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries who clearly exploit the sensory effects of poetic language, but not in a way that strongly interferes with the gleaning of intellectual meaning or that tries to replace intellectual sense with more experiential orders of meaning and poetic communication. In these cases, for example, sonic device may enhance or come in aid of meaning or provide a pleasant sonic “background” to it, as is often true in ballads of the period. In the ballad, regular end-rhymes and sometimes a use of refrain do exploit the powers of sound to carry narrative along and to enfold the reader into the world of the poem; but it is narrative content, rather than the physical effects of language, that generally takes

center stage. No aggressive challenge to the poem as vehicle for communicating intellectual meaning (often, with ballads, in the form of a moral) is typically made.

Wordsworth's "The Idiot Boy" from the *Lyrical Ballads* is an exemplary case. The poem uses short, clipped meter, end-rhyme, and various word repetitions to move the poem along at a swift pace, generating in the reader suspense and an uneasiness to have the content and point of the narrative unfolded. The first stanza's exploitation of these formal devices is emblematic of the rest of the poem:

'Tis eight o'clock, a clear March night,  
The moon is up, the sky is blue,  
The owlet in the moonlight air –  
He shouts from nobody knows where,  
He lengthens out his lonely shout:  
Halloo, halloo! A long halloo! (1-6)<sup>44</sup>

The rhythmic breaks in the middle of the first two lines move the verse quickly along from the start, aided by subtle alliterations of "m" ("March," "moon," "moonlight") and "l" ("owlet," "moonlight," "lengthens," "lonely," "halloo," "long"), as well as by the word repetitions of "shout" and "halloo" (in the last word, onomatopoeic power is also clearly being exploited). In stanzas throughout the rest of the poem, the repetition of various forms of the name Betty Foy (Betty, Good Betty), as well as the name's obvious rhyming link with "idiot boy," also become stock devices for creating forward-lurching, somewhat nervous feeling of the verse. Yet rather than being exploited as effects that are interesting in their own right, or that form the basis of a sensory experience of language rather than an absorption of narrative content, these devices are designed to lead to key moments in the poem where narrative content is precisely Wordsworth's preoccupation. Such a concern with narrative is revealed, for example, when the speaker halts the story to declare, "Oh reader, now that I might tell/What Johnny and his horse are doing,/What

they've been doing all this time -- /Oh could I put it into rhyme/A most delightful tale pursuing! (321-25), and in later verses, when the truth value or authenticity of the narrative as well as the speaker is contemplated:

I to the muses have been bound  
 These fourteen years by strong indentures,  
 Oh gentle muses, let me tell  
 But half of what to him befell,  
 For sure he met with strange adventures . . . .  
 . . . . .  
 And Johnny burrs and laughs aloud –  
 Whether in cunning or in joy  
 I cannot tell . . . .  
 . . . . .  
 And thus to Betty's question he  
 Made answer like a traveller bold  
 (His very words I give to you) (321-25, 396-98,457-59).

Mary Robinson's verse tale "The Haunted Beach" explores a set of strategies similar to those of "The Idiot Boy," using alliterations, internal rhyme, and end-rhyme to advance the poem's story, as in the following stanza:

Above, a jutting cliff was seen  
 Where seabirds hovered, craving,  
 And all around, the crags were bound  
 With weeds, forever waving;  
 And here and there, a cavern wide  
 Its shad'wy jaws displayed,  
 And near the sands, at ebb of tide,  
 A shivered mast was seen to ride  
 Where the green billows strayed. (10-18)

Here Robinson more densely combines the devices mentioned above than Wordsworth, as in the alliterations upon the letter "c" ("craving," "crags," "cavern") and "w" ("where," "were," "with," "weeds," "waving," "shad'wy jaws") and such internal rhymes as in "jutting" and "hovered" and "around" and "bound." These devices move along the

suspenseful story, with the aid of foreboding imagery like the “shad’wy jaws” of the cavern, which is used throughout the poem, and of different forms of the refrain, “Where the green billows strayed.” The key point in the narrative of Robinson’s poem comes in the fifth stanza of nine, when the body of “a murdered man . . . [w]ith ten wide gashes on his head” is revealed laid in a fisherman’s shed (41-43).

The poetry of Sir Walter Scott, furthermore, offers many examples of how sound device, again in the form of repetition or rhyme, can be placed in the service of narrative advancement. In the following lines from *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, for example, consider the use of repetitions:

Land of brown heath and shaggy wood,  
Land of the mountain and the flood,  
Land of my sires! what mortal hand  
Can e’re untie the filial bond  
That knits me to thy rugged strand! (Canto VI, 19-23)<sup>45</sup>

The repeated phrases that begin with “land” help to express the speaker’s emotion while also building toward the revelation of meaning, the speaker’s loyalty to his country, in line 23. A more overt instance of the service of sound to narrative in Scott is the use of a nonsense chorus in the song “Where Shall the Lover Rest” from *Marmion*. The poem begins by mentioning a lover “whom the fates [have severed] from his true maiden’s breast,” then repeats the chorus, “Eleu loro,” between each of its stanzas.<sup>46</sup> The chorus heightens the suspense in the story, for the reason behind the lover’s separation from his maiden – a traitor’s usurpation of her affections – is only revealed several stanzas later. This kind of chorus, common to ballads going back centuries before Scott’s poetry, provides an interesting case of sound that is “nonsense” being exploited but also clearly separated from language that is dedicated to conveying meaning clearly and that therefore

does not employ heavy affective sound. By contrast, we will see that poets who explore sound in more adventuresome ways, such as Keats, blur the boundaries of “sense” and “nonsense” by placing dense sonic networks amidst language that at first appears to have representational objectives or that sets up the expectation that some act of representation will occur. These sonic networks end up moving closer to “nonsense” any conceptual meaning or mimetic clarity that would be achieved because of their overwhelming physical impact upon the reader.

An especially rich example of the ballad’s concern with sound in this period occurs in Sydney Owenson’s “The Irish Harp: Fragment I” from her volume *The Lay of an Irish Harp, or Metrical Fragments* (1807). Like the poems just discussed, this one uses repetitions to move along its animated lines, whose pace and fervor illustrate the effect of Ossian’s song upon the poet even as the poem carries out its chief agenda of discussing that song’s affective power. Such pace and fervor, for example, are rendered in the repetition of “why” in each of these four lines, “Why sleeps the harp of Erin’s pride?/Why with’ring droops its shamrock wreath?/Why has that song of sweetness died?/Which Erin’s harp alone can breathe?” (1-4) as well as in the repetitions, alliteration, and assonance upon the long “i” in “O ‘twas the simplest, wildest thing!/The sighs of eve that faintest flow/O’er airy lyres, did never fling/So sweet, so sad, a song of woe” (5-8).<sup>47</sup>

Yet Owenson’s clear conceptual fascination with the physical dimensions and affective power of Ossian’s song in this poem illustrates another way in which eighteenth and early nineteenth-century poems express interest in the sensory identity of poetry without exploring that interest deeply or disruptively at the practical level of



physically affective style. The poet's interest in the physical character of poetic sound, particularly in oral poetry, is here treated conceptually and narratively through her poem's concern with a scene of singing. The poem's speaker calls the song a "mystic spell," and proceeds to describe it in bodily terms, remarking upon how the poet "with tears his silent harp bedewed" (26) and stressing not his "singing" but his "respir[ing]" or "breath[ing]" of the lay (42, 45).

The central scene of Owenson's poem, furthermore, details the listeners' reaction to the "sounds" of Ossian's verse, which, though it is primarily an emotional response, is described in physical terms: "Oh, what a lay the minstrel breathed!/How many bleeding hearts around,/In suff'ring sympathy enwreathed,/Hung, desponding o'er the sound!" (45-49). The last line, in particular, portrays the sound of the song as a physical thing; even though we are told it is the "hearts" of the listeners that are "hanging," the line paints a picture of bodies hunched over the sound. This topical fascination with the independent physical life and effects of song also takes place in the poem that Mary Robinson writes to Coleridge in response to his "Kubla Khan," a verse that itself considers the power of sound to foster poetic creation ("Could I revive within me her symphony and song/To such a deep delight 'twould win me that with music loud and long/I would build that dome in air/That sunny dome, those caves of ice"). Robinson's speaker imagines the scene and events of Coleridge's poem in highly physical but especially sonic terms:

And now I'll pause to catch the moan  
Of distant breezes, cavern-pent . . . .  
I'll raptured trace the circling bounds  
Of thy rich paradise, extended,  
And listen to the varying sounds  
Of winds and foamy torrents blended . . . .

And now . . . Thy nymph, her dulcimer swift-smiting,  
 Shall wake me in ecstatic measures. . .  
 In cadence rich, in cadence strong,  
 Proving the wondrous witcheries of song! (45-46, 55-61, 63-64).<sup>48</sup>

Clearly, especially in the last line, the “witcheries of song” excite great interest in Robinson’s speaker, whose enthusiastic imagination of being “awakened” by poetic sound is contemplated in her repetition of the word, “cadence,” that itself means a cascade of sound. We also see a topical interest in the affective powers of words in Coleridge, the very poet whose verse Robinson hails, when the narrator of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” refers to the Mariner’s “strange power of speech.”<sup>49</sup>

These examples show how the ballad in this period is particularly conducive to contemplating the physicality of language at a thematic level or exploiting it practically in subtle ways that work harmoniously with meaning. We will see in Chapter One, however, that Chatterton sets himself apart from the writers I have discussed here as a ballad writer who presses both the physical appearance of the text and the sounds of language to more radical and experiential ends. With Chatterton, the physicality of the ballad is deployed at both global and local textual levels to explore the reader’s absorption into narrative and to disrupt its clear communication.

### III.

The writers from across the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries whom I address in Chapter One explore material affect in particular depth or to strong effect compared with other writers of this time, and they display the salient physical poetic techniques of this period. For example, Thomas Chatterton, Charlotte Smith, and Erasmus Darwin, along with Samuel Richardson at certain moments in *Clarissa* and Lawrence Sterne in *Tristram Shandy*, show how a poem, parts of a poem, or a block of

novelistic text can achieve iconic power, usually through the cohesive impact of a single striking visual characteristic. Beyond exploring how the reader's instantaneous visual apprehension of the iconic text can interfere with an ideational approach to reading, Chatterton, Smith, and Darwin also investigate how footnotes can function as an iconified text beneath the main poetic text (or at the back of the poetic volume, as in Smith's *Beachy Head and Other Poems*, 1807). They investigate kinetic strategies of continually sending the reader back and forth between text and notes, creating an experience of physical motion in the reader that disseminates the attention and frustrates the attempt to glean "information" from both poem and notes. At certain moments, as I will show, Chatterton, Smith, and Darwin also experiment with the more gradually unfolding effects of poetic sound and with the interruption of such effects through the reader's motion to footnotes. But this exploration of sound is mild compared with that conducted by other poets whom I discuss in Chapter One.

These poets – Thomson and Macpherson – show especially how material affect can be explored at more minute poetic levels, from letters to words to lines to line groups. They build networks of semi-hypnotic sound and rhythm, working primarily with alliteration and internal rhyme and even sometimes combining effects of visuality or tactility with those of sound; these effects create a strongly experiential text that threatens or at least complicates a clear visual imagination or intellectual comprehension of the objects described, ideas discussed, or story told. For Thomson, we will see, this impingement of the experiential elements of language upon its informational office produces anxiety, which leads to Thomson's speaker's recantation against exploring the physical powers of verse. In Macpherson, by contrast, we see a more open embrace of

the experiential powers of poetic sound. Among the novels touched upon in Chapter One, Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Heloise* also works with the reader's process of comprehension and experience of language at the level of the sentence, exploring especially the effects of ellipsis, while Richardson's *Clarissa* does the same with italics, capitalization, and parentheses. Sterne, too, besides the larger iconic effects of devices such as the marbled or blacked out page, works at the level of the sentence, exploring the kinetic effects of interruptive dashes and parenthetical asides, not to mention more pictorial notations such as the pointing finger.

Chapters Two, Three, and Four focus respectively on Blake, Keats, and Shelley as poets who, as I have already suggested, exploit the materiality of the word in especially rich, complex, and self-reflexive ways. Chapter Two works globally with the rest of the study to place Blake's material uses of word and image in the context of the other eighteenth and early nineteenth-century literature that explores a physically affective style. I read *Jerusalem* as a particularly rich ground for Blake's exploration and metacritical evaluation of visual and sonic techniques. I particularly uncover, where other critics have not, Blake's preoccupation with how the physical effects of language relate to the communication of the poet's voice, focusing on the sensorially overwhelming description of Golgonooza, or Los's "city of art," that occurs early in the poem, and Blake's interpolations of his authorial voice in the passages surrounding this description. Whether these interpolations come in the form of an increased emphasis on the theme of "voice," the poet's symbolic presence through the character of Los, or a direct, first-person utterance, they are Blake's response to the potential dangers of physically affective style. Such a style, with its blocking of lines through striking visual traits and networks of incantational sound, runs the risk of producing a mere trip of

the senses in the reader and obscuring the reader's clear imagination of the city of art's physical appearance, much less what form it might take practically, in terms of the actions of real English citizens. On the other hand, the reader's experience of both sublime shock and hypnotic swoon from Blake's language could subtly work to awaken his or her consciousness and perception, and increase interest in how the imaginative city of Golgonooza could serve as a blueprint for a more benevolent, cohesive English society. Blake's various ways of interpolating his authorial voice are attempts to ensure that such awakening and interest are in fact the result of the Golgonooza text.

Chapter Three argues that Keats's sensorially powerful language in major poems explores how poetic style can work as a charm, which Andrew Welsh defines as a physical action upon the reader and Northrop Frye as verbal magic intended to compel a particular course of action. Like Marjorie Levinson in Keats's *Life of Allegory*, I suggest how Keats's language works to threaten elevated notions of poetry, but I argue that this occurs through the poet's exploration of the charm. I read Keats's style as an enactment of charm in selected early poems but particularly in *The Eve of St. Mark*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, and "Ode to a Nightingale," demonstrating the poet's complex and sometimes conflicted interpenetration of visual, sonic, and tactile effects as well as his metacritique of his own style through devices such the interpolated poet figure. Through these devices Keats particularly considers whether to employ a "charming" style is to allow a mechanistic model of poetry to overtake a humanistic one.

Chapter Four shows how Shelley's major poems explore the enchanting powers of style even more boldly and self-consciously than Keats. The chapter depicts the poet's private use of spell-like style in the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" in order to simulate an

experience of the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty, then moves to address the “Ode to the West Wind.” I show how the latter poem’s public agenda is to use prominent incantational strategies, such as the refrain, to call the reader into sympathy with the poet and his cause; beneath this poetic surface, however, other more subtle features of spellbinding style evince the poet’s stanza-by-stanza formal “striving” with the incantational forces of inspiration in the figure of the West Wind, and his individual quest to understand the relationship between being spellbound and being awakened to a new mindset and attitude. The chapter culminates with a reading of Shelley’s combined exploration of hypnotic and awakening affective styles in *Prometheus Unbound*, and of their role in helping to convey the poem’s intellectual arguments and to revolutionize readerly perception.

As these chapter descriptions and the rest of this introductory chapter suggest, the methodology that underlies this study is an historically aware detailed analysis of form and style. The philosophy that underlies this methodology is that if we want to uncover the complex relationships between form and style and the cultural contexts of literary productions, we must remain invested in the discipline of careful and thoughtful close reading. Such a claim may seem counterintuitive for historicist methodologies or other quarters from which critiques of formalist methods have traditionally come. Yet my attentiveness to the affective operations of poetic language is intended, like Susan Wolfson’s *Formal Charges*, to counteract the critiques of formalist methods that, as she puts it, frequently “deem any interest in the local plays of poetic form irrelevant or ideologically tainted as an old New Critical aesthetic fetish,”<sup>50</sup> and to demonstrate the many ways that form and style acutely mark and negotiate cultural and historical circumstances. What this study uncovers, accordingly, is how eighteenth and early nineteenth-century texts respond to

the emphasis upon the senses in the culture in which they were produced by stylistically making themselves into objects or experiences to be consumed, viewed, or otherwise sensed, but also, crucially, by self-reflexively ruminating upon this stylistic exploration. The poets who practice the most complex forms of physically affective style and its metacritique, Blake, Keats, and Shelley, thus especially “reveal rather than conceal [their poems’] constructedness,” as Wolfson puts it of the Romantic poems she treats.<sup>51</sup> Through their various physical poetic techniques and self-reflections, these poets, together with the other eighteenth and early nineteenth-century writers whom this study addresses, investigate to what extent reading could or should become commensurate with those central activities of the modern age: actively consuming, or alternatively, being passively absorbed into, a strongly sensorial object or experience.

## Chapter One:

### Explorations in Textual Physicality, 1750-1850

As if to take as an exploratory license rather than a caveat Samuel Johnson's comment that "[words should not] draw that attention on themselves which they should transmit to things," key eighteenth and early nineteenth-century texts investigate how the sights and sounds of language can frustrate informational reading and force a more experiential approach to the text. This chapter provides an overview of the salient techniques through which such investigation occurs. Compared with the poems I address in later chapters, however, the texts addressed here take an uncertain stance about their physical poetic practice. Rather than investigating how an experiential model of the text and reading might replace an informational one, these poems study the relationship between sensory and conceptual languages and test how they can compete as models of representation and affect. They explore, that is, both physical and intellectual methods of absorbing the reader's attention, whether that reader is the poet or an external one.

Since it is impossible to address all the texts in the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century period that contemplate or experiment with physically affective style, I have been selective. While the focus of this study is poetry that explores physically affective style, the opening sections of this chapter illustrate three other means by which, or genres within which, this period's cultural focus upon the senses manifests itself in literary texts. I first address conceptually-driven texts by Pope and Johnson that serve as a foil to the rest of the chapter's readings; the procedures of these poems clarify by contrast the techniques in other period poets that move away from or interfere with an informational model of text while exploring a more experiential one. My readings of



Richardson's *Clarissa*, Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Heloise*, and Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* illustrate the particular ways that key period novels evince an interest in the materiality of language, at both the global level of the page or section of text and the local level of the line or word. Finally, my reading of Thomas Gray provides an example of writer who is interested in the physical power of the text at a theoretical level rather than at the praxeological level of literary style.

The rest of the chapter treats poetry that does explore physicality at this praxeological level. The poems I discuss provide the strongest examples of major forms of interest in the physicality of language in this period or of major physically affective techniques that, as my later chapters discuss, appear in particularly rich and complex forms in the work of Blake, Keats, and Shelley. I have also focused on texts or poets who have received little or no scholarly attention for their interest in physically affective style or whose techniques are more complex or significant to the period than scholarship has acknowledged. As my introductory chapter suggests, John Ellis's "Sarah Hazard's Love Letter," Thomas Chatterton's "The Excelente Balade of Charitie," Erasmus Darwin's *The Loves of the Plants*, and Charlotte Smith's "Beachy Head" all serve as examples of writings that exploit the sensory traits of the text as a whole or of large sections, thus exploring the visually affective traits of written language or the effects upon the reader of regular forced motion between poem and notes. At the same time, however, Chatterton, Darwin, and Smith engage at certain moments in local explorations of the sonic powers of description, thus experimenting with how both visual and aural or local and global effects can be used together; in such joint explorations, these writers anticipate the combinatory affective techniques of Blake. Yet critics have yet to address these writers'

multiform exploration of textual physicality. While Jerome McGann's *The Poetics of Sensibility* addresses the physical poetics of some late eighteenth-century poets, Ellis, Chatterton and Smith constitute pertinent writers whom McGann does not treat. McGann discusses in passing Darwin's intended contrasts between the descriptive and factual discourses of poem and notes without addressing the poet's small and large-scale exploitations of the physicality of the text and his general experimentation with sensory and intellectual readerly absorption.<sup>1</sup>

Thomson's "Winter" and Macpherson's *Fragments* constitute exemplary studies in the affective powers of poetic sound, exploring how these powers unfold at the levels of the word, line, or line group. Yet these poets still clearly employ conceptual or informational language or display some form of ambivalence about an experiential model of literature; neither this ambivalence, which is especially present in Thomson, nor the breadth of physically affective techniques in both poets, but particularly in Macpherson, have been discussed in major treatments of these poets' style.<sup>2</sup> Thomson's and Macpherson's sonic techniques anticipate the richer, more radical studies in the enchanting powers of sound that are conducted by all three poets addressed in later chapters but especially Keats and Shelley. In particular, Thomson's explorations of affective sound in the context of description demonstrates how this type of poetic discourse can serve as a seedbed for physical style; as I demonstrate in Chapter Three, it is Keats who takes description to its most sonic as well as tactile affective capabilities.<sup>3</sup> Macpherson's cascading networks of sound in his *Fragments* are more akin to musical performances than to acts of description, and thus are less wedded to a representational office of language. Macpherson's style foreshadows Shelley's intensified and self-

conscious use of similar sonic techniques in “Ode to the West Wind” but supremely in *Prometheus Unbound*.

“Expression is the dress of thought”<sup>4</sup>

Given that Pope and Johnson strongly denounce contemporary overemphasis of the physicality of the word, it is not surprising that their poems largely suppress this character of language, making words chiefly vehicles for ideas. Pope’s “Essay on Man” (1733) epitomizes verse that is dedicated to transmitting concepts to the reader, or, more particularly, to teaching the reader. The following passage from the poem, aside from illustrating Pope’s widely-recognized didacticism, evinces key organizational and representational methods in conceptually driven verse.

Each beast, each insect, happy in its own;  
 Is Heaven unkind to man, and man alone?  
 Shall he alone, whom rational we call,  
 Be pleased with nothing, if not blessed with all?  
 The bliss of man (could pride that blessing find)  
 Is not to act or think beyond mankind;  
 No powers of body or of soul to share,  
 But what his nature and his state can bear.  
 Why has not man a microscopic eye?  
 For this plain reason, man is not a fly.  
 Say what the use, were finer optics given,  
 To inspect a mite, not comprehend the heaven?  
 Or touch, if tremblingly alive all o’er,  
 To smart and agonize at every pore?  
 Or quick effluvia darting through the brain,  
 Die of a rose in aromatic pain?  
 If nature stunned him with the music of the spheres,  
 How would he wish that Heaven had left him still  
 The whispering zephyr, and the purling rill?  
 Who finds not Providence all good and wise,  
 Alike in what it gives, and what denies?  
 Far as creation’s ample range extends,  
 The scale of mental and sensual powers ascends (185-207).

The central portion of this passage, beginning “[t]he bliss of man,” operates in the same manner as a paragraph of argumentative prose. The poem’s speaker makes a claim in lines 189-192 – that mankind will be happy if it does not act or think beyond its proper station – and then proceeds to support that assertion with specific examples of how our faculties are best suited for what we need or how it is dangerous to go beyond one’s place. Why would we need to examine something so minute as a mite, were we given extraordinary powers of vision? Would we not suffer from pain if we had a higher capacity for sensation through the skin? Would we not be overly shocked if we could hear the music of the spheres? These examples of the rightness of mankind’s station and capabilities culminate in the suggestion that Providence is responsible for our gifts and limitations, and is “good and wise . . . for what it gives, and what denies” (204-05).

If the passage’s central verse paragraph is structured as an argument (assertion, evidence, recasting of the assertion), then the statements that immediately precede and follow it show that it is deliberately knitted together with the verse paragraphs surrounding it, forming a structure of linear argument wherein one point builds on another. Lines 187-88 introduce the question of what constitutes a state of blessing for man, or even (in a sonically related word) bliss, so that it can be answered by the succeeding assertion, “[t]he bliss of man (could pride that blessing find)/Is not to act or think beyond mankind.”<sup>5</sup> This structure of a question and answer hooked together also occurs over lines 204-207, where the question at lines 204-05 of whether Providence is “good and wise,/Alike in what it gives, and what denies” is answered by lines 206-07, which suggest that the goodness of Providence appears in the organization of creation into a logically ascending scale of mental and sensual powers.

This knitted-together structure of Pope's verse is also noted by Richard Bradford in *A Linguistic History of English Poetry* as he reads a passage from the "Essay on Criticism": "The couplet, without necessarily completing a syntactic unit, begins to operate like a sentence: each couplet in this sequence contains a discrete unit of information but the total message cannot be fully understood without our transferring something designated in one unit and transposing it with the constituents of units that succeed it."<sup>6</sup> This effect of argumentative coherence is only strengthened by formal properties of Pope's verse: the consistently decasyllabic lines, typical of the heroic couplet as used in the eighteenth century, and the rhyme pairs. The subtlety, order, and predictability of these physical features of language ensures that they do not overwhelm the reader's attention or intrude upon the clear transmission of the poetry's assertions.

Johnson's poetry follows Pope's in its use of language to convey an ideational message. "The Vanity of Human Wishes" (1749), especially, puts into practice his theory that language should focus not on its own material being but on the realities of the outer world. The poem performs this task by surveying the state of humankind in the same logical and confident manner of Pope's "Essay on Man," and arguing for its universal character or "fate" of endlessly repeated avarice and the anguish and violence toward others that ultimately results. The opening lines are paradigmatic of the claims and style of the entire poem:

Let observation with extensive view  
 Survey mankind from China to Peru;  
 Remark each anxious toil, each eager strife,  
 And watch the busy scenes of crowded life;  
 Then say how hope and fear, desire and hate,  
 O'erspread with snares the clouded maze of fate,  
 Where wav'ring man, betrayed by vent'rous pride  
 To tread the dreary paths without a guide,

As treach'rous phantoms in the mist delude,  
 Shuns fancied ills, or chases airy good.  
 How rarely reason guides the stubborn choice,  
 Rules the bold hand, or prompts the suppliant voice;  
 How nations sink, by darling schemes oppressed,  
 When vengeance listens to the fool's request.  
 Fate wings with ev'ry wish th'afflictive dart,  
 Each gift of nature, and each grace of art;  
 With fatal heat impetuous courage glows,  
 With fatal sweetness elocution flows,  
 Impeachment stops the speaker's pow'rful breath,  
 And restless fire precipitates on death.  
 But scarce observed, the knowing and the bold  
 Fall in the gen'ral massacre of gold;  
 Wide-wasting pest! that rages unconfined,  
 And crowds with crimes the record of mankind; (1-24).<sup>7</sup>

In the same manner as Pope's verse, the couplet is the organizing force of this poetry, with an idea being presented in the first line and elaborated or extended in the second. The poetry's claims are compactly presented within the form, with no lingering questions or ambiguities from one line to the next. There is, however, one difference in global structure between Johnson's poem and Pope's. Whereas "Essay on Man" tends to treat verse paragraphs in the manner of argumentative prose, where each paragraph poses a claim, evidence and specification of that claim, and then a recasting of it and the beginning of the transition into the next paragraph, "The Vanity of Human Wishes" sets out a number of general claims about the character of humankind in its beginning, and then in subsequent verse paragraphs provides examples.<sup>8</sup> In the passage quoted above, the first four lines of the poem's second verse paragraph show this process. Johnson's speaker uses this second paragraph to discuss the specific problem of avarice for gold, which is an example of the human being's "desire" and "vent'rous pride" that are discussed in the abstract in the opening verse paragraph. As the poem goes on, the

speaker exposes more and more specific examples by citing historical figures who have fallen victim to avarice and its consequences. The end of Johnson's poem proposes that heavenly wisdom will correct the problems humans bring upon themselves – specifically, that mankind must learn to exercise love, patience, and faith, which can only be achieved by praying to God, who in his “pow’r” and ability to “discern afar” knows what is best (353). While Johnson's poem chooses to focus more on specific aspects of human nature – avarice and vanity – his point about human limits and faults and relying on God's wisdom is similar to Pope's. And, as in Pope's verse, this argument is executed by the clear, systematic movement of one heroic couplet to the next, wherein ideas are clinched but never overwhelmed or downplayed by rhymes.

#### Textual Physicality in the Novel: Three Examples

The novel's narrative occupation commits it first off to transmitting information to the reader in the form of a story. This genre, on the face of it, would then seem to have more in common with the informationally-oriented texts of Pope and Johnson than with texts of the period that explore physically affective style. Yet key novels of the eighteenth century – from the epistolary novels of *Clarissa* and *La Nouvelle Heloise* to Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* – prove to be fascinating explorations of the tensions between informational and experiential models of the text. The epistolary genre, in the hands of Richardson and Rousseau, turns out to be an environment conducive to physical techniques. And, a key *raison d'etre* of Sterne's radical book is to disrupt the linear transmittal of narrative to the reader through various physical strategies, and in general to explore different small-scale and large-scale physical uses of the text on the page. Seeing physically affective style deployed in these novels has two key advantages: it shows that

multiple genres in this period evince a preoccupation with the physicality of text and word, and it throws into sharp relief the differences between physical techniques in the novel and in poetry. The salient point, however, is that the novels addressed here never abandon an informational model of the text, lest the story (however attenuated in Sterne's case) fail to be told. Poetry, by contrast, is not automatically wedded to a narrative form, and as Jerome McGann suggests, it is a genre that "(unlike fiction) forces one to attend to 'the word as such' . . . [and] foregrounds the physique of lexical and grammatical fields."<sup>9</sup> As such, poetry is an environment more hospitable to exploring the physical affects of language than the novel. At the same time, Richardson's, Rousseau's, and Sterne's novels must be distinguished for their experiments with how the reader's physical experience of the text can be placed in the service of ideational communication, or how it can disrupt or manipulate the reader's attention or intellectual absorption into the text.

## I.

The first novel of the eighteenth century to show a sustained interest in the physicality of text is Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748). The novel's most important characters, Clarissa, Anna Howe, Lovelace, all repeatedly mention the appearance of their own scripts or of the letter documents. Beyond this, however, there are several other ways in which the material properties of text become meaningful in *Clarissa*. First, we often see parts of words, entire words, phrases, and sentences emphasized through physical tools such as italics, capitalization, indentation, and setting off with punctuation marks. This occurs because letters in *Clarissa* are written without the benefit of face-to-face conversation, and so verbal emphases that might normally be conveyed through the



nonverbal means of facial expression and bodily gesture must be shown by strictly scriptural devices. Examples occur in almost every letter of the novel – indeed, they are everywhere in Clarissa’s and Anna’s letters of high emotion, and in nearly all of Lovelace’s rhetorically energetic letters. The following passage from one of Anna’s letters to Clarissa may be taken as paradigmatic:

Now I have launched out a little, indulge me one word more in the same strain; I will be decent, I promise you. I think you might have known, that AVARICE and ENVY are two passions that are not to be satisfied, the one by *giving*, the other by the envied person’s continuing to *deserve* and *excel* – Fuel, fuel both, all the world over, to flames insatiate and devouring.<sup>10</sup>

In passages like these, words are not exploited for their intrinsic physical properties as words, but are treated instead as conveyers of concepts. When the concepts transmitted by the words need emphasis, visual tools such as italics are superadded. This is an instance, therefore, of a word that would normally be “invisible” because it is serving as a vehicle for transmitting information being granted a more physical notice through the addition of italics. A more extreme physical style would choose words primarily for their intrinsic physical features, and exploit those features through poetic devices such as assonance and alliteration. But what is notable about instances of words receiving italics and capitalization in *Clarissa* is their frequency; the latter shows Richardson’s basic inclination to use the materiality of written language expressively, and particularly, to explore some of the ways in which that materiality is useful to the epistolary genre.<sup>11</sup>

Lovelace is the character in the novel who is most conscious of the physicality of language and whose letters provide the richest examples of its exploitation. In this passage, for example, Lovelace recounts to Belford a scene wherein Dorcas, Lovelace’s

servant, conveys messages between Lovelace and Clarissa after Lovelace has failed to see Clarissa in the morning as he usually does:

Dorcas runs up and down stairs by [Clarissa's] door . . . . Oh! madam! my master! – my master!  
 What! How! When! – and all the monosyllables of surprise.  
 (Within parenthesis let me tell thee that I have often thought, that the little words in the republic of letters, like the little folks in a nation, are the most significant. The *trissyllables*, and the rumblers of syllables more than *three*, are but the good for little magnates.)

[Clarissa says] Where is [Lovelace]?

Too much in a hurry for good manners (another parenthesis, Jack!, Good manners are so little natural that we ought to be *composed* to observe them: politeness will not live in a storm), I cannot stay to answer questions, cries the wench – though desirous to answer (a third parenthesis – like the people crying proclamations, running away from customers they want to sell to). This hurry puts the lady in a hurry to ask (a fourth, by way of embellishing the third! as the other does the people in a hurry to buy). And I have in my eye now a whole street raised, and running after a proclamation or express crier, as if the first was a thief, the other his pursuers (677).

Here Lovelace shows his awareness of his text's materiality on multiple levels – from the number of syllables in given words, to parentheses and the phrases they set off, to the physical disruption of his letter's linear flow by these parentheses. This letter of Lovelace's is like most of his others in that it acts upon the reader in a physical, indeed a tactile, manner. The regular parentheses, for example, serve the chief role of interrupting the flow of narrative information, but Lovelace makes them seem more sudden in effect through his animated speech inside the marks, which gleefully numbers each of his interruptions as "another," "third," and "fourth." This method of presentation causes the parentheses to act upon the reader as a physical jerking away of the attention. Lovelace's words and punctuation thus insistently stress the fact that language has a physical being, and is not simply an effectively invisible or inaudible vehicle for transmitting

information. Sometimes the letter-writers of *Clarissa* treat the physical features of language as a tool that can help to convey ideas and feelings, as in Anna Howe's emphasis on words through capitals and italics. But Lovelace's use of these features is more rebellious, making the materiality of the word a tool that can be experimented with somewhat arbitrarily to interrupt communication or to manipulate the effect of verbiage upon the reader. This attitude appears in Lovelace's discussion of syllables and is practiced in his wily use of the parenthesis.

*Clarissa* also contains passages, however, that take the physical use of language to a new level: entire documents, distinguished by striking physical traits, are treated as icons, or pictures, of the author's emotional and mental state. In the salient instance of this technique, Lovelace obtains some of Clarissa's writings, penned not long after he rapes her, and he and Dorcas transcribe them into a letter to Belford. Through these documents, Lovelace wishes to show how Clarissa "pursues her writing with such eagerness and hurry, as show too evidently her discomposure" and to demonstrate to Belford "how her mind works now she is in this whimsical way" (889). Here we see that Lovelace treats these documents as "material evidence" in a psychological study. Because Richardson presents Clarissa's writings as individual numbered papers, furthermore, he clearly intends them to strike the eye in a single instance and to be seen, by readers of *Clarissa*, as icons of mental and emotional disturbance.

Papers I, II, and X (Figure 1) most exploit their material features in this way, each of them representing Clarissa's fragile, upset state through different physical means.<sup>12</sup> Although Richardson either cannot, due to limitations in technology, or does not choose

## Figure 1

## PAPER I

*(Torn into two pieces)*

My dearest Miss Howe!

Oh! What dreadful, dreadful things have I to tell you!

But yet I cannot tell you neither. But say, are you really ill, as a vile, vile creature informs me you are?

But he never yet told me truth, and I hope has not in this: and yet, if it were not true, surely I should have heard from you before now! – But at have I to do, to upbraid? – You may well be tired of me! – And if you are, I can forgive you; for I am tired of myself: and all my own relations were tired of me long before you were.

How good you have always been to me, mine own dear Anna Howe! – But how I ramble!

I sat down to say a great deal – my heart was full – I did not know what to say first – and thought, and grief, and confusion, and (Oh my poor dear!) I cannot tell what – And thought, and grief, and confusion came crowding so thick upon me; *one* would be first, *another* would be first, *all* would be first; so I can write nothing at all – only that, whatever they have done to me, I cannot tell; but I am no longer what I was in any one thing. – In any one thing did I say? Yes, but I am; for I am still, and I ever will be,

Your true –

## PAPER II

*(Scratched through, and thrown under the table)*

–And can you, my dear honored papa, resolve for ever to reprobate your poor child? – But I am sure you would not, if you knew what she has suffered since her unhappy – And will nobody plead for your poor suffering girl? – No one good body? – Why, then, dearest sir, let it be an act of your own innate goodness, which I have so much experienced, and so much abused – I don't presume to think you should receive me – no, indeed – my name is – I don't know what my name is! – I never dare to wish to come into your family again! – But your heavy curse, my papa – Yes, I *will* call you papa, and help yourself as you can – for you are my own dear papa, whether you will or not – And though I am an unworthy child – yet I am your child – (890).

PAPER X<sup>1</sup>

LEAD me, where my own thoughts themselves may lose me;  
 Where I may doze out what I've left of life,  
 Forget myself; and that day's guilt!—  
 Cruel remembrance!—how shall I appease thee?

—Oh! you have done an act  
 That blots the face and blush of modesty;  
     Takes off the rose  
 From the fair forehead of an innocent love,  
 And makes a blister there!—

Then down I laid my head,  
 Down on cold earth, and for a while was dead;  
 And my freed soul to a strange somewhere fled!  
     Ah! sottish soul! said I,  
 When back to its cage again I saw it fly,  
     Fool! to resume her broken chain,  
     And row the galley here again!  
     Fool! to that body to return,  
 Where it condemn'd and destin'd is to *mourn*.

Oh my Miss Howe! if thou hast friendship, help me,  
 And speak the words of peace to my divided soul,  
     That wars within me,  
 And raises ev'ry sense to my confusion.  
     I'm tott'ring on the brink  
 Of peace; and thou art all the hold I've left!  
 Assist me in the pangs of my affliction!

When honour's lost, 'tis a relief to die:  
 Death's but a sure retreat from infamy.

By swift misfortunes  
 How am I pursu'd!  
 Which on each other are,  
 Like-waves, renew'd!

Then farewell, youth,  
 And all the joys that dwell  
 With youth and life!  
 And life itself, farewell!

For life can never be sincerely blest.  
 Heaven punishes the *Bad*, and proves the *Best*.

Death only can be dreadful to the bad:  
 To innocence 'tis like a bugbear dress'd  
 To frighten children. Pull but off the mask  
 And he'll appear a friend.

I could a tale unfold—  
 Would harrow up thy soul!

(893)

to show us Paper I actually torn into its two halves, this fragmentation of the document materially suggests that Clarissa's mind is rent in two. This idea emerges further in the inconsistent layout and length of the paragraphs in the paper, with the first two exclamatory lines flush against the left margin and the other paragraphs indented. Also, the repetitive exclamation marks, question marks, dashes, and italics leap to the reader's eye as further signs of Clarissa's emotional state. Such emblems, in some sense, convey all there is to know about Clarissa when she writes this document, for reading the actual verbal content tells us little we do not already know from seeing the document. Clarissa's letter states that she has "dreadful things" to tell Anna, and yet she proclaims throughout that she does not know what to say, that she cannot write anything, that "whatever they have done to me, I cannot tell." These statements thus reinforce semantically the incapacity and shaken state of mind we have already seen through material signs. Paper II is intended to portray iconically Clarissa's disturbance in much the same manner. Once again, Richardson chooses the less visually affective option by telling us about the line that scratches through the document rather than representing it; nonetheless, the line is intended to symbolize the rending of the mind. It is the dashes, peppering the text even more thickly than before, that this time serve collectively as the chief icon for Clarissa's upset state.

As for Paper X, it is no accident that it is placed last among the documents, for it constitutes the case *par excellence* of an iconic representation of Clarissa's disturbance. The material message of this paper is fragmentation, since various lines of each stanza of Clarissa's "poem" are fragments of poems by various authors (so one of Richardson's footnotes tells us). Also, we see the same inconsistencies in the document's spatial

layout as occur in Paper I, with some stanzas centered and others flush left, plus the immediately striking diagonal stanzas that are strewn about the document. On a more minute level, repeated exclamation points and dashes convey the strong emotion felt by the author and compiler of these verses. Of course, Richardson means the verbal content of these papers to express Clarissa's state as well, but clearly semiotic priority is given to the material features of the papers laid out for Belford and the readers of *Clarissa* to see. Nowhere in the novel is Richardson's interest in the physical features of language and their expressive capability more evident.

## II.

The other major and widely read epistolary novel of the eighteenth century, Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Heloise* (1761), uses the physicality of written language in many of the same ways as *Clarissa*, although overall Richardson's novel exercises a larger, more diverse group of techniques. In *La Nouvelle Heloise*, the most common physical usage of language is the iconic representation of strong emotion through repeated ellipses and exclamation points. As we have seen, this technique also appears in *Clarissa*, with the difference that dashes are Richardson's punctuation of choice. The following passage in a letter from Julie to her friend Claire epitomizes the iconic blocks of ellipsis-ridden text that are so regularly found in Rousseau's novel:

How your absence embitters the life you restored to me! What a convalescence! A passion more terrible than fever and transport drags me to my ruin. Cruel Claire! you leave me just when I need you more; you left me for a week, perhaps you will never see me again. Oh if you knew what the madman dares to propose to me! . . . . poor fool! . . . . Of whom do I complain? My heart, my shameless heart urges me a hundred times more than he . . . . great God! What would it be, if he knew everything? . . . . It would make him mad, I would be persuaded, I would have to go . . . . I shudder . . . .

So, my father then has sold me? He is making merchandise, a

slave of his daughter; he acquits his debts at my expense! He pays for his life with mine! . . . . . For I can surely tell that I should never survive it . . . . Heartless, denatured father! Does he deserve . . . . . what deserve? he is the best of fathers; he means to unite his daughter with his friend, such is his crime. But my mother, my tender mother! What wrong has she done me? . . . . Ah, a great deal! she has loved me too much, she has ruined me. Claire, what shall I do? what will become of me? Hanz still has not come. I don't know how to send you this letter. Before you receive it . . . . before your return . . . . . who knows . . . . fugitive, wandering, dishonored . . . . It is too late, it is too late, this is the moment of crisis. A day, an hour, a moment, perhaps . . . . who can avoid his fate? . . . . . Oh, in whatever place I may live and die; into whatever obscure asylum I may trail my shame and despair, Claire, remember your friend . . . . . Alas; want and infamy change people's hearts . . . . . Ah, if ever mine forgets you, it will be much changed indeed!<sup>13</sup>

Here, as in Lovelace's display of Clarissa's "papers," the reader is meant to comprehend the speaker's emotional and mental distress in a single instant, as the plurality of ellipses and exclamation point leap to the eye. These punctuation marks, when used only occasionally, become contextualized in verbal language and blend into it; they are intended to mark off linguistic units almost undetectably and invisibly, so that the ideas the words carry are easier for the reader to comprehend. But in this letter, where the punctuation marks are used so repetitively, the eye is instantly drawn to them and the understanding submits to the iconic type of meaning they generate. Although the words reinforce the message that the ellipses and exclamation marks convey – that Julie is upset and feeling broken and helpless – the passage is clearly interested in presenting information first and foremost through material means.

While such a strategy links *La Nouvelle Heloise* with *Clarissa* in a general way, it is worth pointing out that dashes, as deployed by Richardson, are actually a more iconic form of punctuation than ellipses. Dashes, especially as they operate in Clarissa's papers, appear as sharp splinters of ink that physically fracture text and perform the fracturing of



the person whose words they punctuate. These actions of the dashes take place in a single instant, as if the textual passage is a scene snapped by the camera of the reader's eye. At the same time, once the reader of Richardson's novel gets past this instantaneous visual apprehension and begins to read the passage line by line, dashes often serve to speed up the reading of text. The reader, of course, pauses briefly when he or she hits a dash. But the horizontal stretch of the mark, because it works with the reader's natural right-leaning visual motion as he or she reads lines of text, propels the reader forward. As they occur on a line-to-line basis in *La Nouvelle Heloise*, ellipses have a different effect. The broken dots at the base of the text line act like the bottom of a little pool into which the reader falls again and again. They cause, more than dashes, a pause in the text, and suggest hesitation and lingering instead of lurching forward. Of course, an instantaneous, iconic representation of emotion still takes place when the reader first apprehends a passage full of ellipses, but the rhythm of sequential processing is much different from that accompanying the heavy use of dashes. However, we will see that in the hands of Sterne dashes, cooperating with the digressive words that they often set off, accomplish an interruptive effect like that of the ellipses in Rousseau's novel.

Such instances of the physical effects of punctuation occur throughout *La Nouvelle Heloise*, but at one point Rousseau also uses entire documents as physical things that iconically represent an idea. At the end of a letter from Milord Edward (the reasonable man who sets out to reform St. Preux's passionate ways) to Julie's friend Claire, we are presented with some "fragments" written by St. Preux. These documents are introduced in roughly the same way in which Lovelace introduces Clarissa's papers:

Edward states that he has saved two or three of St. Preux's troubled drafts of letters to Julie, which will give Claire "a glimpse of [St. Preux's] soul's condition" (157).

### Fragments

#### *Enclosed in the previous letter*

1. Why was I not able to see you before my departure? You feared I would expire in leaving you? piteous heart! take comfort. I am all right . . . . . I am not suffering . . . . . I am still alive . . . . . I am thinking of you . . . . . I think of the time when I was dear to you . . . . . I am a bit downhearted . . . . . the coach makes my head swim . . . . . I feel dejected . . . . . I will not be able to write you for long today. tomorrow, perhaps I shall have more strength . . . . . or will no longer need it . . . . .

2. Where are these horses dragging me so fast? Where is this man who calls himself my friend taking me so zealously? Is it far from you, Julie? Is it at your behest? Is it to places where you are not? . . . . Ah, foolish maid . . . . . I measure with my eyes the distance I so quickly cover. Where am I coming from? whither am I going? and why such haste? Do you fear, cruel friends, that I will not reach my doom soon enough? O friendship! O love! is this how you conspire? are these your favors . . . . .

3. Have you carefully consulted your heart, in dismissing me so brutally? Were you, tell me, Julie, were you able to forever give up . . . . . No, no, that tender heart loves me; I know it full well. In spite of fate, in spite of itself, it will love me to the grave . . . . I can see you have allowed yourself to be persuaded . . . what endless repentance you lay up for yourself! . . . . Alas! it will be too late . . . what, you could forget . . . what, I could have so little known you! . . . . Ah, think of yourself, think of me, think of . . . listen, there is still time . . . you have heartlessly sent me away. I am fleeing faster than the wind . . . . . Speak a word, a single word, and I shall return swifter than a flash. Speak a word, and we are forever united. We ought to be . . . . . we shall be . . . . . Ah! the breeze carries my sights away . . . . . and yet I am fleeing; I am going to love and die far from her . . . . live far from her! . . . . (160-61).

In displaying Clarissa's papers, however, Richardson uses not only punctuation but also page layout – especially the skewed, scattered poetic stanzas – to iconify Clarissa's disturbed state. Even though Lovelace and Dorcas are transcribing her writings, they appear to do so with exact fidelity to her words and to their spatial arrangement on the page. Here, by contrast, we are told that St. Preux's writings are enclosed in the letter to

Claire, but Rousseau does not present them on the page of his novel as integral documents. The “fragments” of text are merely numbered and listed, one flush against the other, as if compacted for space considerations. While Rousseau clearly considers punctuation to be a useful tool for iconically rendering a writer’s emotion, he does not exploit the large-scale tactic of page layout for the same purpose.

### III.

It is Laurence Sterne, in *Tristram Shandy*, who especially pushes the question of how the physicality of text and language may be exploited in the eighteenth-century novel. As with Richardson and Rousseau, Sterne does not use physicality to such a degree that it works toward defining an experiential rather than informational model of the text. In fact, Sterne announces his commitment to an informational model by virtue of simply negating it: he deploys digression, which often occurs due to the association of ideas in Tristram’s head, to such an end that the story of the character can never be completely told.

Within this disturbance but not replacement of an informational model of communication, however, Sterne investigates nearly every use of the physicality of the text and of language that can be imagined. He works at the level of the punctuation mark or the single letter all the way up to the level of the block of text or total page. What is more, Sterne often self-consciously addresses his physical uses of language and their effect on the reader’s gathering of knowledge from the story – both narrative and moral. Yet in key instances such as his blacked out or marbled pages, the physical effect of the page attains a certain autonomy upon the reader’s attention with which Sterne’s voice, rendered through the narration of Tristram and seeking to gloss the meaning or purpose

of his radical pages, is seen to compete. At the same time, a conflict between the physical effects of the text and authorial speech does not appear as an overt problem for the dissemination of the text's meaning or the author's individual perspective, as it will be presented in Blake's *Jerusalem*. In *Tristram Shandy*, after all, the ultimate "meaning" of the text is its refusal to complete meaning in the form of its story, and the reader grows accustomed to encountering physical uses of language and the narrator's unique voice together on every page. In fact, we can interpret *Tristram Shandy* as a whole as a constant simultaneous exploration of two different models of the text: the text as physical effect and the text as the vehicle for the narrator's highly humanized, individualized voice. These two models are well illustrated in a passage in Volume III, Chapter XXXVI that, not coincidentally, comes just ahead of the insertion of two marbled pages into the novel. The passage also deploys several of the staple, small-scale exploitations of the physicality of the word that occur across Sterne's book.

The passage comes just after Tristram tells us that his father is consulting Erasmus on "the various uses and seasonable applications of long noses." Then, in a typical move by which the authorial voice speaks through the voice of Tristram, Sterne interjects and tells the reader not to let Satan "get astride of [her] imagination." If this occurs, the speaker begs of the reader "*to frisk it, to squirt it, to jump it, to rear it, to bound it, -- and to kick it, with long kicks and short kicks, till like Tickletooby's mare, [she] break[s] a strap or a crupper, and throw[s] his worship [Satan] into the dirt.*"<sup>14</sup> The narrator proceeds with yet another digression from the subject matter that began the chapter, referring along the way to the marbled pages, which are then displayed on the next two pages.

----- And pray who was *Tickletoby's* mare? – 'tis just as discreditable and unscholar-like a question, Sir, as to have asked what year (*ab urb. con.*) the second Punic broke out. – Who was *Tickletoby's* mare! --- Read, read, read, read, my unlearned reader! read, --- or by the knowledge of the great saint *Paraleipomenon* – I tell you before-hand, you had better throw down the book at once; for without much reading, by which your reverence knows, I mean *much knowledge*, you will no more be able to penetrate the moral of the next marbled page (motley emblem of my work!) than the world with all its sagacity has been able to unravel the many opinions, transactions and truths which still lie mystically hid under the dark veil of the black one (168).

The text passage and its subsequent marbled pages act, first of all, as a kind of survey of the physically affective techniques of *Tristram Shandy*. The novel's elocutionary use of dashes – longer dashes for longer pauses, and shorter dashes for shorter pauses – is represented in the passage's first lines. The long dash that initiates the paragraph is designed, with the long dash that ended the previous paragraph, to create a dramatic pause before the digression upon *Tickletoby's* mare and thus an intensification of the digressive effect. The smaller dashes represent only some of the different sizes that occur throughout *Tristram Shandy*. The parentheses capture yet another physical method by which Sterne disrupts the flow of his text. Also, the italics in this passage constitute an emphasis on the material identity of at least some of words on which they are placed. For example, the Latin phrase “*ab urb. con.*” and the Greek word “*Paraleipomenon,*” to the extent that their meanings were unknown to various of Sterne's readers, appear as opaque physical presences rather than signs whose physicality is erased because conceptual meaning is known or transparent.

In fact, the idea of knowledge as transparently present meaning, and of the connection between reading and the gaining of this knowledge, is precisely what is being played upon in the latter half of the passage. Sterne reflects ironically on the fact that

reading, rather than being defined as the gaining of “much knowledge,” is in his book the constant delay of it, with the story of Tristram Shandy forever being postponed by endless digressions. The role of textual physique in such delay is self-consciously acknowledged when Sterne declares that the “next marbled page” is a “motley emblem of [his] work.” This pointing up of the marbled page’s symbolism can refer to the huge variety of information, languages, quotations, discursive modes, and characters in the novel, as well as to the typographical variety displayed on nearly every page. But Sterne’s comments about the page point to the deeper duality that runs throughout the book between the reader’s experience of the text’s physical character and the novel’s story or “meaning.” Sterne not only suggests that the conceptual and narrative meaning of his story – “opinions, transactions, and truths” – lie “mystically hidden” under the blocked pages of his novel (in this case the black pages that occur in Volume I). He also suggests that the moral of the novel – the ultimate form of conceptual truth – is somehow contained in the marbled page that follows the verbal passage. On one level such a claim is just one of Sterne’s many absurd statements and jokes. On another level it is an ironic reflection on the dual physical and narrative interests of *Tristram Shandy*, and, through the radical claim that a “moral” can be found in a marbled page, on the impact of physical textual effects on meaning. The fact that two marbled pages, not just one, follow the verbal passage literally places more “matter” between the reader’s hearing of the narrator’s voice in the preceding passage and in the beginning of the next chapter – the voice that always urges itself as the chief disseminator of meaning in the form of the story. It also completes Sterne’s joking suggestion that there are no complete “opinions, transactions, [or] truths” or, least of all, a “moral,” between the marbled pages of this

book. This argument is also made dramatically in the book's final declaration that this story is about nothing more than "A COCK and a BULL" (496). As this last quotation suggests, Sterne must be placed among the most self-conscious of writers in this period who explore the physicality of the text. He takes an informationally-oriented genre, the novel, and pushes the exploration of text as matter about as far as it can go within those limits.

"A thousand rills their mazy progress take": Physical Metaphors for Poetry

Thomas Gray's "The Progress of Poetry" and "The Bard" provide a convenient starting place for illustrating how poetry is explored as physical phenomenon in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Many of Gray's works, such as "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" and "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," are reflective and thought-burdened in character, and as such do not tend to explore the physical character of words. Gray, apart from a few moments, cannot be characterized as a poet who engages in physical poetic practice. But his metaphorical descriptions of poetry in "The Progress of Poetry" and "The Bard" are so physical as to warrant our attention. These descriptions go beyond a traditional linking of inspired poetry and music because they contemplate poetry as both a visual and an aural phenomenon. They thus imply the affective complexity of poetry that is conceived as an oral communication or composed with representational techniques of oral culture like heavy repetitions or formulaic expressions, and yet is written down and thus opened to exploitation as a visual presence on the page. Reading through some of Gray's characterizations of poetry reveals his remarkable awareness at the level of metaphor of the physical qualities and effects of the various levels of a poem, from word to line to entire text. Such a theoretical

preoccupation with the sensory aspects of language emerges in a different form when Blake, Keats, and Shelley combine their explorations of physical style with metacritical reflections on the same.

In “The Progress of Poetry” (1757), Gray’s speaker begins the poem with what struck Samuel Johnson as a confusing metaphorical portrayal of poetry.

Awake, Aeolian lyre, awake,  
 And give to rapture all thy trembling strings.  
 From Helicon’s harmonious springs  
 A thousand rills their mazy progress take:  
 The laughing flowers, that round them blow,  
 Drink life and fragrance as they flow.  
 Now the rich stream of music winds along,  
 Deep, majestic, smooth, and strong,  
 Through verdant vales and Ceres’ golden reign:  
 Now rolling down the steep amain,  
 Headlong, impetuous, see it pour:  
 The rocks and nodding groves rebellow to the roar. (1-12)<sup>15</sup>

Johnson objects to these lines because of Gray’s blending of two metaphors, music and a stream, and states: “If this be said of Musick, it is nonsense; if it be said of Water, it is nothing to the purpose.”<sup>16</sup> As Eli Mandel notes, Johnson seems to have missed the point of this passage, which is that Gray is not literally discussing music, but instead the music of poetry. Mandel writes: “The stream is not a literal stream. It is a stream of diction, harmony, and numbers, and tumultuous passions.”<sup>17</sup> Mandel correctly recognizes Johnson’s problem in interpreting Gray – he is too concerned that poetry should strictly imitate nature – and identifies poetry as the actual subject of the line. But he excludes the possibility that even if the speaker fails to imitate accurately the conditions of nature, he may be accurately imitating the material condition of the poem itself. In choosing the sonic and visual metaphors for poetry (the music of the Aeolian lyre and the stream,



respectively), Gray's speaker is in fact faithfully describing the way that sounds are both heard and seen when poetry takes a written form.

After the initial association of poetry with music in lines 1-2, Gray's speaker blends the sonic metaphor with a more visual one when he suggests that poetry is the "harmonious springs" that flow from the mountain Helicon. The path of the "harmonious springs" curiously imitates the visual and aural experience of reading the poetic lines themselves. The "rills" that take their "mazy progress" could be seen to represent the lines of text, which in their pattern of moving out toward the right margin and in again imitate the turns and curves of a maze. This quality of the lines, of course, exists because of the syllabic rules for the lines of a Pindaric Ode, which in this case dictate a regular alternation between eight and ten syllables with the exceptions of a seven-syllable line 8 and a 12-syllable line 12. Gray's speaker continues to portray poetry as a combined visual and sonic phenomenon in line 7 when he states "[n]ow the rich stream of music winds along." This portrayal occurs, as well, in lines 10-11, which imitate the singular gush of the waterfall they describe because of their matching eight-syllable length and because of the visual and aural coherence of the letters and letter groups repeated across them ("l" in "rolling" and "headlong," "on" in "down" and "headlong," "ee" in "steep" and "see," and "ou" in "impetuous" and "pour"). Finally, the visual spread of the 12-syllable line at the stanza's closure imitates the spray of the waterfall as it lands; this visual expression is coupled with the extended sonic experience offered by the longer line, which imitates the "rebellowing" of the rocks and groves and the roar of the waterfall. If Gray's speaker has in this stanza metaphorically portrayed the "progress of

poetry” by depicting the flowing of a “harmonious spring” from Helicon, he has also more literally portrayed the visual and aural “progress” of reading a stanza of poetry.

Gray’s consciousness of the physical aspects of poetic language is also expressed in the metaphorical language of “The Bard” (1757), another Pindaric Ode. In a key crux of the poem, in which the bardic speaker acknowledges the ghostly presence and assistance of past bards who have died, poetry is again described as a physical phenomenon.

‘On dreary Arvon’s shore they lie,  
 . . . . .  
 Dear lost companions of my tuneful art,  
 . . . . .  
 No more I weep. They do not sleep.  
 On yonder cliffs, a grisly band,  
 I see them sit, they linger yet,  
 Avengers of their native land;  
 With me in dreadful harmony they join,  
 And weave with bloody hands the tissue of thy line.’

“Weave the warp and weave the woof,  
 The winding-sheet of Edward’s race.  
 Give ample room and verge enough  
 The characters of hell to trace.  
 Mark the year and mark the night,  
 When Severn shall re-echo with affright  
 The shrieks of death, through Berkeley’s roofs that ring,  
 Shrieks of an agonizing King!” (35, 39, 43-56).

We see two physical metaphors for poetry in these lines. The first is the phrase “the tissue of thy line,” which on a literal level refers to the genetic line of poets who have been killed but on a figurative level refers to the physical form of the poetry that speaks of them. This association between human bodies and the textual body is continued in the other major metaphor, that of the poem as a woven cloth. On the face of it, this metaphor may not seem to have any significance beyond its propriety for Gray’s poem, given that

his subject is oral poetic culture. In such a culture, after all, spoken poems were compared to cloths: the act of delivering poetry was called “rhapsodizing,” which literally means “stitching together.”<sup>18</sup> Yet given the curiously self-reflexive diction in “The Progress of Poetry,” which seems to convey Gray’s consciousness of the physical being of his poetry on the page, the weaving metaphor used in “The Bard” becomes more important. Now the words “room” and “verge” have a strong textual significance, reflecting Gray’s awareness of how far certain lines stretch into the white space of the page, in the same way the phrase “mazy progress” and the verb “wind” capture the material activity of poetic lines in “The Progress of Poetry.” Further ruminations on the physicality of the written word occur in the words “trace” and “mark,” which refer not to the lines on the page but to the act of writing itself. Finally, “warp” and “woof” can be read as having textual significance, metaphorically capturing, respectively, the horizontal and vertical extension of the lines on the page. Gray’s speaker reflects in his metaphors that the reader of stanzaic poetry has a simultaneous visual experience of the horizontality and verticality of the lines.

#### Seeing and Reading: Poetic Explorations of the Visual

The visual character of the poem on the page, considered at the level of metaphor by Gray, is explored practically in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century in ways that are well illustrated in poems by Ellis, Chatterton, Darwin, and Smith. This exploration of the visual aspect of writing may occur through the relatively simple investigation of the iconic power of the text, as in John Ellis’s “Sarah Hazard’s Love Letter,” or through the combination of iconic textual power with other techniques in order to experiment broadly with the reader’s intellectual and physical absorption into the text,

as in Chatterton's "The Excelente Balade of Charitie," Darwin's *The Loves of the Plants*, and Smith's "Beachy Head." Though space does not permit it here, other texts could also be addressed for the same physical interests. Chatterton's preoccupation with the affective dimensions of antiquated language also appears, for example, in Coleridge's study of antiquated ballad language in the first version of the "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," and his later implicit contrast between such language's physical effects and the "informational" language in the moralistic glosses added to the later version of the poem. Moreover, the interest in stimulating a kinetic experience of text that Chatterton, Darwin, and Smith evince is also found in Christopher Smart's unique *Jubilate Agno*. Existing only in manuscript, this poem works its complex merger of visual and sonic effects upon the reader while its antiphonally arranged lines also force him or her to move constantly from left to right across each page opening of the holograph.

## I.

Ellis explores the relationship between seeing the text as an object and reading it for its ideas in his "Sarah Hazard's Love Letter" (1747), presenting iconified text on the page in the manner of Richardson and Rousseau. Although this piece's title would suggest that it consists entirely of a "love letter" by one Sarah Hazard, it is actually a display of several different documents in addition to the letter itself. The first document is a letter to the printer of the *Chester Courant*, dated Dec. 10, 1747, in which a person called "G.Z" relays the way that he came upon Sarah Hazard's letter and explains how one of his acquaintances saw the letter and wrote a poem in response. The second document is Sarah Hazard's letter itself, which first appeared in the *Chester Miscellany* (1750), a collection of items published in the *Chester Courant*. The final document is the

curate's versification of Sarah Hazard's letter, which is written in decasyllabic heroic couplets, the style of "high poetry" in the first half of the eighteenth century.

*To the Printer of the Chester Courant*

The following epistle I met with at a neighbouring seaport, and showed it to our curate, who said that the girl's sentiments were much the same with those of Ovid's heroines, were theirs to be stripped of poetic decorations. A day or two afterwards he brought it to me, as likewise an attempt to versify it; both which I herewith send you, and am

Your friend and servant,  
G.Z.

*Lovin Der Charls,*

*This with my kind lov to yow, is to tel yow, after all ovr sport and son, I am lik to pa fort, for i am with Child, and were of mi Sister Nan knose it, and cals me hore and bech, and is ready to ter mi sol owt, yet Jack Peny kices hur every tim he cums ashor, and the saaci Dog wud a lade with me to, but i wud not let him, for I will be alwas honest to yow, therefore Der Charls, com ashor, and let us be mared to safe mi vartu, and if yow hav no munn, i wil pawn mi new staies, and sel the smocks yow gav me, and that will pa the Parson, and find us a diner. and pra, Der lovin Charls com ashor, and, Der Charles, don't be fraad for want of a ring, for I hav stol my sister Nans, and the naaty tode shal never hav it no more, for she tells about, that I am going to hav a bastard, and god bless yowr lovin sol cum sune, for I longs to be mared accordin to yowr promis, and I wil be yowr own der vartus wife til deth,*

SA. HAZARD.

*P.S. Pra don't let yowr messmate Jack se this, for if yow shud, he'l tel ovr Nan, and ther wil be the Devil to do.*

DEAR object of my love, whose pow'rful charms  
With bliss ecstatic filled my clinging arms!  
That bliss is past; and nought for me remains,  
But foul reproach, and never-pittied pains!  
For (nature baffling ev'ry art I tried)  
My sister has my waxing waist descried,  
And brands me oft with each opprobrious name,  
Though the crack's conscious she deserves the same:  
Her loose associate, sated, from her flies,  
And oft, though vainly, to seduce me tries;  
True as a wife, I only want the name;  
O haste to wed me, and restore my fame.  
No lack of coin our union shall defer,  
For my pawned stays will well supply my dear;  
And those good smocks which once your fondness gave,

Those smocks I'll sell, or any clothes I have:  
 What these produce will pay the coupling priest,  
 And furnish dainties for our nuptial feast.  
 O how I long my loving Charles to see,  
 Haste then, my life! to happiness and me;  
 Nor anxious be 'bout that material thing,  
 For I've just stol'n my saucy sister's ring:  
 In vain she may expect me to restore;  
 No! faith, the slut shall never have it more.  
 Come quick, my love, for far she spreads my shame;  
 Come, patch my virtue, and defend my fame.  
 Take me, and make me soon thy lawful spouse,  
 Then heav'n shall bless thy due regard to vows,  
 And will reward thee with what lasts for life,  
 A tender, duteous, fond, and faithful wife.

P.S. These earnest dictates of my anxious heart  
 I beg you would not to your friend impart;  
 For oft beneath fair friendship's specious show  
 Lurks the false, trait'rous, undermining foe.<sup>19</sup>

The aspect of these documents that is most striking is the contrast between the uneducated language of Sarah Hazard's letter, rendered in dialect, and the high poetic diction and style of the curate's versification of the letter. The first few lines of Sarah's letter contain all the most salient features of this uneducated language: "incorrect" phonetic spellings, failure to capitalize the appropriate words, omission of some connective words, run-on sentences, and repetitive verbiage. In the verse passage that immediately follows the letter, the "correct" counterparts of all the "incorrect" features of Sarah Hazard's language strike one immediately. Here, in contrast to Sarah's letter, we have literate spellings, complete with adjustments to accommodate the metrical requirements of the couplet (such as "pow'rful"); literate capitalization; coherent, structurally hierarchical statements that are crisply divided by diverse punctuation marks; and poetical turns of phrase.

Through the presentation of these documents, John Ellis is obviously exploring differences between the genres of epistolary prose and poetry as well as class differences in language. Such interests are common enough in this period: witness the mid-century resolve of William Collins, Thomas and Joseph Warton, and others to define “true poetry” and the critical commentary of Samuel Johnson on the same subject, or the interest in the lower classes of Thomas Gray, Oliver Goldsmith, and other mid-century poets. What is noteworthy here is the *material* way in which genre, diction, and style are being presented. The lining up of the documents – first the educated letter of G.Z., then Sarah Hazard’s letter in humble language, then the high-style versification of her letter – first and foremost highlights their visual differences. One immediately sees the contrast in format between G.Z.’s letter and Sarah Hazard’s letter. G.Z.’s letter is complete with a valediction common in polite eighteenth-century epistolary style, “your friend and servant” and with the typical syntactical lead-in to the valediction in the missive’s last sentence. Sarah Hazard’s letter inverts the usual “Dear -----“ greeting to arrive at the familiar “Lovin Der Charles,” and does not conclude with a valediction. Also, after first reading G.Z.’s “correct” letter, the dialect and the spellings and capitalizations of Sarah Hazard’s letter are thrown into a relief that is sharpened even more by the contrast of the high poetic language that follows. Here Ellis juxtaposes different kinds of letters and, even more prominently, a letter and a poem, *as things*.

Moving below the surface of visual contrasts and beginning to compare more closely the writing of G.Z., Sarah Hazard, and the curate, one notes more content-based differences such as that between the orderly, subordinated structure of statements in the poetic passage and the more repetitive, overflowing character of Sarah Hazard’s

communication. Such contrasts point to the separation between oral and written habits of expression and culture, which is another of Ellis' interests as he displays these documents. The poet's favor appears to lie with Sarah Hazard's letter, which is celebrated for its "sentiments" by G.Z. and portrayed to be as moving as the language of Ovid's heroines. Ellis' satire attacks "poetical decorations," which, it is suggested, would decrease the emotional force of Sarah's expressions and in fact do just that when her letter is converted to verse by the curate. In presenting these documents, Ellis thus explores the material contrasts between different kinds of language by way of celebrating Sarah Hazard's emotional candor.

## II.

Whereas the chief material interest of Ellis's poem is to explore the iconic power of the text, the latter becomes just one technique of several in the broad study of different forms of readerly absorption that is conducted by poems like Chatterton's "Excelente Balade of Charitie," Smith's *Beachy Head*, and Darwin's *The Loves of the Plants*. These poems present a continuous conflict between reading the text and seeing it as a visual icon that is cohered by some striking visual characteristic or by its differentiation from footnotes or endnotes. Yet these works also explore the relationship between different forms of reading: the one an intellectual absorption in the text for the purpose of gleaning its ideas, and the other an absorption into the unfolding sonic experience of the words. Such sonic interest, however, is just one part of the total picture of physically affective style in these poems. On this note, they may be contrasted with Macpherson's *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*, whose chief interest lies in the absorbing powers of poetic sound.



When the reader comes to Chatterton's or Darwin's poems, the purpose or intended ideational meaning of the iconic text on the page is not clear as it is in the Papers from *Clarissa*. Chatterton's whole poem or a page of Darwin's (which is in many cases equally divided between poetic text and footnote text) appears simply as a "thing" whose entry point or logic is not apparent. Because Smith's copious notes were likely printed as endnotes and not footnotes in the *Beachy Head and Other Poems* volume,<sup>20</sup> there is less of this instantaneous visual effect; it is the constant motion between the very different discourses of poem and notes that reifies both modes of text and makes readerly absorption into either of them more difficult. What is more, Smith's poem, like Chatterton's and Darwin's, indulges in sensory description that works its primarily sonic absorptive powers upon the reader in the midst of the visual and kinetic effects that are already occurring. Each of these texts thus intrudes its material, sensorial properties to such a degree – whether at the level of the whole text or the single word, and often both at the same time – that the ideas and even the sensory experience offered in one section of the text, the page, or the poetic volume are finally hard to access or fully indulge. Through these dynamics, Chatterton, Smith, and Darwin explore different forms of absorption into the text – intellectual and sensory – and how they can interact in the reading process.

Consider first how these poetic interests appear in Thomas Chatterton's, "An Excelente Balade of Charitie" (1777). This text presents distinct physical challenges: not only antiquated language but also Chatterton's footnotes, for reasons that will become clear. These features create a struggle in the reader, not only between the activities of seeing and reading but also between different forms of reading that Chatterton's ballad

tries to induce. In *Clarissa*, *La Nouvelle Heloise*, and *Tristram Shandy* and the poetry from Pope and Johnson, reading is defined as moving line by line through the text in order to glean its information – whether conceptual, narrative, or both. In Chatterton’s ballad, by contrast, reading means both this and something more sensory. This sensory definition emerges when the ballad speaker lapses at key points into highly physical description of the surrounding landscape and of an approaching storm. These descriptions disrupt the factual flow of the story and heighten the temptation, already everywhere imposed by the text, to abandon informational reading and the regular referral to the notes this requires, and to give in to the visual and aural unfolding experience of language that, for its archaicism and its descriptive concreteness, primarily stimulates the senses.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, the arrangement of the poem’s narrative and descriptive phases and the density of footnotes within each phase reveal a conflict about which form of reading should take precedence in “An Excelente Balade of Charitie” and about what the reader should gain from the reading process. On the one hand, the ballad seems dedicated to conveying a strong didactic message. It tells the story of a beggar who is denied money by a rich abbot but ironically receives generous help from a poor friar, who abnegates worldly wealth because he knows his reward will come from the saints (88). This story is clearly intended to contrast worldly and spiritual notions of wealth and to suggest that the poor man is often “gode” where the rich man is unkind (91).

On the other hand, the direct portrayal of this story and moral is undercut by several factors. The poem opens with a long passage of landscape description, so thick with footnotes that the reader’s first experience is frustration from moving back and forth

between text and notes. The story proper does not begin until the third and fourth stanzas, which introduce the poor pilgrim and his wanderings. Immediately thereafter, however, the reader is thrown into a descriptive passage that is even more sensorially dense than the one that opens the poem. The remaining stanzas accelerate the narration of the ballad story with limited descriptive interruptions, as if Chatterton's speaker were growing nervous about getting the moral in before the poem's closing. In this last stanza, the poor friar is speaking to the pilgrim:

But ah! unhailie<sup>6</sup> pilgrim, lerne of me,  
 Scathe anie give a rentrolle to their Lorde.  
 Here take my semecope<sup>7</sup>, thou arte bare I see;  
 'Tis thyne; the Synectes will give me mie rewarde.  
 He left the pilgrim, and his waie aborde.  
 Virgynne and hallie Seyncte, who sitte yn gloure<sup>8</sup>,  
 Or give the mittee<sup>9</sup> will, or give the gode man power. (85-91)

<sup>6</sup>unhappy. <sup>7</sup>a short under-cloke. <sup>8</sup>glory. <sup>9</sup>mighty, rich.<sup>22</sup>

The stanza draws a contrast between worldly and heavenly notions of wealth, well-being, and power, both through the actions of the friar and through the moral stated in the last two lines of the poem. The friar, when he sheds his cloak and gives it to the beggar, both physically and symbolically separates himself from a notion of worldly power as reflected in the possession of material goods. The poem's final two lines solidify the distinction between worldly, materially-based power and a more spiritually-based moral standing. They draw a distinction between "the mighty" and "the good" and take a word normally ascribed to "the mighty," "power," and associate it with the "gode man." Now a notion of secular, worldly status has been given a more positive connotation by its linkage with moral excellence, and the only notion of status associated with the mighty is a raw ambition for power – "will" – rather than a rightful possession of it due to merit.

Yet if Chatterton's ballad requires ideational reading for the reader to understand the moral it wishes to teach, then it also, at times, induces a contrasting form of reading: one that primarily excites the senses as opposed to the mind and seeks to immerse the reader in the physical texture of language itself instead of point to reality or message outside of it.<sup>23</sup> This sensory form of reading is induced in the two major descriptive passages of the poem, which occur in its first half. Consider the two-stanza passage that opens the poem, which establishes the linguistic patterns that will be repeated in the poem's second descriptive passage.

In Virgyne the sweltrie sun gan sheene,  
 And hotte upon the mees<sup>1</sup> did caste his raie;  
 The apple rodded<sup>2</sup> from its palie greene,  
 And the mole<sup>3</sup> peare did bende the leafy spraie;  
 The peede chelandri<sup>4</sup> sugne the livelong daie;  
 'Twas nowe the pride, the manhode of the yeare,  
 And eke the grounde was dighte<sup>5</sup> in its mose defte<sup>6</sup> aumere<sup>7</sup>.

The sun was glemeeing in the middle of daie,  
 Deadde still the aire, and eke the welken<sup>8</sup> blue,  
 When from the sea arist<sup>9</sup> in drear arraie  
 A hepe of cloudes of sable sullen hue,  
 The which full fast unto the woodlande drewe,  
 Hiltring<sup>10</sup> attenes<sup>11</sup> the sunnis fetive<sup>12</sup> face,  
 And the black tempeste swolne and gathered up apace. (1-14)

<sup>1</sup> meads. <sup>2</sup> reddened, ripened. <sup>3</sup> soft. <sup>4</sup> pied goldfinch.  
<sup>5</sup> drest, arrayed. <sup>6</sup> neat, ornamental. <sup>7</sup> a loose robe or mantle.  
<sup>8</sup> the sky, the atmosphere. <sup>9</sup> arose. <sup>10</sup> hiding, shrouding. <sup>11</sup> at once.  
<sup>12</sup> beateous.

For the moment I will put aside the important question of the effects on the reader of the footnotes and concentrate purely on the nature of the descriptive language. This passage interferes with ideational reading with the same techniques used throughout Chatterton's poem: the distracting force of archaic language (particularly the collective obtrusion of

so many words ending in “e,” which merge together and form a barrier to the readerly eye), and the intimidation of seeing several footnotes. But once the reader begins to penetrate such initial barriers and move through the poem line by line, other interferences with ideational processing appear. Similar sounds, laden with vowels, and similar-looking letter combinations assail the ear and eye. The speaker’s pattern is to distribute across a single line the same letters and letter combinations, whose aural and visual consistency carry the reader along. Even when new morphemes come to dominate the scene in the next line, the aural-visual units the reader has experienced before are still present in some minor way.

An example of this pattern appears in the passage’s first two lines. The first line repeats the consonants “n” and “s” all the way across and clusters vowel sounds such as short “i” (“in,” “Virgyne”). This line also establishes other patterns of repetition such as the chiasmus “sweltrie sun gan sheene”: two three-letter words ending in “n,” “sun” and “gan,” are wedged between two words of almost the same length, both beginning in “s” and ending in “e” and both emphasizing the long “e” sound. The aural-visual emphases established in line 1 evolve into a more purely sonic emphasis into line 2, with the “n” (“upon”) and the “s” sounds (“mees,” “caste,” “his”), as well as the long “e” (“mees”). New sonic emphases emerge at the same time, such as the clustering of “o” words (“hotte upon”) and a dominance of “a” (“and,” “caste,” “raie”). The reader is lulled throughout the stanza by this pattern of sensory consistencies and gentle changes, never sharply taken out of a physical experience of the lines. In the same way that successful logical prose establishes a link between sentences even while the new sentence presents a fresh idea, this more physical language establishes simultaneous sensory links and

metamorphoses that keep the reader immersed in the text. Such a pattern does not tend to appear in the more plot-based stanzas of the ballad, where words exist largely to advance the narration and not as ends in themselves.

Even as Chatterton weaves a dense texture of sensory language, however, he ironically erects blockages against the reader's complete immersion in that texture. These blockages are his footnotes. The notes are most plentiful in the ballad's purely descriptive passages and because of their even distribution across the stanza, they regularly intrude upon the reader's sensory absorption in the language by forcing him or her to move out of the stanzaic text and down to the note text. This back-and-forth motion distracts from an experience of the words as physical entities and throws the reader back into an informational mode of reading; the notes offer modern translations of the antiquated words, thus temporarily canceling their physical existence for the reader and making them into informational signs. Consider as an example the passage quoted above, which contains a total of eleven footnotes. The other major descriptive passage of the poem, also two stanzas long, contains twelve notes. In the poem's narrative sections, by contrast, there are fewer notes. The two-stanza narrative section that comes between the major descriptive passages contains eight footnotes – not very many less than the descriptive passages. But the real drop-off comes in the poem's second half, which contains almost no description. In the remaining seven stanzas of the poem, footnotes total only 15 – just a few more than in each of the two-stanza descriptive passages. And, in stanza nine, when a conversation takes place between the poor pilgrim and the wealthy abbot, there are no footnotes; at this late moment in the plot, Chatterton needs for the dialogue to come through clearly to the reader.

Chatterton thus prevents the reader's full absorption into experiential reading, which is the idea-resistant form that the text explores in the descriptive passages. But this prevention accords with the other form of blockage the poet creates: disrupting the reader's understanding of the plot by placing long descriptive passages amidst the narrative's flow. While these activities may be seen to show a desire to manipulate and control the reader, they also reflect Chatterton's ambivalence about whether his text should mainly serve as a story that teaches a principle or as an experience of language itself, and about the ultimate value of either textual model.

### III.

Charlotte Smith's "Beachy Head" also induces conflicts between seeing and reading a text and between ideational and sensory forms of reading, and explores the author's ability to manipulate the reader's absorption into either activity. As with Chatterton's ballad, the physically affective dynamics of Smith's text arises from her ample notes. Yet key differences also exist between the effects of Smith's deployment of notes and Chatterton's, the most overt of which is that Smith's notes were likely intended to be printed as endnotes rather than footnotes.<sup>24</sup> This placement of the notes at the end of the poetic volume obviously requires more physical work on the part of the reader to get back and forth between the notes and the poem. In Chatterton's annotated ballad, the reader's eye is the main laborer, moving down and back up the page each time a note occurs. But in Smith's text the hands would have to turn to the back of the poetic volume, with the eye following along, in order to reach the notes. This means that any form of reading taking place in the poem would be more radically interrupted by the notes than in Chatterton's text.

Furthermore, Smith uses notes as a locus for expressing her own authorial voice even more overtly than Chatterton, often speaking in the first person there. Though Smith's speaker sometimes uses the first person in the poem itself, the first-person voice is often curiously absent from the passages that refer to notes most repetitively. In these passages, regional history tends to be given, or the thick description of natural scenery (especially minute plants) is the chief office of the verse. The tendency of such description toward dense sonic effects, together with the fact that the poetic passages are already separated from the notes in the volume, grants the poetic text an especially physical character in two ways: as both a different physical locale than the notes section, and as an environment where sensorially affective language is explored at the more local level of the line. What is more, the displacement of Smith's voice to notes, where it often comes through in a conversational tone, suggests a relationship where that voice is an "other" to the dense physical effects taking place in the description – as if the two forms of language, an author speaking to the reader and physically affective style, cannot coexist in one passage. As I will discuss in Chapter Two, this idea is variously articulated in key sections of Blake's *Jerusalem*.

A passage from "Beachy Head" in which Smith appears to be defining her poetic voice against Wordsworth's provides a paradigmatic example both of her physically affective description and of her use of notes containing Latin names; these notes ironically disrupt the full-scale sensory impact of her description in the poetic text and feature her first-person voice. Smith's speaker begins the passage with a clear allusion to the moment in "Tintern Abbey" where Wordsworth calls himself a "worshipper" of Nature.



An early worshipper at Nature's shrine,  
 I loved her rudest scenes – warrens, and heaths,  
 And yellow commons, and birch-shaded hollows,  
 And hedge rows, bordering unfrequented lanes  
 Bowered with wild roses, and the clasping woodbine  
 Where purple tassels of the tangling vetch\*  
 With bittersweet and bryony inweave, †  
 And the dew fills the silver bindweed's° cups ---  
 I loved to trace the brooks whose humid banks  
 Nourish the harebell, and the freckled pagil; ‡  
 And stroll among o'ershadowing woods of beech,  
 Lending in Summer, from the heats of noon  
 A whispering shade; while haply there reclines  
 Some pensive lover of uncultur'd flowers,  
 Who, from the tumps with bright green mosses clad,  
 Plucks the wood sorrel, • with its light thin leaves,  
 Heart-shaped, and triply folded; and its root  
 Creeping like beaded coral; or who there  
 Gathers, the copse's pride, anémones, \*  
 With rays like golden studs on ivory laid  
 Most delicate: but touch'd with purple clouds.  
 Fit crown for April's fair but changeful brow. (346-67)

\* vetch. *Vicia sylvatica*. † bittersweet. *Solanum dulcamara*. bryony. *Bryonia alba*.

° bindweed. *Convolvulus sepium*.

‡ harebell. *Hyacinthus non scriptus*. pagil. *Primula veris*. •sorrel. *Oxalis acetosella*.

\* anémones. *Anemone nemerosa*. It appears to be settled on late and excellent authorities, that this word should not be accented on the second syllable, but on the penultima. I have however ventured the more known accentuation, as more generally used, and suiting better the nature of my verse.

The Wordsworthian note of the first two lines, however, quickly succeeds to a less subjective form of speech; indeed, the plant description that follows grows increasingly dense with sonic effects, as if Smith's speaker's first person "I" has disappeared into a thick copse of words. The listing of places and features of landscape already moves the verse into a more physical mode, as items succeed each other with no interpretive or ordering voice presiding over them. "Yellow commons," initiating line 348, begins a

cascade of “l,” “o,” and “w” sounds (“hollows,” “rows,” “bowered with wild roses”) that then blends with a submelody of “d,” “b,” and “t” (“woodbine” “tassels,” “tangling,” “bittersweet”) and finally of “v” and “w” (“vetch,” “inweave,” “dew,” “silver bindweed’s”).

This would be the sonic cascade, that is, if it were not interrupted several times by the direction of the reader’s hands, eyes, and attention to the notes, which contain Latin names for the words in the poetic text. Therefore, a word that in the poem plays a strongly sonic role suddenly changes character when it reappears in the notes. In physically affective terms, the word’s new character is visual, as the reader’s first task is to locate the correct note with the eye. In broader terms, the word has changed from a sensorial effect into a vehicle for information, taking on a more strictly scholastic cast as it is placed next to its scientific Latin descriptors.

This same pattern of the first-person voice first appearing in the poem and then being suddenly absorbed into the physical effects of words begins again at line 354, “I loved to trace the brooks whose humid banks,” which succeeds to a more mildly affective version of the sonic network that just appeared. Perhaps one reason why the sounds at this point are not aloud to achieve the dense effects of the earlier lines is the speaker’s visualization of the “pensive lover of uncultur’d flowers” who reclines in the woods and picks a collection from the blooms and plants. This figure seems to be a representative of least one part of the speaker’s identity, which she has figuratively placed amongst the plants the poem describes and amongst the physical effects of the words that describe those plants. On the one hand, that is, Smith’s speaker is herself a lover of “uncultur’d flowers” like the reclining figure, since she calls flowers by their English and sometimes

colloquial names in the poetic text. In the notes, however, the speaker becomes a botanist in the more academic sense, limited to the Latin taxonomic terminology.

Smith's initially first-person speaker, then, is absorbed first into the physical verbiage of description itself and then into the person pictured among the plants. But one more stage of this absorption takes place before this passage is done: the first-person voice reappears in the note upon "anémone." If the previous two forms of absorption are imagined spatially, then the first person is physically moving both "down" the passage as it appears on the page and at the same time moving deeper into its order of subjects; the first person blends into the text's initial phase of physically affective words and then into the scene of the figure reclining in the woods (or even into the figure itself). The last stage of absorption, however, is the ultimate form of moving "down" the poem – indeed moving right out of it – because in Smith's volume, the note on "anémone" would likely have been separated entirely from the poem "Beachy Head" – placed at the very back of the book. But despite the paratextual relegation, Smith's first-person voice appears to have adopted some measure of boldness: in the note she summarily denounces the accentual placement for "anémone" of "late and excellent authorities" and ventures a placement that not only is more "known" and colloquial, but also "suit[s] better the nature of [her] verse."

The latter comment more overtly suggests what has been apparent throughout the passage on an affective level: its exploration of a network of crucially placed sounds. The ambivalent or at least merely experimental stance that Smith seems to take toward experientially-driven language, however, emerges in the aspects of her verse that prevent the complete affective power of her sonic network. The sounds have their full absorptive

capability everywhere fractured by the visual and kinetic shifts to the volume's section of notes, and their sensorial identity countered often by the "informationalizing" of poetic words when they are addressed in the notes. The power of the sounds, therefore, is not released as it would be in a more openly experiential model of text and reading like that explored by Macpherson, but especially by Blake, Keats and Shelley.

#### IV.

Erasmus Darwin's *The Loves of the Plants* (1789), part of *The Botanic Garden*, provides a particularly complex and self-conscious example of a text that combines visual and sonic techniques and contemplates informational and experiential models of poetry. Darwin iconifies not just large sections of text but the page as a whole, which is usually divided fairly evenly between the poetic passage and a dense, small-print passage of prose notes. Yet Darwin explores informational versus experiential forms of reading in a way different from Chatterton and Smith. All three poets immerse the reader into an unfolding sensory experience of the text and at the same time erect blockages against the reader's complete surrender to this form of non-ideational reading. But the difference comes in the level of self-consciousness at which the reading process is being explored. With Chatterton and Smith, any interest in inducing different forms of reading and manipulating the reader's absorption into the text are implicit in the structure and style of the poem and its notes. With Darwin these interests are more explicit. As in Smith's "Beachy Head," Darwin's poem makes judicious use of matter-of-fact notes that starkly contrast with the diction of the poem (Darwin's notes, in fact, are much lengthier than Smith's). Yet Darwin includes a prose "proem" at his poem's beginning and "interludes" between the cantos that self-consciously address the stylistic and affective agenda of *The*

*Loves of the Plants*. These sections show Darwin's awareness of some of the physical characteristics of his poem and indirectly suggest the text's preoccupation with informational and experiential models of reading, along with some important contradictions between Darwin's poetic theory and practice.

Darwin's proem demonstrates from the outset his interest in the physical properties of his text, and it begins to expose the ideational and experiential models of reading with which *The Loves of the Plants* is implicitly concerned. The proem, which is presented in its three-page entirety in Figure 2, from the first characterizes written language and the act of reading in physical terms.<sup>25</sup> The opening phrase, "Gentle Reader!," is the textual equivalent of grabbing the reader by the arm, since the physical isolation of the address in white space and its exclamatory character so immediately draw the eye. This physical gesture suggests Darwin's awareness of the placement of his words on the page.<sup>26</sup> A physical idea of the text and of reading develops further when Darwin's speaker describes the poem as an object – a camera obscura – that contains "lights and shades dancing on a whited canvas and magnified into apparent life." This portrayal of the text as a camera obscura continues in the speaker's invitation that the reader "walk in" to the text – invoking a model of the immersion or containing of the reader that somewhat recalls the absorption of the speaker's first-person voice into the physical effects of the text in Smith's "Beachy Head." Yet herein lies an ambiguity that will emerge more clearly in later passages. The camera obscura is an instrument that presents images to the viewer's eye, but because those images are displayed all about a camera obscura room which the viewer enters, he or she also has an experience of being

Figure 2

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( v )

P R O E M.

---

GENTLE READER!

**L**O, here a CAMERA OBSCURA is presented to thy view, in which are lights and shades dancing on a whited canvas, and magnified into apparent life!---if thou art perfectly at leasure for such trivial amusement, walk in,  
and

( vi )

and view the wonders of my INCHANTED  
GARDEN.

Whereas P. OVIDIUS NASO, a great Necromancer in the famous Court of AUGUSTUS CÆSAR, did by art poetic transmute Men, Women, and even Gods and Goddeffes, into Trees and Flowers; I have undertaken by fimilar art to restore some of them to their original animality, after having remained prisoners so long in their respective vegetable mansions; and have here exhibited them before thee. Which thou may'st contemplate as diverse little pictures suspended over the chimney of a Lady's drelling-room, *connected only by a slight festoon of ribbons.* And which, though

---

( vii )

though thou may'st not be acquainted with  
the originals, may amuse thee by the beauty  
of their persons, their graceful attitudes, or  
the brilliancy of their drefs.

F A R E W E L L .





enfolded in sensory stimuli. In poetry, this experience of being enfolded is generally more characteristic of how sound operates upon the reader than of the visual effect of the words on the page. In speaking of the camera obscura, then, Darwin chooses a metaphor for his poem that generally suggests it has a picturesque nature but also refers to an experience of sensory immersion. Darwin's textual metaphor thus suggests from the beginning, although perhaps unwittingly, the kinds of enfolding sonic effects that his verse will shortly explore and that, I will show, ultimately work to undercut his poem's picturesque clarity. The proem passage, moreover, presents a parallel ambiguity about the nature of Darwin's text when it leaves it unclear whether the "lights and shades" are contained in the "camera obscura" and "magnified into apparent life" are the very words of the text or the characters of the poetic story. Or, to frame the problem differently, the text raises the question of whether reading *The Loves of the Plants* is supposed to be an absorption into the physical world of the words themselves, or an intellectual comprehension of words that are essentially invisible and inaudible and exist only to convey the content of the story and create a clear picture in the reader's mind. The remainder of the proem does not solve this question; it only complicates it further by suggesting that the "object" the reader must "view" is not the text itself but the "picture" painted by the words of the text. This is implied when the speaker says that trees and flowers, portrayed as women and men, are "exhibited" before the reader as "diverse little pictures . . . connected only by a slight festoon of ribbons." The final words of the proem thus emphasize a notion that Darwin's poem will create "pictures" of the plants and their interactions in the mind and will hope to amuse the reader through visual aspects such as "beauty," "graceful attitudes," and "brilliancy" of dress.

Given this general preparation of the reader to see the plant characters in the mind's eye, he or she expects the first passages of Darwin's poem to begin to create a clear imaginative picture of the plants and their interactions. Instead, the reader encounters three pages of sensorially rich language wherein the physical properties of the words themselves tend to obscure clear visualization and prevent the clear transmission of the plot. Consider these two stanzas, the poem's first and second.

Descend, ye hovering Slyphs! aerial Quires,  
 And sweep with little hands your silver lyres;  
 With fairy foot-steps print your graffy rins,  
 Ye Gnomes! accordant to the tinkling strings;  
 While in soft notes I tune to oaten reed  
 Gay hopes, and amorous sorrows of the mead. ---  
 From giant Oaks, that wave their branches dark,  
 To the dwarf Moss, that clings upon their bark,  
 What Beaux and Beauties croud the gaudy groves,  
 And woo and win their vegetable Loves.  
 How Snow-drops cold, and blue-eyed Harebells blend  
 Their tender tears, as o'er the stream they bend;  
 The love-sick Violet, and the Primrose pale  
 Bow their sweet heads, and whisper to the gale;  
 With secret sighs the Virgin Lily droops,  
 And jealous Cowslips hang their tawny cups.  
 How the young Rose in beauty's damask pride  
 Drinks the warm blushes of his bashful bride;  
 With honey'd lips enamour'd Woodbines meet,  
 Clasp with fond arms, and mix their kisses sweet. ---

Stay thy soft-murmuring waters, gentle Rill;  
 Hush, whispering Wings, ye rustling Leaves, be still;  
 Rest, silver Butterflies, your quivering wings;  
 Alight, ye Beetles, from your airy rings;  
 Ye painted Moths, your gold-eyed plumage furl,  
 Bow your wide horns, your spiral trunks uncurl;  
 Glitter, ye Glow-worms, on your mossy beds;  
 Descend, ye Spiders, on your lengthen'd threads;  
 Slide here, ye horned Snails, with varnish'd shells;  
 Ye Bee-nymphs, listen in your waxen cells! --- (1-30).

The language that least intrudes its sensory elements upon content occurs in the first six lines, which invoke forest creatures to descend upon the speaker's imagination; these creatures' playing of lyres analogizes the poet's craft. After these lines, however, a network of similar but gently metamorphosing words and parts of words unfolds, much like those in Chatterton and Smith. Lines 11-12 serve as a paradigmatic case. In line 11 the dominant sounds are short and long "o" and short "e," and they are continued in line 12 in "their tender" and "o'er" even as new sounds are added in "tears" and "stream." Patterns of consonance are also present, striking the eye perhaps even more than the ear. We see a dominance of "w" ("How Snow"), "d" ("cold," "blue-eyed," "blend," "bend") and "r" ("Their tender," "o'er"). Such sound effects only intensify in the second stanza, and the reader is drawn deeper and deeper into a sensory experience of language.

Yet the following stanza overturns the previous one's immersive experience of sound by further developing a contrasting picturesque textual model: the poem exists to portray a "picture" to be beheld from a distance. Indeed, Darwin's speaker startles the reader out of the previous sensory lull with a typographically bold and animated address, "BOTANIC MUSE! who I this latter age/Led by your airy hand the Swedish sage,/Bad his keen eye your secret haunts explore . . . Say on each leaf how tiny Graces dwell" (31-33, 35). In the following stanza, the muse begins the "plot" of the poem, which is the "loves of the plants." Yet there is also a new beginning for the physical layout of the poetic pages, with each page now clearly divided into two halves: a poetic passage at the top and a long section of prose notes at the bottom. The pair of pages shown in Figure 3

Figure 3

( 6 )

Two knights before thy fragrant altar bend,  
 Adored MELISSA ! and *two* squires attend. 60  
 MEADIA'S soft chains *five* suppliant beaux confess,  
 And hand in hand the laughing belle address;  
 Alike to all, she bows with wanton air,  
 Rolls her dark eye, and waves her golden hair.

*Melissa*. l. 60. Balm. In each flower there are four males and one female; two of the males stand higher than the other two; whence the name of the class "two powers." I have observed in the Ballota, and others of this class, that the two lower stamens, or males, become mature before the two higher. After they have shed their dust, they turn themselves away outwards; and the pistil, or female, continuing to grow a little taller, is applied to the upper stamens. See Gloriosa, and Genista.

All the plants of this class, which have naked seeds, are aromatic. The Marum, and Nepeta are particularly delightful to cats; no other brute animals seem pleased with any odours but those of their food or prey.

*Meadia*. l. 61. Dodecatheon, american Cowslip. Five males and one female. The males, or anthers, touch each other. The uncommon beauty of this flower occasioned Linneus to give it a name signifying the twelve heathen gods; and Dr. Mead to affix his own name to it. The pistil is much longer than the stamens, hence the flower-stalks have their elegant bend, that the stigma may hang downwards to receive the fecundating dust of the anthers. And the petals are so beautifully turned back to prevent the rain or dew drops from sliding down and washing off this dust prematurely; and at the same time exposing it to the light and air. As soon as the seeds are formed, it erects all the flower-stalks to prevent them from falling out; and thus loses the beauty of its figure. Is this a mechanical effect, or does it indicate a vegetable storgé to preserve its offspring? See note on Ilex, and Gloriosa.

In the Meadia, the Borago, Cyclamen, Solanum, and many others, the filaments are very short compared with the style. Hence it became necessary, 1st. to furnish the stamens with long anthers. 2d. To lengthen and bend the peduncle or flower-stalk, that the

Woo'd



Erasmus Darwin. *The Loves of the Plants*. London: J. Johnson, 1789, 6, illustration.

illustrates not only this general layout of poem and notes, but also Darwin's practice of continuing a note from one page onto the next and from time to time inserting pictures of the plants that are the characters in his poem.

Where immersive sound effects before intruded on the picturesque success of Darwin's poem, now these additional physical features assume this role. The poetic passage on the pair of pages in Figure 3 does initially set out to paint a picture in the mind of the reader of the plants themselves and their interactions, and the speaker's language does go some way toward that goal. We find the vivid, illustrative diction that Darwin later commends in the interlude after Canto I, where he explains that his revision of one of Pope's lines, "And Kennet swift, where silver Graylings play," is far better than Pope's original, "And Kennet swift for silver Eels renown'd," because it brings the scenery before the eye (42). For example, the speaker's verb "bend" describes the action of the male parts of the flower in relation to the female part, and concrete phrases such as "rolls her dark eye" and "waves her golden hair" convey not only the coloration of the flower but also its form and movement. The problem is that the physical properties of the page as a whole and of the poem and note texts individually, prevent the reader from concentrating long enough on this language to form an imaginative picture. First, the poem and note texts, because they are so visually different, each appear as "things" when the reader first looks at the page. Even though each text is a separate entity, the two strike the eye at the same time and confront the reader with the problem of where to begin. If the reader commences with the poem text, it is difficult to fix on what it is saying because the prose section below is so large as to be a visual distraction.

Furthermore, the reader's eyes are drawn to various words from the poem that are materially distinguished, either by italics or all capital letters, and then to the information in the notes below that those words cue. Attention, therefore, is constantly thrown back and forth between poem and notes and concentration on the poem is hard to sustain. This distracting motion between the poem and notes occurs from page to page as well, for Darwin's speaker often continues a footnote onto the next page, as the note break-off on page one of Figure 3 indicates. If the reader has been immersed in a footnote and turns the page, he or she is likely to continue reading that note, even if it concerns a different plant than the new page's poetic text takes up.

The minute linguistic qualities of the note text itself also tempt the reader away from concentration on the poetic text. Every time he or she goes to a note, the reader is immediately struck by the contrast between the extremely figurative poetic language and the matter-of-fact note language and then tempted to focus on reading the note, which is easier to understand than the poem. Furthermore, on any given page, the notes portray the characteristics of the flowers more clearly than the verse's figurative language, as do the pictures of the plants that pepper the text, an example of which appears in the picture in Figure 3. Therefore, any picturesque success of Darwin's text tends to be delivered by the notes and not the poem. The worlds of the poem and the notes, even though they are meant to complement each other and to work in tandem, seem to end up warring with each other.

Each of the two passages I have examined exposes one of the two levels of textual materiality that Darwin explores in *The Loves of the Plants*: the minute level of letter groups, words, word groups, lines, and line groups, and the more global level of sections

of text and the entire page. But it is important to note that this separation of micro- and macro- level material exploitations into different pages does not occur elsewhere. Indeed, on most pages, we see the micro- and macro- levels of materiality interact in a complex dynamic. The reader begins to be immersed in the poem's unfolding experience of highly sensorial and dominantly sonic language; this immersion prevents the clear formation of an imaginative picture of the plants and their interactions; then the reader is yanked out of this experience every time a word in the poem refers to a note at the bottom of the page, which, because of its clear portrayal of the plant being addressed, draws the reader in intellectually. The reader is constantly thrown between the sensory linguistic world of the poem, where words tend to create their own sensory reality, and the world of the notes, wherein words refer to a reality outside of themselves.

The prose interludes between Darwin's cantos directly and indirectly contemplate the issues I have drawn out of the proem and the poem. The interludes are organized as dialogues, wherein a character called the Poet explains and defends the theories behind *The Loves of the Plants* to his skeptical but inquisitive interlocutor, The Bookseller. The chief task of the interludes, one might say, is to continue to elaborate the generally picturesque mission of Darwin's poem that was suggested in the proem, but with one crucial qualification: that *The Loves of the Plants* is not imitating or "painting a picture" of an existent reality, but creating a new reality that is so vividly posed to the reader's imagination that he or she is willing to accept it. The following exchange in Interlude I between the Poet and Bookseller prosecutes this argument.

[Poet] [When we read poetry] we cease to attend to the irritations of common external objects, and cease also to use any voluntary efforts to compare these interesting trains of ideas with our previous knowledge of things, [and thus] a compleat reverie is produced: during which time



however short, if it be but for a moment, the objects themselves appear to exist before us. This I think has been called by an ingenious critic “the ideal presence,” of such objects. (*Elements of Criticism* by Lord Kaimes.)

.....

[Bookseller] Then it is not of any consequence, whether the representations [in poetry] correspond with nature.

[Poet] Not if they so much interest the reader or spectator as to induce the reverie above described. Nature may be seen in the market place, or at the card-table; but we expect something more than this in the play-house or picture room. (48-49)

Along with this notion that poetry paints a picture, albeit of a non-mimetic reality, comes the following exchange about the specific nature of poetic language versus prosaic language.

[Bookseller] In what then consists the essential difference between Poetry and Prose?

[Poet] Next to the measure of the language, the principal distinction appears to be to consist in this; that Poetry admits of very few words expressive of perfectly abstracted ideas, whereas Prose abounds with them. And as our ideas derived from visible objects are more distinct than those derived from the objects of our other senses, the words expressive of these ideas belonging to vision make up the principal part of poetic language. That is the Poet writes principally to the eye, the Prose-writer uses more abstracted terms. (41-42)

These passages show the range of theoretical concerns Darwin is taking up in this interlude; also, the model of poetry they present contradicts the character of Darwin’s poem for which I have argued. These interlude passages show that Darwin is interested in showing how poetry can be a world apart – how it can portray its own reality rather than imitating an external one. But, Darwin is careful to suggest that this alternate world does not live in poetic language itself but in the imaginative scenes to which poetic

language refers. Words exist to express ideas, no matter how fantastical or unmimetic, and not to foreground their own characteristics.

Yet this is not what the poetic language actually ends up doing, since any picturesque agenda for the poem is repeatedly contravened by the physical dynamics of the text itself. Therefore, when the Poet says in Interlude I, “[t]he Poet writes principally to the eye,” this is an observation laden with irony, for the visual traits of the text itself, which manipulate the reader’s physical eye, are what interferes with the reader’s formation of a picture in the mind’s eye. Furthermore, there is the rich word-by-word, line-by-line experience of Darwin’s poetic language, which occurs in the passage quoted earlier and which constitutes, in yet another way, a reality of words themselves, not a reality to which words refer.

While it first appears that Darwin, in the prose interludes, does not acknowledge the word-by-word, line-by-line sensory realities of his poetic language, this issue subtly emerges in a passage from Interlude III that considers the relationship among the sister arts of poetry, painting, and music. The Poet, in logical fulfillment of his picturesque theory of poetry, first aligns verse and painting most strongly. Then poetry and music are likened on the basis of some shared metrical patterns. But the relation between painting and music is more obscure and tenuous: the Poet explains the “mathematical” relationship between the primary colors and the notes on the musical scale that Newton has observed. Here there is a curious silence about the fact that music, of all the sister arts, has perhaps the greatest potential to create a world apart from reality and ideas – a world made of sounds – and that this potential contradicts so sharply the far more mimetic office of painting. This form of silence about music is opposed by the practice

of Darwin's verse, which explores networks of sound just as Chatterton's ballad and Smith's natural description do. This silence is important, however, as a signal of Darwin's reservation about fully investigating non-mimetic physical language. *The Loves of the Plants*, like Chatterton's "An Excelente Balade of Charitie" and Smith's "Beachy Head," backs away from imagining experience and not reference as the chief effect of poetic language.

"Melodious plots": Poetic Explorations of the Powers of Sound

James Thomson and James Macpherson explore sonic affect in a more focused way than Chatterton, Darwin, and Smith. Rather than investigating sonic power only in certain descriptive moments that are contextualized within and/or interrupted by visual and kinetic physical modes, these two poets tend to concentrate upon the absorptive powers of sound by itself.

Thomson's focus on the technique of description brings into sharp relief how it can become a fertile field for affective sonic explorations, as Keats demonstrates particularly in *The Eve of St. Agnes*. Yet Thomson tends to recant his exploration of a sensory style by following it with abstract moral lessons; this move shows his consideration of a tension in Chatterton's work – should poetry delight or instruct? – and suggests he finally comes down on the side of "instruct." Macpherson's use of sound contrasts with Thomson's in both degree and kind. *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*, first of all, does not match its heavy exploration of sonic networks with negative theoretical reflection upon that endeavor. What is more, from the beginning Macpherson's style does not announce itself as driven by representational goals. This push away from representation is advertised first in the dramatic situation of the poem. The pieces within

the *Fragments* are spoken sometimes as monologues but more often as antiphonal exchanges between two characters, within which the words of one speaker tend to generate sonically from the words of the other, such that poetic sounds work together somewhat in the manner of a piece of music – in this case, an operatic one. Such a technique will be taken to particularly radical affective ends in the exchange between Asia and the Voice in the air in Act II, Scene V of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. Also, when Macpherson's speakers describe the bleak landscape that surrounds them, the dense sonic and rhythmic qualities of their speech and its tendency toward various forms of repetition obscures any clear picturing of the objects and scenes.

Description in general tends to be suited to physically affective explorations because there is less prioritization of one statement over another than in conceptually or rhetorically driven writing, or even of one object of description over another. This is especially true in descriptive poems like Thomson's, which focus on pastoral scenes or landscapes instead of single objects in nature, such as a mountain or a waterfall. These different poetic foci represent a contrast between the beautiful, a phenomenon of disseminated details, and the sublime, a phenomenon of concentrated magnitude. Thomson's "Winter" is clearly most concerned with the beautiful or the picturesque. The visual imperatives to the reader such as "see!" and "hark!" that pepper the verse, first of all, suggest that each described scene should be pictured in the mind's eye. Furthermore, the speaker tells the reader at the end of the poem that he has been painting a picture of one of nature's seasons, and, allegorically, of human life:

Now, fond Man!  
Behold thy pictured life: pass some few years,  
Thy flow'ring Spring, thy shortlived Summer's strength,  
Thy sober Autumn fading into age,

And pale, concluding Winter shuts thy scene,  
And shrouds thee in the grave (363-368).<sup>27</sup>

Yet this move toward allegory, and thus toward a highly conceptual understanding of the meaning of nature, occurs only after the poem's process of exploring a more experiential model of descriptive language.

This exploration happens within a pattern of discursive modes that is clearly marked in Thomson's poem. Each segment of the pattern begins with a long passage of natural description, continues as the speaker indulges more and more in physical poetic language, and then closes when the speaker ceases this type of language and "regulates" himself and his poetic discourse through an elevated, contemplative address either to nature or to God.<sup>28</sup> The first important point about this pattern is its remarkable consistency across the poem, which one can easily detect by following repeated verbal signals. Most every major descriptive passage that initiates a segment of the poem's pattern begins with a visual imperative to the reader, such as "see," "behold," "lo," or "hark," and the repetitive presence of such words tends to streamline the verse's major segments in the reader's mind. The same homogenization process occurs within each descriptive passage, where many verse paragraphs begin with the word "now," as in: "Now solitary, and in pensive guise,/Oft let me wander o'er the russet mead" (40-41), or "Now, when the western sun withdraws the day,/And humid Evening, gliding over the sky" (80-81). The structural leveling that occurs through such repetitions, or non-subordination of one part of the poem to another, has the important consequence of highlighting the speaker's physical poetic techniques and inducing the reader to experience them fully. That is, the removal of a conceptual hierarchy from the verse dissuades the reader from abstracting words and phrases by focusing on their

metacharacteristics or on their place in a hierarchical structure of statements; this causes more attention to be focused on the concrete being of the words and phrases, or on language as such.

Although Thomson's speaker repeatedly indulges in foregrounding the physical properties of language, this action clearly makes him anxious; the apostrophes to nature or God that follow sensorially rich passages are designed to check what he sees as an excess of the descriptive act. There are some moments when these addresses seem to arise not from the desire for self-regulation but from the speaker's inspired feelings as he describes a scene. This is especially true of an excited hailing of nature which follows on a lively account of a muddy deluge flowing into a valley: "Nature! great parent! whose directing hand/Rolls round the seasons of the changeful year,/How mighty, how majestic are thy works!" Yet most of the addresses in the poem operate more as regulations against acts of description that seem to have become too excitedly absorbed in the imagined natural scene or that too much indulge in the sensorial texture of descriptive language itself.

An example of description rescued by an address occurs early in the poem. The speaker, as is typical, begins a description with a visual imperative to the reader:

Behold! the well-poised hornet hovering hangs,  
 With quivering pinions, in the genial blaze;  
 Flies off in airy circles, then returns,  
 And hums and dances to the beating ray:  
 Nor shall the man that musing walks alone,  
 And heedless strays within his radiant lists,  
 Go unchastised away. Sometimes a fleece  
 Of clouds, wide-scattering, with a lucid veil  
 Soft shadow o'er th' unruffled face of heaven;  
 And, through their dewy sluices, shed the sun,  
 With tempered influence down. Then is the time  
 For those, whom Wisdom and whom Nature charm,

To steal themselves from the degenerate crowd,  
 And soar above this little scene of things:  
 To tread low-thoughted Vice beneath their feet,  
 To lay their passions in a gentle calm,  
 And woo lone Quiet in her silent walks (23-39).

The passage's first two lines evince the ways in which the sounds of language are exploited throughout these verses. A strain of alliteration on the letter "h" begins the passage on a strong sonic note, foretelling alliterations on different letters which will appear on a smaller scale in later lines in the passage. Also, the "staple" letters and letter groups of the extensive assonance in the passage are established in the opening two lines: "o," "l," "oi," "r," "n," "v," "er," and "a" are the chief sounds that will be repeated or will metamorphose into related sounds. The subtle interweaving of "r" and "er" sounds with the "ing" forms sonically networks the passage's first few lines ("hovering," "quivering," "airy circles," "beating," and "musing"). But this pattern yields to a denser interweaving of vowels and especially the letter "l" ("lucid," "sluices," "influence"). All these sensory relationships, among individual letters, letter groups, words, and phrases, create a flood of sensorial language that is unnecessary to transmit information about the winter scene that is the speaker's focus.

The speaker, at line 32, seems to realize this linguistic indulgence. Although he appears to count himself one of the ones who has been "charmed" by Wisdom and Nature, who stands apart from the "degenerate crowd," and who has command over Vice and his passions, this appears to be a move of self-reassurance. In fact, it does appear that the speaker's "passions" have been aroused if we judge by the rich language he has just used. Also, the "little scene of things" away from which he supposedly wishes to soar could be defined as the text itself – the expanse of visual but primarily sonic play

that has just been laid out. After all, in such highly sensorial descriptive language, letters, letter groups, and words do indeed become “things” in the form of sounds that hit the ear.<sup>29</sup>

Most other apostrophes in the poem are enough like the one I just discussed as not to warrant specific commentary. Yet there is one address to God in the middle of the poem that deserves particular mention because it is the most forceful instance in which the speaker regulates his rich descriptive language. Significantly, the apostrophe follows on one of the longest passages of natural description in the poem, which evinces the kinds of sensory relationships between letters, letter groups, and words that I have just described. In fact, the process of linguistic regulation begins after a trio of lines which are clearly cohered by visual and sonic relationships. The speaker is describing the sounds of a winter night, which he says

Warn the devoted wretch of woe and death!  
Wild uproar lords it wide: the clouds commixed  
With stars, swift-gliding, sweep along the sky (189-91).

The most initially striking feature here is the vertical visual alliteration of the string of capital “ws” along the left margin of the text, and the fact that each word that begins in “w” – “warn,” “wild,” and “with” – is four letters long. These visual features initially block the lines as a physical unit in the reader’s mind, but it is the sonic relationships among the letters and words – alliterations on “w” and “s,” and assonance on short “e,” short “o,” short “i,” and “r” – that cohere the lines and most fully impact the reader. Immediately following this block of lines the speaker begins to check his language by introducing God as a subject and making a crescendo toward a climactic address.

All nature reels. But hark! the Almighty speaks:  
Instant the chidden storm begins to pant,



And dies at once into a noiseless calm.  
 As yet 'tis midnight's reign; the weary clouds,  
 Slow-meeting, mingle into solid gloom.  
 Now, while the drowsy world lies lost in sleep,  
 Let me associate with the low-browed Night,  
 And Contemplation, her sedate compeer;  
 Let me shake off th'intrusive cares of day,  
 And lay the meddling senses all aside.  
 And now, yet lying Vanities of life!  
 You ever-tempting, ever-cheating train!  
 Where are you now? and what is your amount?  
 Vexation, disappointment and remorse.  
 Sad, sickening thought! and yet deluded man,  
 A scene of wild, disjointed visions past,  
 And broken slumbers, rises still resolved,  
 With new-flushed hopes, to run your giddy round.  
 Father of light and life! Thou Good Supreme,  
 O! teach me what is good! teach me thyself!  
 Save me from folly, vanity, and vice,  
 From every low pursuit! and feed my soul  
 With knowledge, conscious peace and virtue pure,  
 Sacred, substantial, never-fading bliss! (192-215).

It is the phrase “meddling senses” that sets off the string of exclamations beginning at line 202. First, these animated addresses are directed against the senses themselves, which are called “vanities” that are “ever-tempting, ever-cheating,” and associated with “vexation, disappointment and remorse,” “sad, sickening thought,” and delusion. Then, the exclamations are directed toward God, asking for rescue from “every low pursuit” and for “peace,” “knowledge,” and “virtue.”

The intense fervor about the senses displayed here suggests an uneasiness about their proper role in life in general and in poetic writing. Over and over, and most paradigmatically in the climactic passage just quoted, Thomson's speaker indulges in extremely sensorial descriptive language, full of affective relationships between units of language that contribute little to the conceptual content of the verse or the painting of

nature's picturesque scenes; in fact, the sensorial texture of Thomson's speaker's description so absorbs the reader that he or she is distracted from reading for concepts or imagining such scenes altogether. Yet significantly Thomson's speaker withdraws himself from such linguistic indulgence at every stage. In such withdrawals, Thomson's language shifts abruptly into a conceptual, didactic mode and thus leaves its physical character behind. Also, the fact that in the passage just quoted the speaker protests specifically against bodily experience – “[s]ave me . . . [f]rom every low pursuit” – and then implores God to grant him more abstract gifts such as “knowledge” and “virtue” implies that he is wary of extensively using any faculties outside those of the mind or the more reserved faculties of the heart, such as benevolence or charity. Clearly too pleasurable or too physical an experience of writing and reading – one that suppresses concepts or fails to portray clearly the truths of nature – is associated with a dangerous poetry that should be avoided and repented of if written.

As his recantation makes clear, Thomson imagines verisimilitude and the illustration of nature's moral lessons to be the proper office of his verse, even though that office is regularly compromised or sidetracked by his explorations of the sonic textures of descriptive language. Macpherson's *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*, by contrast, announces itself as a poetic volume with more affective interests. Macpherson's introduction to the text claims that these fragments, supposedly collected from the Scottish highlands and translated, are in fact intended to tell a story: “there is ground to believe that most of them were originally episodes of a greater work which related to the wars of Fingal.”<sup>30</sup> And such a notion is supported to a degree in the poetic fragments themselves, when a mention of Fingal, his sons, and their exploits in battle occurs or

when the actions of other warriors are mentioned. Yet such references serve as a seemingly incompletely formed skeleton for these fragments; their “real action” is draped over this weak narrative frame and has more to do with the sensorial effects of the poetry upon the reader. Both the common mode of presentation of the pieces – two speakers calling antiphonally to each other – as well as their strongly physical style tend to push their narrative content into the background of interest. These traits even obfuscate the reader’s sense of the “plot” of the story or stories being told and of how all the different characters being mentioned relate to each other, personally or historically. Readers in Macpherson’s day corroborate this claim. Lord Kames, for example, suggested that Macpherson add headnotes to his poems because he felt that the plot was difficult to make out.<sup>31</sup> The plot’s obscurity stems partly from the fact that many of the characters’ names and the words they say to each other are not introduced according to a primarily informational logic, with one responding to the ideas of the other or continuing or filling in the blanks of a narrative. Rather, names and other words appear to generate out of each other, often for sonic or rhythmic reasons, as if each fragment were a movement in the larger symphony of the text, and speakers’ statements were variations upon a central theme – in this case, a set of key words and sounds, or a leitmotif – that is being developed throughout that movement.

The opening fragment of Macpherson’s text illustrates these stylistic traits well. This text’s preoccupation with the physically affective relationship between two voices rather than with narrative is announced in the very title of the fragment, “Shilric, Vinvela.” Just as the words uttered by these two characters will be closely knit together through various sonic and rhythmic similarities, the two names in the title are as well,

with no intrusion of grammatical logic in the form of the conjunction “and” coming between the names. Vinvela begins the antiphonal exchanges of the fragment.

#### Vinvela

My love is a son of the hill. He pursues the flying deer. His grey dogs are panting around him; his bow-string sounds in the wind. Whether by the fount of the rock, or by the stream of the mountain thou liest; whenwith the wind, and the mist is flying over thee, let me approach my love unperceived, and see him from the rock. Lovely I saw thee first by the aged oak of Branno; thou wert returning tall from the chace; the fairest among thy friends.

#### Shilric

What voice is that I hear? that voice like the summer wind. -----  
I sit not by the nodding rushes; I hear not the fount of the rock. Afar, Vinvela, afar I go to the wars of Fingal. My dogs attend me no more. No more I tread the hill. No more from on high I see thee, fair-moving by the stream of the plain; bright as the bow of heaven; as the moon on the western wave.

#### Vinvela

Then thou are gone, O Shilric! and I am alone on the hill. The deer are seen on the brow; void of fear they graze along. No more they dread the wind; no more the rustling tree. The hunter is far removed; he is in the field of graves. Strangers! sons of the waves! spare my lovely Shilric (9-10).

Vinvela’s first speech is itself a dense interweaving of repetitious words and sounds. The “v” and short “i” sounds from her name, announced in the heading poised above her speech, are distributed in her opening words, “My love is a son of the hill,” while these words also establish their own patterns of consonance upon “l” and assonance upon “o.” From here networks of similar sounds unfold down Vinvela’s utterance, with “ing” forms ringing throughout” and the “in” of Vinvela’s name appearing again in the form of “when” and the repeated word “wind.” Also, the keyword “love” from Vinvela’s

opening line repeats itself both exactly and in the derivative form “lovely” in the passage. New vowel patterns (“around, “sounds,” “fount,” “mountain”) and new consonantal strains (“rock,” “oak”) establish themselves farther down the text.

Figuratively announcing that in Macpherson’s *Fragments* passages “hear” each other by repeating each other’s sounds, Shilric responds to Vinvela with the words, “what voice is that I hear?” Shilric’s words are organized according to Vinvela’s, as he tells his lover that he has gone off to war by declaring his absence from the very scenes or animals she mentions and using her very words: “nodding rushes,” “fount of the rock,” “hill,” “dogs,” and “stream.” Shilric’s words, however, are also structured by his own ringing repetitions, especially of “afar” and the phrase “no more,” and by patterns of alliteration upon “m,” “l,” and upon “b” and “n” (“bright,” “bow,” “heaven,” “moon, “western”). Vinvela’s reponse to Shilric’s speech, in turn, repeats the sounds he has produced. She continues, for example, the use of the word “wave” and the emphasis in his passage on “n” in “then,” “alone,” “seen,” and “along”; she also weaves in words whose strain of repetition she originally started in her first speech in “hill,” “wind,” and “rustling” – the latter operating as a derivative of “rushes.”

Yet these speeches’ dense sonic character does not totally occlude the story of the characters. We are told amidst these fragments some key pieces of narrative information: the fact that Shilric must go and fight the wars of Fingal and that Vinvela appeals to those he is fighting to spare his life. But the physically affective style that is the driving force of these fragments tends to occlude this narrative. With so many different types of repeated sounds, woven in with the moving rhythm of the sentences of similar length, the reader first experiences the musical effect of the writing. In order to read the fragment as

a narrative rather than as a piece of word-music, in fact, one has to concentrate very hard on stripping away the overwhelming networks of physical affect that are coursing through the words and on discerning the bits of story.

The clear representation of settling, character action, and plot is compromised in these texts, also, by the consistencies found across Macpherson's fragments. The same aspects of landscape, for example, appear in most of the descriptive passages in the fragments. Furthermore, the kinds of narrative information with which we are presented (someone going off to war, someone being killed) is repetitive enough that the information begins to run together and become confused. On a purely verbal level, too, certain keywords like "son," "love and lovely," and "hill" pervade the fragments – examples of leitmotifs running through them. All of these factors, together with the local plays of dense sound in each fragment, tend to foreground language more as a body of physical effects and less as a vehicle for transmitting a story.

Considering how Vinvela's and Shilric's sounds and words generate out of each other's, as well as the general tendency of the sonic, experiential qualities of this verse to overwhelm its representational moments, it makes sense that readers in both Macpherson's time and in modern days tend to respond to the *Fragments* by going into a trancelike or swoonlike state or attempting to compose their own poems of a similar style.<sup>32</sup> Singer inspires singer, song yields song, and sound generates sound, both inside of the musical exchanges that constitute Macpherson's verse and in the interaction between that verse and external readers. Despite the powerful effects of sound in the *Fragments*, however, it is important to remember that they have not abandoned an informational model of text and reading for an experiential one, as attested by the

elements of narrative that occur amidst the dense networks of sound. As in the poems by Thomson, Darwin, Smith, Chatterton, and Ellis which I have addressed and as in Richardson's *Clarissa*, Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Heloise*, and Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Macpherson's text explores the tensions between informational and experiential modes of language, although perhaps with the greatest emphasis on the experiential mode of any text addressed in this chapter.

While the fragment of "Shilric, Vinvela" begins to illustrate how the tensions between narrative and physically affective style unfold in Macpherson's work, a fragment later in the collection entitled "Duchommar, Morna" presents these tensions more overtly. This is true largely because "Duchommar, Morna" is more clotted with ancient-looking and sounding names than any of the others in the collection. These names, nearly all of which are near-anagrams of each other, play sonically off of one another in the speeches made by the title characters, as well as off of the other words that surround them; such words, as seen to some degree in "Shilric, Vinvela," in many cases even seem to generate affectively out of the names. Yet interestingly, Macpherson chooses to provide a sizeable footnote at the beginning of the fragment to announce the "signification," or ideational meaning, of the names. This note not only calls attention to the sheer number of different names in the piece but also suggests that the names will tend to have a largely physical effect if not "informationalized."

The first elements of this poetic piece that the reader sees are its centered title, "Duchommar, Morna," and Duchommar's name just beneath the title as a heading over the words he speaks. But right before those words, an asterisk appears that directs the reader's attention to the note at the bottom of the page. The note reads as follows:

The signification of the names in this fragment are. Dubhchomar, a black well-shaped man. Muirne or Morna, a woman beloved by all. Cormac-cairbre, an unequalled and rough warrior. Cromleach, a crooked hill. Mugruch, a surly gloomy man. Tarman, thunder. Moinie, soft in temper and person.

Unlike notes used by Chatterton, Darwin, and Smith, which gloss items in the text as they appear, this note provides information about the names in the fragment all at once and is the only note in the piece. This means that while the reader can *elect* to go back to the note every time he or she encounters a name in the fragment, the regular *forced* interruption of the main text with notes is not present here as it is in the other poets' texts. Once the fragment proper begins, the names and the words in general shed their informational character and take on the kind of physical power seen in the "Shilric, Vinvela" fragment. This phenomenon tends to enfold the reader in the experience of the fragment itself and push the informational note away from the attention. Consider, for example, the opening exchange between Duchommar and Morna.

#### Duchommar

Morna, thou fairest of women, daughter of Cormac-Carbre! why in the circle of stones, in the cave of the rock, alone? The stream murmureth hoarsely. The blast groaneth in the aged tree. The lake is troubled before thee. Dark are the clouds of the sky. But thou are like snow on the heath. Thy hair like a thin cloud of gold on the top of Cromleach. Thy breasts like two smooth rocks on the hill which is seen from the stream of Brannuin. Thy arms, as two white pillars in the hall of Fingal.

#### Morna

Whence the son of Mugruch, Duchommar the most gloomy of men? Dark are thy brows of terror. Red thy rolling eyes. Does Garve appear on the sea? What of the foe, Duchommar?

In these speeches, ideational or narrative clarity is undermined by several factors. Oblique, fragmented syntax appears in Duchommar's words ("why in the circle of stones,



in the cave of the rock, alone?) and in Morna's ("Whence the son of Mugruch"). The sentences of landscape description in Duchommar's speech are not clearly connected to what has come before, and their almost identical length tends to make their chief effect rhythmic rather than descriptive or representational. This effect is compounded by the assonance and consonance ringing throughout the speech ("tree," "thee," "heath"; "dark," "sky"; "seen from the stream of Branuin"; "pillars in the hall of Fingal").

Furthermore, names in these speeches establish their own sonic relationships, thus achieving an otherworldly character that tends to overwhelm any temporarily informational dimension they had achieved in the context of the note. For example, the names mentioned in the heading and first sentence of Duchommar's speech – Duchommar, Morna, Cormac-Carbre – seem to have been created from a finite pool of just a few letters, in the same way that Blake's names in the prophetic books, as one scholar has noted, seem to spawn other similar names using a common body of letters.<sup>33</sup> Also, the names seem to enact quasi-chemical processes upon each other. "Morna" uses many of the softest letters from the name "Duchommar" while adding an "n." But then "Cormac" takes the "or" part of Morna's name and brings back in the harder "c" sound that first appears in Duchommar. Also, "Carbre" returns upon the "ar" sound of Duchommar, thus rounding out this particular cycle of the transformation of these three names into and out of each other. The same kind of sonic relationships exist between "Mugruch," "Duchommar," and "Garve," the foregrounded names in Morna's speech. In fact, the name "Garve" seems to have a strongly sonic *raison d'être*; it is positioned so awkwardly in the oblique narrative hinted at in the speech, making it unclear whether Garve or Duchommar is the son of Mugruch. The sounds in these names also form

networks with the sounds in the words around them. For instance, in Duchommar's sentences, "But thou art like snow on the heath. Thy hair like a thin cloud of gold on the top of Cromleach," assonantal relationships cohere "heath" and "Cromleach" and the non-name words to each other ("thou" and "cloud," "snow" and "gold"). The sound of "ar" performs the same linking of names to other words in Morna's speech ("Duchommar," "dark," "Garve").

Operating through such local plays of affective relationships among letters, words, and lines, the affective character of Macpherson's *Fragments* provides a strong example of the special power of poetic sound to generate a sensorial experience of the text and to occlude representation. These powers will be explored by Blake, Keats, and Shelley each in his own ways. But Shelley in particular explores how sonic exchanges between voices can operate as musical performance, taking the kinds of techniques that appear in Macpherson's *Fragments* to self-consciously sublime ends in *Prometheus Unbound*.

However, Macpherson's *Fragments* are linked to later physically affective verse by more than technique. The general conflict surrounding Macpherson's text about his authorial position relative to the fragments – is he their author, merely posing as a translator? – is a factual form of the conflict about the relationship between the poet and physically affective language that we will see repeated in more theoretical forms in later poets. If Macpherson is a translator of pieces of old verse that he has collected, then he stands apart from them: the documents are reified as "things" external to him, which he has rendered into English, and with which his poetic self and voice only interact in the liminal space of the notes. (Although the decision to collect and translate these

fragments, if that is all the involvement Macpherson had with them, suggests an interest in oral poetic style, which is replete with several of the sonically affective features I address in this study and is advertised as a preoccupation of several other poets in this period through a literary-cultural phenomenon like the ballad revival.) As Macpherson's modern editors suggest, however, the more likely scenario is that Macpherson had a significant degree of involvement in the authorship of the fragments through his own interpretation of Gaelic stories and oral style;<sup>34</sup> whether Macpherson was an "author" of the fragments in the more dramatic sense of penning the pieces entirely, we can never be sure. Even as an interpreter of oral style, however, Macpherson's authorial self ends up being expressed in the very words and physical effects of the verses and asserted more directly in such settings as the note on names I discussed above. Macpherson's decision to present the fragments in a prose format even though their language much more resembles poetry is another facet of his control over these verses. The prose presentation tends to increase a readerly expectation of narrative content or clarity; yet this expectation, as I have discussed and as contemporary readers like Lord Kames suggest, is constantly overturned. The plot tends to be overwhelmed or undercut by the verses' physical style, and therefore tends to foreground that style and its effects all the more. Whether Macpherson is an author in a looser sense of creative translating or in a stricter sense, the questions being raised are the degree to which the poet has control over the physical effects of language, and how the poet's voice "appears" in the text relative to the potentially autonomous, overwhelming effects of such language. In Macpherson's *Fragments* these queries are provoked but are not a preoccupation. Blake, however, contemplates them deeply and self-consciously in *Jerusalem*.

## Chapter Two:

### “Word, Work, and Wish”: Blake’s Affective Style in *Jerusalem*

Golgonooza is the sum of the words used to make its existence known to us. . . . Indeed, its walls and towers are present wherever words manifest their power to form an order of freestanding autonomy, transcending mere descriptiveness.

– Vincent De Luca, *Words of Eternity: Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime*

Consider again the physical dynamics of a few texts I discussed in Chapter One. In Thomson’s “Winter,” authorial self-chastisement bursts through the terrain of sensuous landscape description. In *Clarissa*, Richardson as “editor” insists upon the integrity of the documents within, which he has merely collected and arranged; but in regular footnotes sometimes half a page in length, he reports his alterations and excisions of letter text and offers commentary on events and characters. In Chatterton’s “The Excelente Balade of Charitie,” an archaic text raises an initial iconic resistance to being read, and once such reading begins, interrupts it at every turn by shunting the reader to footnotes, which again become the locus of the author’s personal translations. In Smith’s “Beachy Head,” a thick passage of natural description refers the reader repeatedly to notes at the end of the volume, which feature not just translations but botanical analyses and observations rendered in a conversational tone. These dynamics suggest a linkage between explorations of linguistic and textual materiality and problems of authorial role. Along with other writers I addressed in Chapter One, that is, Thomson, Richardson, Chatterton, and Smith all appear anxious about their proper “place,” physically and figuratively, in their productions. This anxiousness expresses itself in a paradox. One might expect a certain textual autonomy or authorial anonymity in writing that most exploits the visual character of the print on the page or the sounds and tactility of

language, as Vincent De Luca suggests of William Blake's text presentation in *Jerusalem* when he remarks, "as soon as words become seen as walls, they begin to function as such, firmly outlining and guarding the autonomy of the text."<sup>1</sup> Yet one finds the exact opposite: the authorial voice's attempted invasion or manipulation of the language's physical effects in order to assert presence and control.

Such authorial actions are fueled by an unresolved tension between two different ideas of the literary text. Is it a thing or a series of effects, whose chief function is to generate a particular experience in the reader? Or, more humanely, is it the platform for the authorial "voice," whose expression is meant to establish a personal connection – ideally, "a meeting of the minds" – between author and reader? And, can these two models be successfully combined?<sup>2</sup> This conflict between mechanistic and humanistic notions is largely implicit in the material addressed in Chapter One. For example, when Chatterton's assertions of his linguistic knowledge peep out from the footnotes, as if the authorial personality were confined to the tight and cramped basement beneath the main floor of the solid, iconic medieval text above, the reader feels the tension between the visual antiquarial power of the text-as-thing and the poetic persona who is unsure how to scale or penetrate it; yet, that tension remains a hovering presence, never emerging as an overt preoccupation or as an issue that the poem is actively working to resolve.<sup>3</sup>

In the work of William Blake, however, the idea of the text as material affect and the idea of the text as authorial self-expression confront each other more directly. As just mentioned regarding *Jersusalem*, for instance, passages of poetic text regularly appear as intimidating, seemingly autonomous things or bodies of effects, especially in the prophetic texts. At the same time, Blake claims a radically humanist, confessional model

for his poem, as if his individuality were expressed in every element of his text, when he pleads with the reader in his preface, “be with me. wholly One in Jesus our Lord . . . . “[forgive] what you not approve, & [love] me for this energetic exertion of my talent.”<sup>4</sup>

To complicate matters even further, Blake regularly claims that he is not even the “author” of his poems in the strictest sense, but that his verses were dictated to him as if he were – as Samuel Richardson, James Macpherson, and Thomas Chatterton all portray themselves – a mere editor or collector of someone else’s words or texts. This deflection of authorial agency occurs in Blake’s most notable prophetic poems, as in the opening of *Milton* when he appeals to the Muses to “record the journey of immortal Milton thro’ your Realms/Of terror & mild moony luster . . . Tell also of the False Tongue! vegetated/ Beneath your land of shadows: of its sacrifices. and/Its offerings: even till Jesus, the image of the Invisible God/Became its prey . . . Say first! what moved Milton, who walked about in Eternity/One hundred years” (7: 2-3, 10-13, 16-17), or, even more overtly, as in the account of the origin of *Jerusalem* in its opening plates: “when this verse was first dictated to me I consider’d/a Monotonous Cadence like that used by Milton & Shak-/speare & all writers of English Blank Verse” (Plate 3), and “Of the Sleep of Ulro! and of the passage through/Eternal Death! and of the awaking to Eternal Life/This theme calls me in sleep night after night, & ev’ry morn/Awakes me at sun-rise. then I see the Saviour over me/Spreading his beams of love, & dictating the words of this mild song” (4: 1-5). Though such declarations about authorship are common to prophecy, they attain a special complexity when considered next to Blake’s suggestion that his texts are more self-expressive, showcasing his “talent.”

The uneasy relationship between the physically affective and expressive dimensions of Blake's work has remained largely unscrutinized by critics. Some of the poet's best commentators, of course, have supplied excellent accounts of various aspects of Blake's materially affective style. For example, Susan Wolfson, addressing the poet's early volume *Poetical Sketches*, demonstrates how the poet's radical use of enjambment simultaneously rebels against eighteenth-century poetic practices and jars the reader into rethinking the message of poetic lines.<sup>5</sup> Vincent De Luca's *Words of Eternity* takes a broader look at Blake's style, arguing that many of the poet's most drastic affective strategies form the centerpiece of a "poetics of the sublime" in the prophetic books. De Luca follows Blake's own physical metaphors for his verse ("I call them by their English names: English, the *rough basement*./Los built the *stubborn structure* of the Language, acting against/Albion's melancholy, who must else have been a Dumb despair," 36: 58-60, my emphasis). He describes in terms of terrain and architecture the two sublime modes that intermingle in any given prophetic text: a "bardic sublime" characterized by "[narrative] discontinuity . . . leaps and haltings . . . sudden disjunctions and mismatched interfaces . . . a rhetorical equivalent to the rough topography of the Burkean landscape"; and, an "iconic sublime" characterized by the use of a passage of verse as a physical icon that presents "an image of totality, of an 'all' concentrated within formal bounds."<sup>6</sup> One of the best examples of the latter phenomenon, as noted earlier, is what De Luca calls "a wall of words": a massing together of words in which their visual dimension, "their height, breadth, and density of figuration, are foregrounded," which is intended simultaneously to impress the reader and to "check him" by its daunting resistance.<sup>7</sup>

The critic who focuses perhaps most directly on the material aspects of Blake's work is Jerome McGann, who approaches the poems from a bibliographical standpoint. In his chapter on Blake in *Towards a Literature of Knowledge*, for example, McGann identifies material elements of the prophetic poems that take the reader off guard and defy interpretive assimilation or cohesion with the rest of the text. Examples are gouged out lines from the opening plate of *Jerusalem* or, in *Milton*, absent quotation marks, sense-interrupting lineations and plate-breaks, and single lines that are spatially and ideationally severed from surrounding stanzas. McGann particularly focuses on how such bibliographical features render the identity of speakers unclear in *Milton*, Blake's autobiographical poem; this is the sense in which McGann addresses the question of how material style relates to the expression of the authorial voice. McGann stresses how the absence of quotation marks and spatial autonomy of lines like "Mark well my words! they are of your eternal salvation" or "So Los spoke!" throws into question who speaks both these lines themselves and the lines that precede and follow them – Blake *in propria persona*, Los, or the Bard. McGann stresses the material fissures and challenges of Blake's prophetic texts in order to predicate a more general point: that such aspects exist because Blake poems are conceived not as coherent forms but as actions "designed to 'move' the reader and force the reader "continually to revise [his or her] perceptions of things."<sup>8</sup> The Blakean view of truth that is argued through his texts, McGann contends, is that "delayed understanding cannot undo the previous imaginations which the text has generated . . . . uncertainties, and even misunderstandings, are as full of truth as comprehensions and 'firm persuasions.'"<sup>9</sup>



The idea of the text as an action is a key tenet of my argument in this chapter, in that Blake's physically affective style explores a certain series of actions upon the reader; Keats and Shelley, I will later show, by definition deploy language as a physical action when they explore how poetic language can become a charm or spell. But this office of language in Blake must not be addressed only in negative terms – how the absence of text or conventional punctuation impacts the reader. One must also address the key passages in Blake's work that through their positive traits – the visual and sonic dynamics of their language – physically overwhelm the reader and occlude conceptual meaning. What is more, one must address the problem especially contemplated by *Jerusalem*: how the effects of such passages relate to the communication of Blake's authorial voice.

Wolfson's, De Luca's, and McGann's studies, moreover, tend to focus upon the visual aspects of Blake's style – not his equally important use of sonic and rhythmic effects and his ample figurative rumination upon these and other techniques. The self-reflexive dimension of Blake's verse, however, has received one focused treatment in Roger Easson's article, "William Blake and His Reader in *Jerusalem*." Easson argues that "*Jerusalem* is a poem about itself, about the relation between the author and reader," contending that Blake's poem is "composed of an allegoric drama embedded in an obscuring matrix of narration," and that once the characteristics of the narrative are identified and it is "strip[ped] . . . away from the body of the drama," one can see clearly that that drama tells the story of the poet and his reader.<sup>10</sup> This drama is composed of two interlaced "cycles": the Albion cycle, which presents the fall of Albion, who in Easson's reading is the reader-figure, and the resulting ruination of the ideal transformative power of *Jerusalem*; and the Los cycle, which tells of Los's, or Blake's,

struggle to keep the Divine Vision in time of trouble, which for Easson entails Los's temptation by his Spectre and other enemies.<sup>11</sup>

My account of Blake's affective style in this chapter will focus on *Jerusalem*, the work in Blake's oeuvre that is distinguished for the subtlety and complexity with which it uses and contemplates material affect. Other Blakean texts, of course, seek to affect the reader by physical means. *The Songs of Innocence and Experience*, for example, often use rhythm, repetition, and other sound effects to create a "sensation" of either innocence or experience in the reader. Compare, for example, how these devices operate to different effects in "The Lamb" and "The Tyger." The former poem features ample repetitions, cast as refrains, of lines like "Little Lamb, who made thee?" This line displays a simple rhythmic pattern with a subtle medial pause; such features create in the reader a sense of comfort and simplicity. In "The Tyger," by contrast, repetition, rhythm, and rhyme create a more dire feeling, as in "Tyger, tyger burning bright/In the forests of the night/What immortal hand or eye/Could frame thy fearful symmetry?" The urgent rhythm, heavy with stresses, forges ahead without pause, and the off-rhyme of "eye" and "symmetry" connotes the skewed, tumultuous nature of life in a state of Experience, despite the ironic fact that the two lines containing these rhymes speak of an idea of perfect alignment – symmetry. (As the ironically voiced morals at the end of several *Songs of Experience* demonstrate, irony is itself a feature of Experience.) Furthermore, Blake's prophetic works aside from *Jerusalem* contain examples of physically affective style. *Milton*, for instance, is a key text for what De Luca calls "the bardic sublime" style, which features sudden shifts of subject or emphasis and narrative disjunctions; these events, though they are largely shocks to the reader's ideational comprehension of

the text, still exert their suddenness in a way experienced as physical jarring. *Milton* also features passages that are more purely physically affective – that is, far less clearly purposed toward informational or narrative modes of discourse. A long passage of stockpiled proper names on Plate 37, for example, visually overwhelms the reader and blocks out clear meaning and understanding in the same way as similar passages in *Jerusalem*. Finally, *The Four Zoas*, though an unfinished manuscript poem, is infamous for passages that display both the forms of physical affect I have just mentioned.

What distinguishes *Jerusalem* as a worthy focus for studying Blake’s physically affective style is its rich interpenetration of both visual and sonic techniques; the fact that its preoccupation with physically affective style is both praxeological and theoretical, or self-reflexive; and that this self-reflection often centers upon the important but critically under-discussed question of how Blake’s physical poetics relates to the communication of the authorial voice. This character of the poem is particularly displayed in a neglected but important group of plates, which I define as Plates 10 through 16. These plates focus through both direct and indirect means on discussing and describing Golgonooza, which is Los’s city of Art & Manufacture.<sup>12</sup> Due to stylistic richness and complexity, this section of the poem constitutes a fertile field for studying how Blake uses physically affective language. Yet because Golgonooza represents the idea of “art,” and because these plates’ (and thus the poem’s) central portrayal of Golgonooza is an elaborate, physically overwhelming description that executes and implicitly proposes an effects-driven, presentational model of art, this section of *Jerusalem* has a broader importance. Specifically, these plates are preoccupied at the levels of poetic style, character, and first-person authorial statements with the practical issue of the different ways poetic language

may be exploited physically and their impact upon readers. Through what I will call their “stylistic plot,” or their series of materially affective passages and metacritical reflections, these plates reveal Blake’s concern about the ultimate use value of physically affective style for transforming readerly perception, conveying his poetic messages, and clearly communicating his authorial voice.

These points are crucial because they suggest that Blake’s physically affective style is less controlled or orchestrated than critics have argued, and at key poetic moments is more exploratory and ruminative in nature. This is nowhere more true than in the symbolically weighted passages concerning Golgonooza, where the very nature of art is up for questioning. These passages suggest that even if Blake’s poem aspires to create an “Eternal” perspective or imaginative mode of perception in the reader, it may have less confidence about the proper methods by which to execute this goal. Accordingly, the Golgonooza description emerges as somewhat unstable terrain for Blake – characterized by a certain amount of stylistic trial and error, and contemplation of that process. Indeed, in the concept of a city of art that is embodied in the Golgonooza description and reflected in its associated passages, “English [is a] rough basement” (36:58): a foundational linguistic space wherein we find complete authorial control only in the form of a controlled experiment.<sup>13</sup>

What unsettles and roughens the terrain of the Golgonooza plates is the poem’s persistent rumination on how materially affective style relates to authorial voice. This is an issue, we will see, that Blake foregrounds through various interpolations of his voice in the passages surrounding the Golgonooza description, such as the key textual emendation of adding Plate 10 to the poem, which foregrounds the voice theme, narration

of what Los the poet-figure “sees” when he looks at his creation, Golgonooza, and finally the entry of first-person authorial speech.<sup>14</sup> These interjections, in turn, raise the prior problem of defining the slippery, unwieldy concept of authorial voice through their contemplation of some fundamental questions: Is the poet’s “voice” the same as his or her “message” or “vision”? If so, can language that operates largely as a body of physical effects convey that vision or voice?

*Jerusalem* does more simply to raise these questions than to supply concrete answers, and this chapter will mine the Golgonooza plates as the richest ground where Blake’s poem demonstrates its preoccupation with these problems. The particular focus of the Golgonooza plates has an additional advantage: it serves to situate Blake’s exploration of physically affective style relative to the poets I discussed in Chapter One and to those I will discuss in later chapters, Keats and Shelley. *Jerusalem*’s stylistic plot reveals that Blake’s experimentation with both visual and sonic styles is richer and more elaborate than that deployed by such authors as Thomson, Macpherson, Chatterton, and Smith; his metacritical stance toward his style, which engages in open-ended reflection on whether and how such style renders conceptual meaning and the authorial voice, adds a deeper complexity to his interest in physically affective verse and ties him to the same forms of metacritique that happen in Keats and Shelley. For example, it will be clear that the problem of how the poet’s individual voice can be expressed most accurately and effectively (a preoccupation of Blake’s work because of the unique, idiosyncratic character of his vision) is echoed in Keats’s ample figurative rumination in major poems on whether one achieves poetic greatness through humane, confessional speech, such as the nightingale’s “pouring forth [its] soul,” or through sheer beauty and affective

intensity in language.<sup>15</sup> And, Shelley's figurative contemplation of affective strategy in *Prometheus Unbound* resembles Blake's in *Jerusalem* – especially with regard to how incantatory or intensely physical poetic style should be used in a poem that aspires to disseminate distinct intellectual messages and to engender social change. Of course, to suggest that Blake's material style sketches problems that appear as major preoccupations of Keats's and Shelley's verse is not to argue that Blake's poetry is less complex and refined than theirs; the intricate difficulty of Blake's mythology and composite art clearly prevents such a conclusion. Instead, it is to try to resist the commonly indulged temptation, stemming from the challenges of Blake's unusual mythology and artistic methods, to focus on the poet's uniqueness, and, through the poetic field of inquiry and organization of this study, to try to reap the benefits of perspective and understanding that come from reading Blake's work through the lens of other period work, and, in turn, reading that other work through the lens of Blake's. Viewed in terms of this comparison to the poets I discussed in Chapter One and to Keats and Shelley, Blake's stylistic techniques and self-reflections in *Jerusalem* serve as a kind of primer for the period on the key potentialities and tensions for how physically affective style relates to meaning.

## I.

Before delving into the text of *Jerusalem*, it will be useful to examine more closely how critics negotiate the relationship between material affect and the authorial voice in Blake's texts. If the subjects both of Blake's material style and his more personally expressive articulations are invoked within a single scholarly treatment, the emphasis tends to fall upon just one of these topics, with the other being treated only intermittently or reductively. There is a tension, for instance, between the main activity

of De Luca's *Words of Eternity* – to provide a thorough, detailed description of Blake's sublime style – and the problems both of the intentionality of that style, and of how much it may be explained as William Blake's expression of his personality. This tension appears when De Luca regularly declares that various “sublime” stylistic features are “designed” or “intended” to have given effects on readers. De Luca recognizes this tension when he declares that he does not want to give an overly “imperial” impression of Blake; he momentarily reflects upon Blake's “risk [of] exposing the most experimental and unsettling reaches of his poetic conception to possible embarrassment and scorn . . . . [and his act of] setting the reader before him, in an act of faith and trust, first as a brother, then as another self.”<sup>16</sup> Yet this statement, though an attempt to show that Blake is willing to relinquish a certain amount of control to the reader by risking embarrassment, actually perpetuates the notion of Blake's control of every element of his text. Even the most difficult moments in Blake, though they are “experimental and unsettling reaches,” are still connected to the command-control of Blake's intentions, or his “poetic conception.” De Luca's statement about Blake's self-exposure also raises the problem of the extent to which Blake's material style may be read as self-expression. De Luca at first attributes the traits of that style to Blake's “poetic conception,” thus suggesting that they are less marks of individuality and more vehicles for a body of imaginative ideas which Blake wants to disseminate. But then he moves to explain Blake's style – especially what he calls the iconic mode, whose highly physical uses of text and word seem so autonomous and independent of the poet's voice – as pure self-expression, or an “uncovering and identification of the intellectual self.”

The alternative to De Luca's approach, of course, is not to subtract Blake from the interpretive equation and try to explain his style merely in terms of its effects, as if they were autonomous and as if it were undesirable and impossible to connect those effects to both the intention and the personality of William Blake. Such a method would be especially inadequate in a text like *Jerusalem*, where almost from the first line the poet suggests his personal investment and bare self-expression in his poem, as well as that most radical and provocative of declarations of intentionality, "every word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place" (Plate 3). But there is a balance to be struck between describing what the text does and arguing authorial design and self-expression. There are passages in Blake, after all, which are so insistently physical (not only the "walling" of text, but also deluges of sonic and rhythmic intensity, both of which phenomena sometimes intermingle in a single passage) that they are most usefully approached simply by showing how they operate, or what they do. Such an interpretive decision is not so much a violation of some Blakean intention or nuance of personality, hidden beneath the textual sands too deep ever to be uncovered, as it is a taking advantage of the fact that Blake's prophetic poems contain textual passages that simply *present themselves* as a body of effects. These passages ask not to be "solved," as problems posed to the concepts of intentionality or expressive art, but instead to be addressed as *themselves interrogative* of the very categories of "intention" and "expression," as De Luca suggests in a general way when he writes, "all [Blake's] measured orders – numerical sets, parallel lines of words forming visual rows, blocks of text forming walls – make the form of the poetry in which they intrude more problematic rather than less so."<sup>17</sup> There are cases in *Jerusalem*, I would add, in which Blake's



material forms provide a particularly acute metacritique on what stylized language has to do with authorial “intention” and “self-expression.” These are the provocative instances where shortly before, shortly after, or in the middle of a strongly material affective passage or set of passages, Blake’s first-person voice abruptly enters the text, often seeking to explain his poetry or pleading for divine aid, and thus suggesting a certain degree of self-consciousness or anxiety around the issue of an extremely physical style. This occurs prominently after the Golgonooza description, when Blake’s verse literally juxtaposes materially affective and expressive modes of poetry.

Between the two subjects of Blake’s self-expression and his materially affective style, De Luca’s book tends to emphasize the latter, dedicating itself to characterizing that style as richly as possible within the context of the prophetic poems. Morris Eaves, by contrast, dedicates his study, *William Blake’s Theory of Art*, entirely to the subject of Blake’s expressive theory of works of art, the artist himself, and the artist’s relation with the audience, drawing largely from Blake’s statements in his letters and in works such as the *Descriptive Catalogue* and only in a limited way from Blake’s literary productions. Concentrating on Blake’s repudiation of color on the grounds that it blurs and obscures identity, and on his preference for and emphasis on line, on the grounds that it expresses the artist’s self-definition and integrity, Eaves traces out Blake’s theory: that the artist’s imagination is synonymous with identity or selfhood; that the work of art is first and foremost the expression of that identity; and that the artist, in facing his audience and fearing that they will not understand or accept the “self” that is the work of art, responds not necessarily by withdrawing into solipsism, as goes the stereotype of the Romantic poet, but instead by defining his audience as a personal friend or set of friends with

whom he seeks intimate union and mutual identification.<sup>18</sup> In a rare lingering upon Blake's poetry instead of theoretical statements, Eaves turns to *Jerusalem* further to substantiate this extremely human model of relations between artist and audience, and work and audience, for which he has argued in Blake. He draws upon the two places in the epic that most openly invoke such a model: the prefatorial statements quoted earlier and the ecstatic vision of perfected communication between human beings in the last plates: "When in Eternity Man converses with Man they enter/Into each others Bosom (which are Universes of delight)/In mutual interchange" (88: 3-5).

Yet what is missed, through this focus upon the very beginning and the very end of *Jerusalem*, are the rich and complex stylistic events, authorial self-presentations, and self-reflexive passages that occur in between and that consider – more indirectly, but arguably more richly – the very problems of the identity of artist, text, and audience to which Eaves dedicates his study. *Jerusalem*, first of all, is not just "about art in one way or another": it is a complex reflection on the definition and proper methods of poetry – particularly on what role affective style is to have. Furthermore, it is the rich middle of *Jerusalem* that complicates Eaves's theory that Blake's poetry is raw self-expression that seeks to establish an intimate and honest relationship with the audience. Between the two idealistic flanks of the Preface's appeal to the reader and the peaceful model of communication expressed in the quotation from Plate 88 is the poem's more anxious and skeptical rumination on the image the author must present to the reader, and its suggestion that certain forms of affective style conceal rather than reveal the authorial self, hinder rather than aid the clarity of the author's message. The most important site for the exposure of these tensions is the Golgonooza plates.

The latter, however, must also be seen in the context of *Jerusalem's* larger preoccupation with matters of affect. This is evinced in the poem's concerns at various points with the motifs of "voice," "persuasion," "song," and "cadence," as well as its passages of briefly onomatopoeic sound or striking verse rhythm, or of enticing, stylistically self-aware statements such as "English, the rough basement./Los built the stubborn structure of the Language" (3:58-59). In *Jerusalem*, first of all, we find certain moments where the notion of the poet's voice is invoked as a kind of foundational concept for the poem's broader considerations of the general affective potential of verse. Los uses this motif, for example, when he implores Albion and his legion to "hear" and "obey" his voice as he torturously considers how he will succeed in "awakening" Albion, a figure for Blake's individual reader or body of readers. In Chapter Two, also, Los contemplates his proper role in addressing Albion's sons by crying out poignantly, "how shall I them perswade" (45:38); some lines later the speaker tells us, more specifically, that Los is hoping to impact his listeners through a very physically affective form of verbiage, "Los was all astonishment & terror: he trembled . . . but the interiors of Albion's fibres & nerves were hidden from [him]" (46:3-4). In such moments, Blake metaphorically contemplates the very nature of "persuasion" as well as of the authorial voice, and what expression the latter could have in a language that stimulates the body.

Additionally, there are times when Los airs a suspicion of sonically dense language that produces soporific, hypnotic effects, such as that used by the Daughters of Albion when they attempt to "woo" him with songs (84:25). (Interestingly, the Daughters use their seductive music to lure Los when they appeal to him, "let thy voice he heard" (84:28), thus drawing a provocative contrast between the humanity of the poet's voice or

self-expression and the semi-magical, sonic seductions of “song.”) But the poem’s wariness of “cadences” (as these kinds of sonically affective utterances are called in other passages of *Jerusalem*) has a significance beyond the local struggles between the poem’s individual characters: it registers the broader antipathy in Blake’s work, discussed by Eaves, against blending and blurring, which, as Blake suggests in *The Descriptive Catalogue*, are caused by an emphasis on color instead of line in painting. Yet such effects can also occur within networks of absorptive sound in poetry, a fact of which Blake appears well aware in *Jerusalem* and which, despite his apparent ambivalence toward “cadences,” he appears to exploit strategically in key passages. Such a use of highly sonic language appears, ironically, in those “walled” passages, which are epitomized in the blocking of lines that simultaneously describes and embodies Golgonooza (as De Luca comments, “[d]escribe’ . . . is perhaps not the best word [for the stylistic resources employed by the city description]; these things *are* the city”).<sup>19</sup> While, at first look, the Golgonooza passage seems entirely visual in its effects, it generates strong sonic effects when read closely, even alternating those effects with visual ones line for line. This is just one example of the complex engagement with matters of style in *Jerusalem*: the poem’s sometimes negative position on sonic affect, contrasted with the Golgonooza plates’ exploratory study of the nature and value of incantational sound in poetry, especially in conjunction with visual textual effects.

The Golgonooza description and related passages, then, raise issues of importance to *Jerusalem* and to Blake’s poetry *tout court*. Yet the small amount of existing commentary on these parts of Blake’s poem has failed to establish, in the first place, an adequate definition of the idea of “Golgonooza” or even of the definite boundaries of the

textual section that describes or comments on it. What is more, we have no thorough account of the Golgonooza passage's stylistic intricacies, or of the reflection, both in the city description and surrounding passages, of Blake's purposes in *Jerusalem* and artistic theory in general.

Critical definitions of Blake's city often do little to clarify the significance of Golgonooza and the passage that portrays it because they concentrate either on what Golgonooza *is* at the level of concept, or on what the passage depicting Golgonooza *does* at the level of affective language, but not both at once.<sup>20</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell's account of the city is an example of an interpretive separation of Golgonooza the idea and Golgonooza the presentation within the commentary of a single critic. Mitchell draws a connection between the serpent temple that is illustrated in the background of Plate 92 and that Blake calls an "image of infinite./Shut up in finite revolutions" (*Europe* 10.21-22), and the city of Golgonooza, which Mitchell presents as the "work of the poet" in *Jerusalem*:

The stones of the [serpent] temple are the one hundred plates of *Jerusalem* perceived as a total spatial form which unites closure and openness, eternal perfection and ongoing imperfection. Viewed as a translation of themes within the poem, the serpent temple is Golgonooza, the city of art-in-progress, the "new Golgotha" which is both the new place of sacrifice (Self-annihilation) that replaces the old doctrine of atonement, and the new "place of the skull," the new consciousness of eternity in time rather than beyond it.<sup>21</sup>

Mitchell's argument that Golgonooza is the "work of the poet" begins to suggest the most important aspect of its definition: that it is a concept, as well as a descriptive portrayal, through which Blake reflects on the very problem of defining poetic work and on the proper linguistic strategies for accomplishing such work. Yet Mitchell treats the Golgonooza description – a key site for the kinds of reflection I just mentioned – as a

separate subject from the ones he addresses in the quote above. His claims about the city description are brief but provocative: “[In the instances] [w]here Blake does pause to describe a fixed object, such as the city of Golgonooza, the result is anything but a visualizable set of images . . . . Blake does not move, as Spenser or Thomson does, from one picture or visualizable scene to another, but rather from vision to vision – and these visions tend to be not visual but synaesthetic, tactile, and phantasmagoric.”<sup>22</sup> This assessment highlights a key trait of the Golgonooza passage: its tendency visually to obscure what it describes and to stimulate other senses (especially the ear) just as extensively, if not more. This proliferation of non-visual affective strategy is quite provocative in a passage that exerts striking visual effects at the large-scale level of illuminated plates, and that is followed by the intrusion of Blake’s authorial voice in various forms almost obsessively telling the reader what he “sees” – first through the narration of Los’s view of Golgonooza and then through first-person authorial speech.

De Luca, in fact, is the critic who has most attentively tried to assess the basic stylistic traits of the Golgonooza passage and to suggest how they affect the reader. Yet De Luca’s approach to the passage is piecemeal, excising bits of it that exemplify the traits of Blake’s sublime style which he is trying to describe. For example, he singles out the following four lines from the Golgonooza description in the section of his book on Blake’s “walls of words”:

And sixty-four thousand Genii, guard the Eastern Gate:  
 And sixty-four thousand Gnomes, guard the Northern Gate:  
 And sixty-four thousand Nymphs, guard the Western Gate:  
 And sixty-four thousand Fairies, guard the Southern Gate: (13:26-29).

De Luca comments on the perfect rectilinear alignment of the repeated phrases, claiming that it is “more immediately apparent than the meanings of the lines” and that in the line

group in general, “verticality moves into rectangularity.”<sup>23</sup> Yet this line group is the most blockish of the passage describing Golgonooza, which, though it is partially characterized by visually noticeable repetitions and the blocking of lines through capitalization and verbal alignment, is also distinguished for its aural and rhythmic techniques: incantatory repetitions and other forms of sonic networking. These sonic techniques exert their effects upon the reader as he or she begins to read the passage line for line – after the large-scale blockage, caused by the sublime “word walling” that one experiences on first approaching the Golgonooza plates – and intermingle themselves with smaller-scale visual effects throughout the city description. Sonic affect turns out, also, to be a major issue in the Golgonooza plates’ figurative reflection on the advantages and disadvantages of using different forms of physical style. De Luca does acknowledge the city description’s sonic qualities, noting the “rhythmic incantation” of the six-line group beginning “And the Four points are thus beheld in Great Eternity” (12:54), and is sensitive to the combined stimulation of the eye and ear elsewhere in *Jerusalem*. But Blake’s combined visual and sonic style is especially significant in the Golgonooza passage because of the self-reflexive lines that flank the city description or occur amidst it, serving as a guide for how to understand the description and its related passages.

One commentator has attempted to define both what Golgonooza is and what the city description does or is intended to do to the reader. James Bogan articulates what Golgonooza is relative to the other important cities in *Jerusalem* (London, Babylon, and Jerusalem), claiming:

Golgonooza is a place within Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the Eternal City whereas Golgonooza is within Time, being built by Los towards Eternity. The positive qualities of Golgonooza are congruent with those of Jerusalem . . . . The four cities [in the poem] are interrelated. In the

process of assimilating London to Golgonooza, there is a struggle with the devastating influences of Babylon. Drawing the laborers of Golgonooza on is the hope of Jerusalem restored. The relation of Babylon to Jerusalem is negation, but that of Golgonooza to Jerusalem is one of growing correspondence.<sup>24</sup>

Bogan's central objective is to illustrate how Golgonooza the city and Golgonooza the descriptive passage are intended to serve as a multi-dimensional mandala-map. His explanation of the mandala follows that of Carl Jung, who defines the mandala as "a magic circle" that has a "distinct tendency towards quadrapite structure"; this circle has a healing power, reducing "confusion to order" and bringing "the attention . . . back to an inner, sacred domain, which is the source and goal of the soul and which contains the unity of life and consciousness."<sup>25</sup> Bogan argues that the building of Golgonooza comes early in *Jerusalem* because it is intended to serve as a mandala for Albion, acting as "a bastion of dynamic order amidst the widespread collapse in Albion's soul,"<sup>26</sup> but also for the reader. The reader of *Jerusalem* can create and contemplate the mental image of Golgonooza by using Blake's city description as "instructions"; this activity will lead his or her senses "to a state beyond the senses . . . . to a realm where energy and vision are interfused . . . . [and] 'the mind . . . may pass beyond its usual fetters' . . . ."<sup>27</sup> Yet Bogan never addresses in detail the actual affective traits of Blake's language in the Golgonooza passage, specifies how the reader is able to sense Golgonooza's cosmic or spiritual significance, or examines how these two subjects are related. His account of the Golgonooza passage thus ultimately remains abstract until he notes in passing that Blake's vision of Golgonooza is only rendered in words and not images: "Blake has deliberately avoided drawing the visions of Golgonooza and of the fourfold Albion. That work is left to the reader."<sup>28</sup> This point suggests the link between Blake's city description



and the operation of magic or a spell by suggesting that the power of Blake's vision is tied up inextricably with the physical effects of the words that convey that vision.

Indeed, I will show that the Golgonooza passage is dedicated precisely to exploring words as overwhelming physical power, and, together with surrounding passages, to contemplating what such a style has to do with building a city of art or with accomplishing *Jerusalem's* larger goal of transforming England into a more benevolent, compassionate nation. The Golgonooza plates also show us how Blake, through Los and the city he is building, depicts a miniature version of his own activity in writing *Jerusalem*. Or, to frame this point in the language Mitchell uses: Golgonooza is a city of "art-in-progress" that is the product of Los's "new consciousness of eternity in time," just as the poem *Jerusalem* is "art-in-progress" that displays Blake's "consciousness of eternity in time" and tries to create that kind of consciousness in the reader. With the achievement of each reader's "new consciousness," furthermore, Blake gets closer to building a state of communal benevolent consciousness and a new form of human relations that together will constitute Jerusalem the city. Golgonooza, in this view, is more than the "city of art" or even the "city of art-in-progress": it is a city of *metacritical* art, or art that is always ruminating upon its own traits and efficacy, even as it is being built. This metacriticism is carried out through the stylistic strategies of the city description itself, which presents Golgonooza to the reader, but especially through the second-order reflections on Golgonooza in the passages surrounding the description.

## II.

The Golgonooza description, which begins on Plate 12, cannot be properly understood without discussing the related passages that lead up to it and work to present

an idealistic portrait of Los's city of art. This portrait is first painted through a distinct series of stanzas that discuss the three stages of the artistic process for the work of art that is Golgonooza: Los's original conception and impetus for building the city (inspiration), his building of it (creation), and the response of his sons and daughters (reception).

This series of passages begins on Plate 10 with the mention that the building of Golgonooza is underway and the accompanying account of Los's battle with his Spectre. Los implores the Spectre to listen to him, saying, "[o]bey my voice & never deviate from my will/And I will be merciful to thee: beorpe thou invisible to all/To whom I make thee invisible, but chief to my own Children/O Spectre of Urthona: Reason not against their dear approach/Nor them obstruct with thy temptations of doubt & despair" (10:29-33). The Spectre makes a pathetic speech, denying that God feels pity and compassion; arguing that God delights in sacrifice and offering; claiming that his own prayers for compassion, mercy, and pity have not been heard; and attesting that he has been created to be the Contrary of God, "all evil . . . & forever dead" (10:47-57). In making these claims, the Spectre may appear to be a kind of anti-Blake: either an alter ego to the "real William Blake" who espouses the exact opposite of the philosophies Blake wants to convey in *Jerusalem*; or, possibly, the type of a reader who may rebel against Blake and his poem by trying to read through the lens of reason instead of imagination, or with the skepticism portrayed by the Spectre.<sup>29</sup> Yet given that the struggle between Los and the Spectre comes in the context of Blake's figurative plotting of the artistic process and is clearly meant to illustrate elements of the conception/inspiration stage, the Spectre here more likely represents the Blakean alter ego who exercises the powerful negativizing power.

This contentious dialogue between Los and the Spectre, more importantly, prioritizes the concept of the poet's voice, an emphasis that would not have occurred had not Blake specially inserted Plate 10 into the poem where it did not exist before. As David Erdman's textual notes to *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake* indicate, the only significant revision of any material in the plates this chapter examines, 10-16, in any of the five extant complete copies of *Jerusalem* through which the poem is known is the addition of Plate 10 between Plates 9 and 11.<sup>30</sup> Of course, the logic behind Blake's manipulations of his plates, whether in the notoriously challenging case of the *Songs of Innocence and Experience* or here in *Jerusalem*, is a labyrinthine subject that has led to multiple books and articles and that cannot be adequately treated here. Nevertheless, the significance of Plate 10's insertion for this chapter's argument is worth remarking. Plate 10 is the poem's first mention, in the narrator's voice, of the building of Golgonooza (earlier, in the poem's introductory plates, Blake records in his first-person voice what topics the poem *Jerusalem* will consist of, including "the building of Golgonooza," 5:24, but the actual poetic material concerning Golgonooza's construction and meaning does not begin until Plate 10). Almost immediately following is Los's battle with his Spectre, the climax of which is Los's plea, "obey my voice" (10:29). The battle is the poem's first major scene following its announcement, "[t]herefore Los stands in London building Golgonooza" (10:17), as well as the only place in all of what I call the group of Golgonooza plates (and one of the few places in the entire poem) where the motif of Los's voice is directly invoked. For these reasons, the scene establishes the clear expression of Los's voice as a crucial element of the city of art that he is building, and figuratively suggests that the readerly perception of Blake's voice is a major goal and

self-reflexive concern for *Jerusalem*. The Golgonooza description follows shortly after; its strong physical effects, which seem so autonomous and evacuated of the authorial voice, must be read with attention to the concept of the poet's voice, whose importance is clearly announced through Blake's special insertion of Plate 10.

The rest of Plate 10 also reveals that the authorial voice cannot communicate meaning without some significant internal struggle, and possibly the deception of the reader by hiding certain elements of the authorial vision or experience. When Los implores the Spectre to obey his voice and enlists him to play a role in the building of Golgonooza, he also wants to make the Spectre "invisible," especially to the specified audience of his sons and daughters. This further corroborates the poem's suggestion that Blake wishes carefully to control what image he projects before the reader – or, what voice he speaks in. Implicitly, the poet's audience, even the immediate circle most likely to be sympathetic to him, cannot be won over without at least the appearance of this control. Making the Spectre "invisible" thus attempts to hide the influence of negative spiritual forces, which are assumed to contaminate Blake's artistic vision but, in being suppressed, are at the same time crucial in fuelling and forming that vision. This psychic drama has an analogy in the stylistic plot of the whole of *Jerusalem*, wherein dense poetic sound is at times regarded skeptically because of its lulling, soporific properties but takes a significant role in the Golgonooza passage. Sonic affect thus becomes the poem's stylistic abject: rejected at the level of plot, as when the Daughters of Albion try to lure Los with their hypnotic songs, and yet employed in key stylistic passages. Indeed, the poem's portrayal of the city of art, or of the concept of art in general, is deeply dependent on sonic effects, suggesting Blake's position that poetry must rely on sound – no matter

how soporific or hypnotic – in order to be “affectively effective.” As I will discuss, the question of the proper role of sound in poetry continues to be figuratively pondered by passages that succeed the Golgonooza description and reaches a tentative resolution in Los’s song at Plate 85.

In the brief account of Los’s building of Golgonooza that follows the scene with the Spectre, we continue to see an idealistic portrait of the city of art taking shape: “& in his ladles the Ore/He lifted, pouring it into the clay ground prepar’d with art;/Striving with Systems to deliver Individuals from those Systems;/That whenever any Spectre began to devour the Dead,/He might feel the pain as if a man gnawed at his own tender nerves” (11:3-7). Golgonooza is “prepared” art, or art that is more pre-ordered than spontaneous; it is a peculiar combination of traits that somehow participate in a System and yet contain the power to deliver its participating audience out of that System; and, it is an experience designed, to some degree, to create pain or at least sublime shock. Following this brief portrait, in turn, is a passage that illustrates the final stage of the artistic process: reception. Yet this scene may be more accurately described as a Blakean reception fantasy:

Then Erin came forth from the Furnaces, & all the Daughters of Beulah  
 Came from the Furnaces, by Los’s might power for Jerusalem’s  
 Sake: walking up and down among the Spaces of Erin:  
 And the Sons and Daughters of Los came forth in perfection lovely!  
 And the Spaces of Eric reach’d from the starry heighth, to the starry depth.

Los wept with exceeding joy & all wept with joy together! . . . .  
 But when the joy of meeting was exhausted in loving embrace;  
 Again they lament. Oh what shall we do for lovely Jerusalem?

(11:8-13, 16-17)

The response of the figurative readers of Golgonooza to Los’s work of art is to emerge from the “Furnaces” remade. Los’s art has managed to make the single impression upon

his audience of his “mighty power for Jerusalem’s sake,” and the result is not only that they show their allegiance to him, but also, in the case of the Sons and Daughters of Los, that they display “perfection lovely.” What is more, the now intimately joined party of artist and audience shares a deep emotional connection, weeping together for the same collectively perceived purposes: first, the joy of their transformation and solidarity, but then the “lament” that Jerusalem has not yet been achieved. In this communal sharing of emotion, the figurative audience of the Daughters of Beulah and the Sons and Daughters of Los is answering the call that Blake issues to his Christian readership in the opening of Chapter Four, “Let every Christian as much as in him lies engage himself openly & publicly before all the World in some Mental pursuit for the Building up of Jerusalem” (77). This extremely idealistic portrayal of the relation between artist and audience is then tempered by Los’s subsequent comments, which espouse his despair (although not without also attesting that he “saw the finger of God go forth/Upon [his] Furnaces” and that “God is within, & without! he is even in the depths of Hell!”(11:10-11, 15). It is also tempered by the lengthy, intricate portrayal of Golgonooza that will shortly occur, which suggests that the features of “art,” as they are embodied in the city description, are less orchestrated and controlled than the preceding account of creation and reception would have us think.

The idealization of Golgonooza as art enters its second phase just before the city description itself, with a peculiar stanza that reads as if it is trying to translate the strange and detailed portrayal of the city that will follow it. Blake’s narrator has just relayed that “[t]errified at the sublime Wonder, Los stood before his Furnaces . . . . And [he and his

Labourers] builded Golgonooza: terrible eternal labour!” when suddenly, with a rhetorical question, he shifts to a more direct mode of addressing his audience:

What are those golden builders doing? where was the burying-place  
 Of soft Ethinthus? near Tyburn’s fatal Tree? is that  
 Mild Zions hills most ancient promontory; near mournful  
 Ever weeping Paddington? is that Calvary and Golgotha?  
 Becoming a building of pity and compassion? Lo!  
 The stones are pity, and the bricks, well wrought affections:  
 Enameld with love & kindness, & the tiles engraven gold  
 Labour of merciful hands: the beams & rafters are forgiveness:  
 The mortar & cement of the work, tears of honesty: the nails,  
 And the screws & iron braces, are well wrought blandishments,  
 And well contrived words, firm fixing, never forgotten,  
 Always comforting the remembrance: the floors, humility,  
 The ceilings, devotion: the hearths, thanksgiving:  
 Prepare the furniture O Lambeth in thy pitying looms!  
 The curtains, woven tears & sighs, wrought into lovely forms  
 For comfort. there the secret furniture of Jerusalem’s chamber  
 Is wrought: Lambeth! the Bride the Lambs Wife loveth thee:  
 Thou art one with her & knowest not of self in thy supreme joy.  
 Go on, builders in hope: tho Jerusalem wanders far away,  
 Without the gate of Los: among the dark Satanic wheels. (12:25-44)

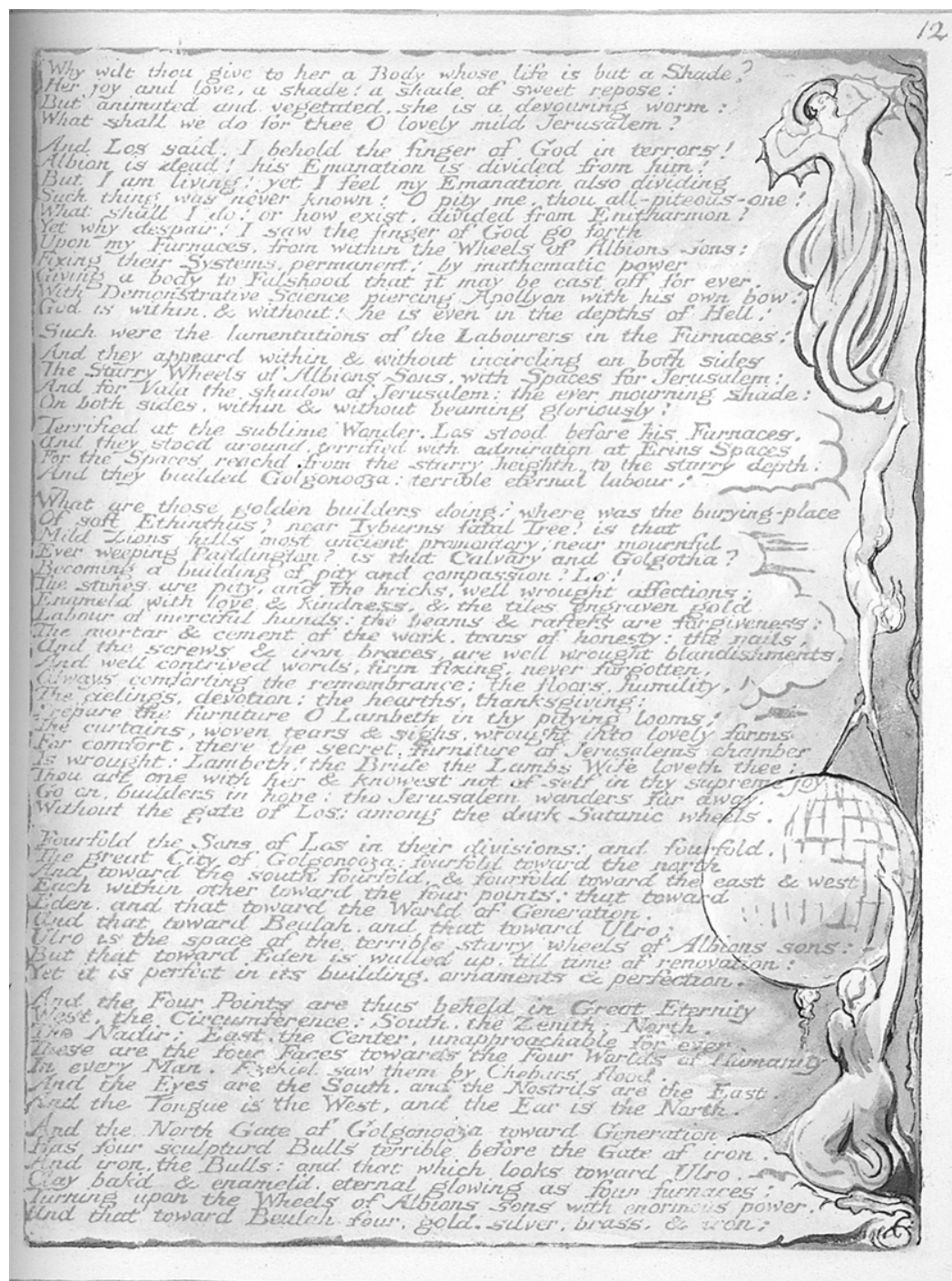
The impression given from this sudden shift is that the concepts “Golgonooza” and “building Golgonooza” need to be translated for the reader. The passage, beneath its surface declarative mode, is actually a searching consideration both of the role “translation” should play in interpreting Blake’s work, which is symbolized by Golgonooza as the city of art, and of the relationship between translation and interpretation. In the first lines of the passage, for example, Blake’s speaker evokes the name “Ethinthus” from his mythology, but then carefully moves to translate that name into meanings more familiar to his audience by suggesting that Ethinthus’s burying place is synonymous with key English places such as Tyburn’s Tree and Paddington, or with classical Judeo-Christian places and concepts such as Zion, Calvary, and Golgotha. In such associations, Blake seems to display his own prescience that his art – with its

intricately webbed cast of characters and places – would inspire the modern critical debate about whether or not it is based in a “system” whose component parts need to be converted into more familiar or understandable concepts.

The rest of the passage continues this reflection upon the idea of translation, or upon the extent to which an interpretation of Blake’s art involves translation (whether that interpretation occurs in Blake’s own text, with one passage glossing or commenting on another, or through the reader). It does this by attempting to instruct the reader, as if in a mathematic equation, how mentally to convert into human emotional terms the building materials of Golgonooza and the English and Christian ideas and places to which the city has just been related. Yet the passage’s question of whether all the associated terms, “Ethinthus,” “Tyburn’s Tree,” “Mild Zions hill,” “Paddington,” and “Calvary and Golgotha,” are “becoming a building of pity and compassion” (12:29) is just another way of asking far deeper questions about Golgonooza and by extension Blake’s art: Where is Golgonooza, the city of art? That is, where does art happen and what is it in the first place? Could building Golgonooza, or building art, mean actually turning real social wrongs and pain – such as that associated with the English executions at Tyburn’s tree – to justice and change?

To the last of these questions this passage and Blake’s poem as a whole answers an idealistic “yes.” But to the previous two the implicit answer is that art’s power over the audience may depend as much upon its material qualities or its effects as it does upon the author’s honest conveyance of an inspiring message. The contrast between these human and physical definitions of the power of art inheres first in the contradiction between the images and the words on Plate 12 (Figure 4).



Figure 4<sup>31</sup>

William Blake. *Jerusalem*. Plate 12. Copy E. Facsimile edition. *William Blake: The Complete Illuminated Books*. Intro. by David Bindman. New York: Thames & Hudson, in association with the William Blake Trust, 2000.

The images suggest that art is defined by its emotional relevance, or in what it makes human beings do, and they imply that such a relevance of Golgonooza can be clearly communicated to the reader. The human figures alongside the right margin, after all, are portrayed as both physically and spiritually connected. The two bottom figures are united in the effort either of turning or moving upward a large sphere. Though the figure at the top right corner of the Plate is not engaged in this effort, solidarity among all the figures is implied in their positioning in a single vertical strip along the right margin. The eye is drawn up in a continuous line from the person at the bottom of the Plate up toward the top figure, whose gaze and body orientation are also directed upward. The slight yellow glow of this top figure, which is part of a wash of yellow flowing diagonally down the Plate from its top right corner, implies that he is gazing upon sunshine. This suggestion, plus the motif of unity and collaboration that appears in the actions of the figures, reinforces the idealization of the city of art that the “golden builders” passage prosecutes on an ideational level, and that has occurred just before in the verse’s figurative portrayal of inspiration, creation, and reception. The portrait of Golgonooza we see from a surface reading of the “golden builders” passage and from Blake’s images is one of deep human relevance: the city of art’s ability successfully to portray and to inspire cooperation and harmony between human beings.

Yet this idealized picture contrasts with other emphases in the “golden builders” passage that exist at a more strictly verbal rather than ideational level. The passage demonstrates a preoccupation with the means by which poetry affects, or should affect, a change in the will and perception of its readers in its near-obsessive foregrounding of the “contrived” nature or the design of Golgonooza. Consider, first, the ample repetition of

the term “wrought,” which, though it is technically merely the past tense and past participle of the verb “to work,” especially connotes the physical character of an object and its creation. This is reflected in the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s chief definitions of “wrought”: “worked into shape (or condition); “made or constructed by means of labor or art,” fashioned, formed,” “shaped, fashioned,” “finished from the rough or crude material,” or “cut”; and, finally, “decorated or ornamented, as with needlework; elaborated, embellished, embroidered.”<sup>32</sup> The word “wrought” is repeated no less than four times across the “golden builders” passage, as if the poem were expressing at a kind of subconscious verbal level its preoccupation with the fact that it is carefully worked up, especially in certain key passages like the Golgonooza description, even though it aspires to the loftiest and noblest of goals: transforming the minds, hearts, and behavior, and thus the lives, of human beings. It is also significant that the passage juxtaposes the term “wrought,” which so particularly foregrounds the material origin and character of artwork, with more abstract emotional concepts such as “love,” “kindness,” and “forgiveness,” which can potentially be fostered or increased through art. Through this clash of diction the poem questions the relationship between the material or sensory character of art and its conceptual and emotional content.

That Golgonooza, and by extension *Jerusalem*, is a work that explores how words can be used as bodies of effects is also suggested in how the term “well wrought” is positioned in the passage. Blake’s speaker tells us that the “nails,” “screws,” and “iron braces” of Golgonooza – the materials that hold it together – are “well wrought blandishments/And Well contrived words, firm fixing.” Both “contrived” and “blandishments,” but particularly “blandishments,” suggest that the language of art,

represented here by the concept of the city of Golgonooza and, shortly following, its elaborate description, generates not necessarily just from the desire to convey an intellectual message or even to tug the heartstrings of readers (though the passage's surface emotional emphasis would suggest as much); it also generates from an interest in influencing readers through more mechanistic means. These words suggest that if readers are to be persuaded of the truth of Blake's vision and of the rightness of transforming England into Jerusalem, this will occur as much from a kind of linguistic spellcasting, epitomized in the city description on Plate 12, as it will from a "meeting of the minds" between the author and his readers. In the passages following the Golgonooza plates, however, this consideration by the poem metamorphoses into a more skeptical form: the suggestion that sensory effects, especially if heavily foregrounded, may risk compromising rather than assisting art's intellectual communication, its impression of social relevance, or its catalysis of perceptual change for readers. What is more, if sensory effects are to lead to comprehension of the poem's meaning and perceptual change, this depends very much on the reader. The poem suggests some awareness of this jeopardy from the beginning by postulating ideal readers in the reception fantasy discussed above.

### III.

The overwhelming intensity of the Golgonooza description, from its first lines, indeed leaves the impression that this verse is indeed part of an obscure and seemingly unknowable form of linguistic power that is being "wrought" upon the reader. Its effects are strongly sonic, anchored in a powerful and multiform employment of repetition,

though the kinds of visual effects which De Luca highlights in his account of passage appear at various sites.

Fourfold the Sons of Los in their divisions: and fourfold,  
 The great City of Golgonooza: fourfold toward the north  
 And toward the south fourfold, & fourfold toward the east & west  
 Each within other toward the four points: that toward  
 Eden, and that toward the World of Generation,  
 And that toward Beulah, and that toward Ulro:  
 Ulro is the space of the terrible starry wheels of Albions sons:  
 But that toward Eden is walled up, till the time of renovation:  
 Yet it is perfect in its building, ornaments & perfection.

And the Four Points are thus beheld in Great Eternity  
 West, the Circumference: South, the Zenith: North  
 The Nadir: East, the Center, unapproachable for ever.  
 These are the four Faces towards the Four Worlds of Humanity  
 In every Man. Ezekiel saw them by Chebars flood.  
 And the Eyes are the South, and the Nostrils are the East.  
 And the Tongue is the West, and the Ear is the North.

And the North Gate of Golgonooza toward Generation;  
 Has four sculpturd Bulls terrible before the Gate of iron.  
 And iron, the Bulls: and that which looks toward Ulro,  
 Clay bak'd & enamel'd, eternal glowing as four furnaces:  
 Turning upon the Wheels of Albions sons with enormous power.  
 And that toward Beulah four, gold, silver, brass, & iron:

And that toward Eden, four, form'd of gold, silver, brass, & iron.

The South, a golden Gate, has four Lions terrible, living!  
 That toward Generation, four, of iron carv'd wondrous:  
 That toward Ulro, four, clay bak'd, laborious workmanship  
 That toward Eden, four; immortal gold, silver, brass & iron.

The Western Gate fourfold, is closd: having four Cherubim  
 Its guards, living, the work of elemental hands, laborious task!  
 Like Men, hermaphroditic, each winged with eight wings  
 That toward Generation, iron; that toward Beulah, stone;  
 That toward Ulro, clay: that toward Eden, metals.  
 But all clos'd up till the last day, when the graves shall yield their dead

The Eastern Gate, fourfold: terrible & deadly its ornaments:  
 Taking their forms from the Wheel of Albions sons; as cogs  
 Are formd in a wheel, to fit the cogs of the adverse wheel.

That toward Eden, eternal ice, frozen in seven folds  
 Of forms of death: and that toward Beulah, stone:  
 The seven diseases of the earth are carved terrible.  
 And that toward Ulro, forms of war: seven enormities:  
 And that toward Generation, seven generative forms.

And every part of the City is fourfold; & every inhabitant, fourfold.  
 And every pot & vessel & garment & utensil of the houses,  
 And every house, fourfold; but the third Gate in every one  
 Is closd as with a threefold curtain of ivory & fine linen & ermine.  
 And Luban stands in middle of the City, a moat of fire.  
 Surrounds Luban, Los's Palace & the golden Looms of Cathedron.

And sixty-four thousand Genii, guard the Eastern Gate:  
 And sixty-four thousand Gnomes, guard the Northern Gate:  
 And sixty-four thousand Nymphs, guard the Western Gate:  
 And sixty-four thousand Fairies, guard the Southern Gate:  
 (12:45-66, 13:1-29)

Repetition occurs at various moments across *Jerusalem*, but the especially intense repetitions here are so conspicuous as to announce that a special affective movement has begun. The description's first stanza illustrates many of the stylistic traits of the entire passage. It establishes some of the exact words that will be repeated at short and long range across the whole city description, as well as the principal syntactical structures and general dynamics. These features organize what the reader experiences as a deluge of sonic and visual effects, which in their intensity frustrate any attempt to visualize Golgonooza or glean its conceptual meaning.

The most obvious example of repeated diction in the Golgonooza description emerges bluntly in the first stanza: the word "four," and its adjectival cousin "fourfold." Yet just as immediately Blake creates its verbal relative, "toward," that will be a key player in the passage's repetitions. "Toward" gently echoes "fourfold" in sound while also mimicking its visual appearance, since both words have similar length and feature

tall letters at their beginnings and ends. The first stanza also evinces the general pattern by which these words work together in Blake's city description: the repetition of "toward" is at first intermingled with that of "fourfold," but then "toward" gradually takes over and becomes the chief repeated word. A later example of "toward" succeeding "fourfold" occurs when the speaker declares at 13:6, "The Western Gate fourfold," and then for the rest of the stanza pounds away with lines that repeat "toward" ("and that toward Beulah, stone"/"That toward Ulro, clay," etc.). Having one word take over the labor of sonic patterning from another is, in fact, adopted as a general dynamic in the Golgonooza passage that can be exploited at the level of a single letter or sound, as when the proliferation of "l" and "d" sounds in the first part of the description's ninth stanza, "And every part of the City is *fourfold*; & every inhabitant, *fourfold*./And every pot & vessel & garment & utensil of the houses,/And every house, *fourfold*; but the third Gate in every one" (13:20-22), yields to a domination of the "n" and "in" sounds in the second part, "Is closd as with a threefold *curtain* of ivory & fine linen & ermine./And *Luban* stands in middle of the City. a moat of fire,/Surrounds *Luban*, Los's Palace and the golden Looms of *Cathedron*" (13:23-25) (my emphasis).

The other most evident dictional repetition is "and," which also serves a key role in the Golgonooza description's most basic repeated syntactical structure. Again, the first stanza establishes the proliferation of "ands" (whether the word "and" or the ampersand of which Blake is so fond), that will be used throughout the city description: "and fourfold,/The great City of Golgonooza: fourfold toward the north/And toward the south fourfold, & fourfold toward the east & west/Each within other toward the four points: that toward/Eden, and that toward the World of Generation/And that toward Beulah, and

that toward Ulro.” These lines achieve their entrancing effect through the dictional repetition of “and” or “&,” and the syntactical repetition of the structure “and that toward” (on top of repetitions of “four,” “fourfold,” and “toward” and the general saturation of “o” sounds).

The reader’s perception of continuity in these repetitions is aided by the image of the sphere to the right of the first stanza of the Golgonooza description; this is one of the few places in *Jerusalem* where words directly bleed onto an image (Figure 4). The lines of poetry stretch out over the sphere, whose turning is suggested in the grid lines that are drawn on it and curve rightward. Sonic networks in poetry normally give the impression of words and sounds moving in and out of each other, but this impression is compounded by the image of Blake’s words printed on the sphere and appearing to turn with it. Also, the networking of sounds in the Golgonooza passage is symbolized in the grid on the sphere.

The passage’s chief sonic techniques, in their apparently formulaic application of key words, syntactical structures, and sonic patterns, seem to support the idea that the city of art, as presented in its description, is indeed carefully and strategically “wrought” and “contrived.” But to articulate the city description’s sonic operations is only to begin to explain its general affective dynamics. Sonic patterning is responsible for the overall hypnotic, swooning effect of the Golgonooza description upon the reader, which De Luca acknowledges when he suggests it employs “rhythmic incantation.”<sup>33</sup> But at the same time, this sound is intermixed with moments of strong visual affect. Once one gets beyond the initial visual impact of Blake’s especially word-dense plates as “walls” and begins to experience the overwhelming sonic traits of the poet’s language on a line-by-



line basis, one sees that the passage's visual affective strategies have not ceased but merely changed form. For amidst his deluges of repetitive chant, Blake has placed stubborn blocks of lines that strike the eye just as much as they sound in the ear. These appear as "mini-walls" that seem designed to create on a smaller scale the same shocking effect of some of Blake's word-walled illuminated plates.

The visual shock of these mini-walls occurs because they usually follow upon a clear movement of dense sound effects, which has created in the reader a sensibility that is temporarily not programmed for the very different process of visual perception. Intense poetic sound has a gradually absorbing, enfolding effect as Blake uses it here, at first acclimating the reader to patterns of repetition and then using those repetitions, with only subtle variations, to keep him or her inside a kind of linguistically-induced cocoon. By contrast, Blake's striking visual presentation of words, lines, and line-groups, epitomized in his word walls, tends to impact the reader in a single instance of sublime shock, blocking him or her out by its strangeness or seeming unapproachability and thus creating feelings of alienation and pain, not inclusion and comfort. These differences between the way sonically affective and visually affective languages operate in the Golgonooza passage make a stylistic shift between them seem all the more sudden.

The first mini-wall in Blake's city description illustrates these points well. It is placed deeply enough within the passage to seem an aberration from the text's sonically dense opening – a visual block that literally suddenly appears. The type of sonic patterning I described earlier has been going on for the first three stanzas of the city description and gaining special power in the third, where Blake's insistent preference for exact word repetition and urgent incantational "ands" apparently overtakes the

requirement that the poetic lines (especially line 13:63) “make sense”: “And the North Gate of Golgonooza toward Generation;/Has four sculpturd Bulls terrible before the Gate of iron./And iron, the Bulls: and that which looks toward Ulro,/Clay bak’d & enamel’d, eternal glowing as four furnaces” (13:61-64). Although a second reading reveals that the conceptual meaning of line 13:63 is connected to that of 13:64 and must be “iron, the Bulls, and the gate into Ulro are all clay-baked and enameled,” these lines first impress the reader physically, not intellectually, through their networking of the “u,” “l,” and “d” sounds that dominate the Golgonooza description. These central sounds blend, in the next three lines, into the now familiar “or”-sounding words – “four,” “toward,” and the variant in this case, “enormous”: “Turning upon the Wheels of Albion’s sons with enormous power./And that toward Beulah four, gold, silver, brass, & iron:/And that toward Eden, four, form’d of gold, silver, brass, & iron” (12:65-66, 13:1). Yet, as the line numbers indicate, the blocked visual effect that would have occurred if the almost-identical lines 12:66 and 13:1 were part of the same stanza is destroyed by the fact that these verses are split over two plates.

Such a line-splitting only increases the surprise created by the mini-wall that then follows, whether one is reading *Jerusalem* in its illuminated form or in a letter-press edition. The resulting desensitization of any visual links between the two lines forces the reader to hold onto the rich sounds in line 12:66 as he or she passes into line 13:1, implicitly assuming that the connection between the verses will be aural. From a retroactive perspective, this form of readerly behavior might be called “aural memorization”; from a progressive perspective, it might be called “echo anticipation.” Either way, it is the basis for sonic effects in poetry more generally, and its exploitation

here increases the impact of the visual block about to occur. The hitherto aurally-programmed reader experiences an overturning of expectations when this striking line group appears:

The South, a golden Gate, has four Lions terrible, living!  
 That toward Generation, four, of iron carv'd wondrous:  
 That toward Ulro, four, clay bak'd, laborious workmanship  
 That toward Eden, four; immortal gold, silver, brass & iron. (13:2-5)

The first noticeable trait of these lines is certainly the strip of “Thats” stretching down the left margin, from which the “The” in line 13:2 only technically departs, since the word is so visually similar to “That.” This strip, which is thickened by the vertically apparent repetition of “toward” in three out of the four lines, seals the lines as a group to the eye. It is only a secondary event when one notices the continuance of the city description’s sonic patterns in these verses, such as the repetition of “four” and the echoing of the “l” and the “d.” When Blake’s speaker repeats the exact wording of just a few lines earlier in “gold, silver, brass, & iron” – close enough to the previous instantiation for the reader to detect the repetition on a second look but far enough away also to distinguish it as a separable phenomenon – one begins to consider that there may be a certain stylistic playfulness or spirit of experimentation going on here.

This impression is compounded in the next major example of a mini-wall. As before, it is introduced by a line pair that would be more visually striking but for the strong sonic effects that downplay its visual qualities. The stanza leading into this second mini-wall is indeed strongly cohesive in sound, distributing repeated words and phonemes across single lines and across the whole stanza:

That toward Eden, eternal ice, frozen in seven folds  
 Of forms of death: and that toward Beulah stone:  
 The seven diseases of the earth are carved terrible.

And that toward Ulro, forms of war: seven enormities:  
 And that toward Generation, seven generative forms. (13:15-19)

Here appear the staple word repetitions of the city description *in toto* (“that,” “and,” and “toward”) and the sonic cousins of the latter word that Blake spins off (“forms,” “war,” “enormities”). We also see the dictional mainstay of “seven,” which Blake repeats across the stanza’s latter half, even visually echoing its medial “v” in the word “carved” (13:17). Finally, the central phonemic unit is a soft vowel paired with an “r,” which is repeated in the sound cluster of words featuring “or” and “er” (“eternal,” “earth,” “Generation,” “generative”). These dynamics occur from the stanza’s beginning and appear at the horizontal level of each line and the vertical level of the whole line group. As such, they dominate the stanza’s impact upon the reader, shunting attention away from the line pair, which is visually sealed with repetitions of “And that toward.”

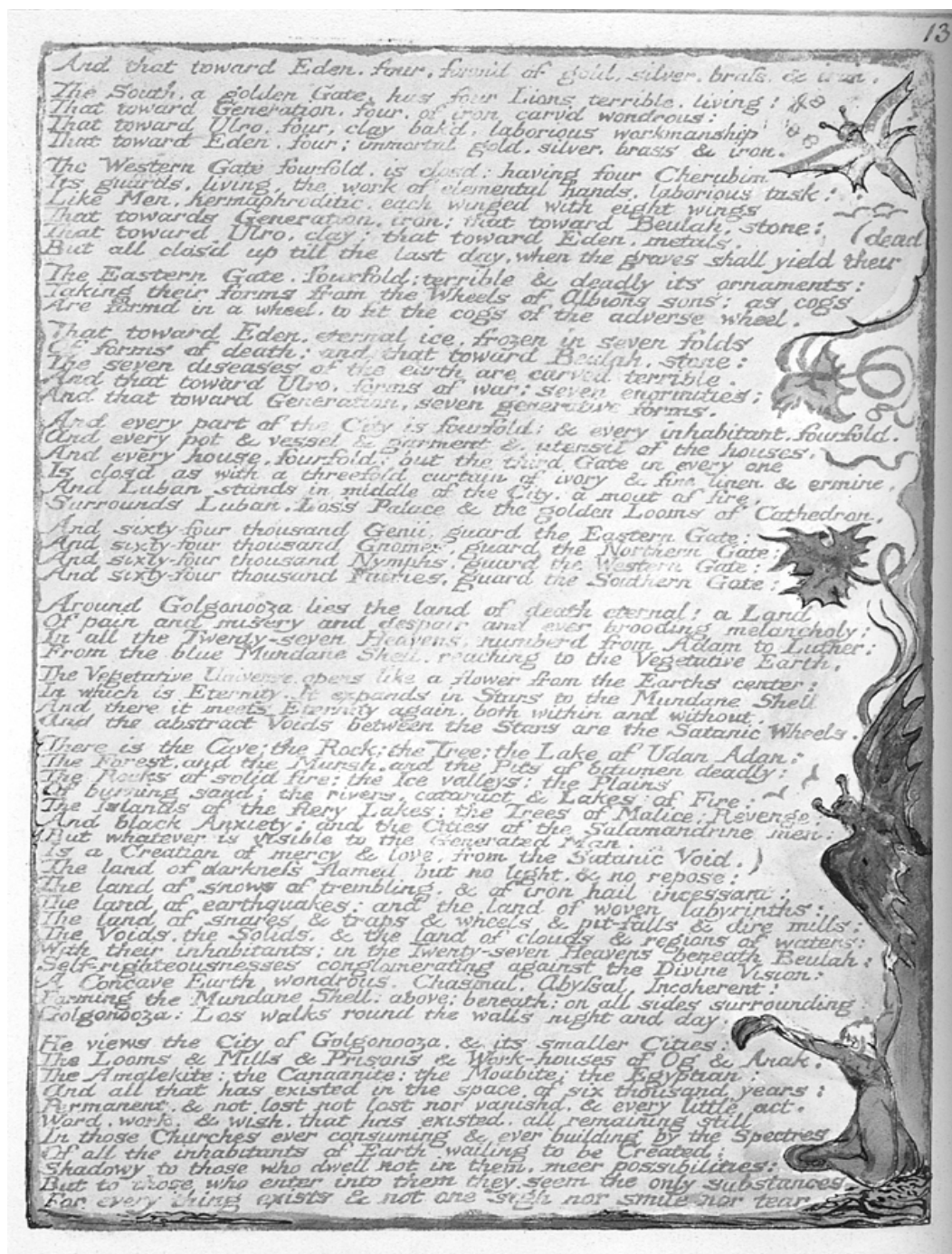
It is unclear, indeed, whether this pair is part of the even more clearly distinguished mini-wall that follows in lines 20-22. This wall is caulked together not only by the “And every” that begins each of these lines and thus visually blocks them along the left margin, but also by the heavy use of ampersands, which begins at line 20 but really picks up in line 21. The marks link the words together rightward, as if they were bricks, thus fostering an impression of this small word-wall’s girth as well as height. The ampersand use, however, continues through lines 23-25 and lends the lines their mainly sonic and not visual affective character. The ampersand thus joins the other stylistic materials in this passage – stock diction, set syntactical structures – that Blake makes Janus-faced, shifting them into aural agency when just before they were serving a visual role. And, when the next stanza, beginning “And sixty-four thousand Genii,” breaks off and forms a clear four-line mini-wall, it is a mystery whether it is separate

from or part of the mini-wall appearing just before. If the latter were true, the spate of sonic effects that occur intermittently across all the lines I have been discussing (13:15-25) would appear as connective mortar over what would constitute two segments (13:18-22 and 13:26-29, respectively) of a single mini-wall.

This shifting or double-timing of Blake's language between visual and sonic roles is further complicated by the images on Plate 13 (Figure 5). To the right of each of the three word-walls I have mentioned one finds an image (a winged insect and two leaves, respectively). On the one hand, these images seal off each of the word-walls as a unit visually. On the other, leaves and vines they grow on are motifs that *Jerusalem* associates with the seductions of song: they appear on Plate 85 in the image of the Daughters of Albion trying to woo Los with their cadences. The appearance of these sonically associated images next to line groups that affect the reader visually symbolizes the city description's dual devotion to visual and sonic styles and the ambiguity about how its languages are ultimately intended to operate upon the reader.

I have gone into some detail in presenting Blake's affective techniques in the Golgonooza description and the interpretive quandaries they engender in order to predicate a more general point: how difficult it is to intentionalize Blake's interpenetrating sonic and visual styles. It seems equally possible that they may be explained by the poet's experimental spirit, that they are part of an obscure, seemingly imperceptible "order" in the Golgonooza passage of which Blake is aware but which his readers have great trouble discerning, that some combination of both of these is true, or that there is still another explanation. De Luca argues the case for Blake's complete control and the passage's absolute "order" when in *Words of Eternity* he compares

Figure 5



William Blake. *Jerusalem*. Plate 13. Copy E. Facsimile edition. *William Blake: The Complete Illuminated Books*. Intro. by David Bindman. New York: Thames & Hudson, in association with the William Blake Trust, 2000.

Blake's Golgonooza description to Ezekiel's description of the chariot of the Living Creatures:

The perspicuity [of Ezekiel's description] lies entirely within the order of language – particularly as it is deployed to create an impression of intellectual order. . . . When Blake comes to describe the city of Golgonooza on plates 12-13 of *Jerusalem* . . . he too endeavors to produce not an easily visualizable description of the city but a vision of order that the mind, rather than the bodily eye, can perceive.<sup>34</sup>

But this claim depends upon a contention of Blake's absolute forethought and control over every element of his poems. That Blake has clearly envisioned the physical form and human meaning of the city of art, at least, is suggested by the glimmers of Eternal perspective that are buried like "gates of rubies" (14:21) amidst the dense mass of physical effects. These are the moments when the speaker either mentions this Eternal perspective directly ("And the Four Points are thus beheld in Great Eternity," 12:54), hints at the significance of the city of art for all time ("But [the city division that looks] toward Eden is walled up, till the time of renovation," 12:52), or implies the city's significance for humanity ("These are the Four Faces towards the Four Worlds of Humanity/In every Man," 12:57-58). Yet even if Blake has a coherent vision of the city of art, it does not follow that he has complete control and forethought in crafting the description of that city, or confidence that the reader will be able to see the vision he sees – through or in spite of the physically affective description. Such a notion of authorial control is not supportable based on the shifting stylistic events of the Golgonooza description itself, which moves ambiguously between sonic and visual modes, and especially based on the self-reflections that occur before and principally after the description itself. The Golgonooza passage, rather, is better seen as a stylistic terrain that

explores sonic and visual forms of affect and their respective roles in helping the reader to envision Golgonooza – its physical being and its practical meaning for human behavior.<sup>35</sup> The problem is whether the overwhelming visual and sonic experience of Blake's language engenders merely a readerly trip of the senses, or a higher form of perception and an understanding of Blake's poetic messages. That this remains an irresolution – or, to put it more drastically, the jeopardy of using at least some forms of physical affective style – is suggested when the commentators who have looked most deeply into the Golgonooza passage cannot say specifically how such techniques as incantational language lead to perceptual and conceptual enlightenment.<sup>36</sup>

At this point Blake's claim in the Preface to *Jerusalem* that "every word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place" (Plate 3) comes to mind; for how can this be true if the description of the city of art – and, symbolically, art itself – is based to a significant degree on experimentation and exploration? Blake's claim must be seen as to some extent a rhetorical performance and certainly an ideal to which the poem cannot possibly hold up, in the same manner of Los's assertion in Plate 10 about his Spectre. Los declares, we recall, that the Spectre must be made "invisible" for his words to have affective power for his listeners and by extension for Blake's words to have affective power for his external readers; yet, ironically, the Spectre remains visible, both because it is an abject constitutive force for Los's words and because Los's battle with the Spectre is periodically narrated in *Jerusalem*. This paradox demonstrates the larger conflict between two major impulses in Blakean art: rhetorical persuasion of the reader ("oratory," as it is described in the poem's Preface) that England can become Jerusalem, and raw self-expression. That is, Blake suggests that inspiring his readers to social action



involves carefully projecting an authorial image of strength, but at the same time *Jerusalem* regularly bares to the reader authorial struggle in the symbolic form of Los's battles with the Spectre.

The problem of the "fit place" claim as to physically affective style is that the Golgonooza passage appears on its face to evince an unknowable stylistic logic but reveals itself to be more exploratory in nature. As we will see, the passages following the city description and the larger context of the poem's reflection on physical style further corroborate the exploratory character of the Golgonooza passage through their own experimental physical style and self-reflexive character, both of which subtly comment upon the city description itself. In these roles, the description's subsequent passages and the poem's total context thus suggest that only the first half of Blake's bold claim is true: every word and letter in passages of physical style do indeed appear to be "studied," but only in the sense that they are deeply pondered by the poem's many self-reflexive statements, which turn out to portray not Blake's assurance of his poem's absolute order, but his skepticism about the definition of "fit place" for any element of poetic language. Indeed, the ideal of a language that is completely *affectively effective* – a totally "fit" style that enraptures its reader without sacrificing the integrity of *Jerusalem's* intellectual meaning – lies beneath the poem's self-reflections before and after the Golgonooza passage. It haunts the city description's outlying poetic quarters with the threat of its unattainability, and drives the almost frantic desire of these flanking passages to control the reader's process of meaning-making by "translating" the meaning of the Golgonooza description and the idea of the city of art.

## IV.

This translation begins immediately after the Golgonooza passage, with the phrase, “Around Golgonooza lies the land of death eternal” (13:30), and stretches until the end of Plate 16. In this poetic section, Blake demonstrates more clearly than before the attitude toward physically affective style that affiliates him both with the writers I discussed in Chapter One and with Keats and Shelley: exploratory, and at the same time idealistically seeking some form of reconciliation between the readerly experience of physical style and ideational meaning.

Critical discussions of the passages following the city description take it merely as a postscript whose details are hardly significant and are only related to the astounding descriptive act that has just occurred through the obscure, elaborate geography of the Blakean vision. Consider, for example, Harold Bloom’s critical commentary to *Jerusalem* in the Erdman Blake edition. Following his discussion of the Golgonooza description (defined as occurring over lines 12:45-13:29), Bloom marks off a distinct new passage for commentary in lines 13:30-14:15; he annotates these lines as a “comprehensive catalogue of dread [which] is the negative of vision . . . . Most simply, it is [Blake’s] description of Ulro[,] . . . resembl[ing] the underworlds and hells of Virgil, Dante, and Milton.”<sup>37</sup> Bloom then names 14:16-34 the next observable segment of the poem, remarking provocatively, “Against nature and its torments Los sets his own creations in this extraordinary passage, which in effect attempts to describe a poem’s state of being.”<sup>38</sup> What Bloom’s divisions of Blake’s lines and glosses do not illuminate is that even though the discussion of Golgonooza’s geography has technically ended at 13:29, the poem continues to reflect figuratively on Golgonooza the concept until the end

of plate 16, as well as at key points later in *Jerusalem*. Specifically, from the end of the city description until around 15:27, the poem suggests that physically affective art cannot stand on its own to portray clearly to the reader the vision of the poet. It needs “glossing” with representational language that can, ostensibly, better convey the authorial vision of Golgonooza. The Golgonooza text’s surrounding passages thus become footnotes of a sort, where by various means the poem attempts to depict more exactly the physical appearance and human meaning of art, and, finally, when Blake’s first-person voice enters the text, the vision and character of the poet himself. When the poem comes to describe the “lands surrounding Golgonooza,” therefore, it is figuratively describing paratexts within the text – smoother footpaths that lead to the rougher conceptual and stylistic terrain of the Golgonooza passage itself.

In using the city description’s surrounding passages to translate the meaning of Golgonooza and to host the first-person voice, Blake thus takes to new levels of complexity the penchant for self-expressive footnotes that I have discussed in Richardson’s *Clarissa*, Chatterton’s “Excelente Ballade of Charitie,” Smith’s “Beachy Head,” and to a certain extent Darwin’s *The Botanic Garden*. What is more, Blake’s exploratory disposition toward affective style in the Golgonooza description affiliates him with the more experimental uses of physical style that we have seen in the authors I addressed in Chapter One. Yet because *Jerusalem* has an explicit goal of socially transforming England, Blake’s paratexts within the text bear burdens that the notes in these other pieces do not. Notes for Richardson, Chatterton, Smith, and Darwin explore what could be conceived as the “other” to the materially affective language in the text proper (etymological or scientific discourse, as well as the authorial voice itself, speaking

in a first-person and often conversational or assertive mode), but they do not display a desire to reconcile what happens in the notes with what happens in the text proper. By contrast, in the passages following the Golgonooza description, Blake tries to reconcile his physically affective style with conceptual meaning by making his rhetorically-gearred translational passages gloss the Golgonooza description. In fact, the urgent tone of Blake's paratexts within the text implies that the success of *Jerusalem* in transforming English readers depends upon such reconciliation.

In making such an effort to unify style and substance, Blake aligns himself with a notion of Romantic idealism that is perhaps most famously expressed in Coleridge's theory of the unifying, reconciling power of the secondary imagination. A similar reconciling desire appears, we will see, in Keats's anxiety about his exploration of poetic charming, although with Keats the "substance" with which he hopes to reconcile his physical style is as much the achievement of poetic greatness and dignity as it is conceptual meaning. In Shelley's case, the push to reconcile physically affective style with conceptual meaning and with a catalysis of perceptual change is even stronger than it is for Blake and Keats, driving his poems' careful deployment of both hypnotic and awakening affective styles. What is most at issue here, however, is the particular kind of relationship between materiality and meaning that these poets imagine or attempt to draw up. Blake's city description explores a model of physically affective language but then glosses it abruptly with more representational verbiage, as if physicality cannot convey prophetic meaning except for in the mind of Blake himself or in the most ideal kind of reader. Keats's exploration of poetic charming across his oeuvre signals his generally more open inquiry into how physicality can be exploited in verse, and his more

embracing attitude toward an experiential model of poetry; it is only when it comes to Keats's figurative consideration of how his techniques bear upon his poetic greatness that he tends to portray physically affective style in a more negative light, using metacritical passages in his central charm poems to pit the sonic and tactile seductions of poetic language against an expressive or ideational conception of poetry. Shelley devises the most complex, self-conscious, and unified relationship between sound and sense of all, simultaneously deploying experiential and conceptual models of communication by having his sonic effects perform aspects of human love, the supreme value of *Prometheus Unbound*, such as mutuality and continuity-in-difference. Considered next to poets like Chatterton, Smith, Darwin, and Macpherson and next to Keats and Shelley, then, Blake's attitude toward physical language in *Jerusalem* is best seen as sitting between two poles: exploration, as seen in many of the authors I discussed in Chapter One, and agenda, as is most clearly expressed in Shelley's use of physical style in *Prometheus Unbound*. This intermediate role – just loose enough to foster stylistic experimentation but also tight enough to create tension or anxiety about how physical style relates to other poetic objectives – lends Blake's techniques and self-reflections in *Jerusalem* their chief value: illustrating the key issues that attend exploring an experiential poetics.

In the first phase of the Blake's translational passages in the Golgonooza plates, the poetic speaker reports what Los perceives when he looks at the city of art; and, after these reports have apparently failed to satisfy Blake's notion of an accurate translation, Blake's first-person voice enters the poem and tries to convey more directly what he sees when he imagines Los's city and England itself. All these passages use fairly straightforward observational language, beginning "Los beheld" or "he views," or, when

the first-person voice speaks, “I see” or “I view.” The penultimate translational movement of the Golgonooza plates, however, exploits the more oblique and coded commentaries that affective style can achieve. The cataloguing of the British Isles counties from 15:28 to the end of plate 16 at first appears to be and is treated by critics as a rather odd, aberrant event that is unrelated to the Golgonooza passage or to the concept of the city of art. Its techniques, however, both mimic and depart from the stylings of the Golgonooza passage in significant ways and in this constitute their own attempt to gloss the meaning of the city of art. At the end of plate 16, finally, appears Blake’s master attempt to convey the deepest forms of cosmic significance for the city of art and, by extension, his own art.

The first translational passage describes the lands surrounding the city of art but ends up communicating as much about Golgonooza. Specifically, the bleak descriptive content and the less than powerful style of the passage suggest, by comparison, the poem’s ideal for how the preceding city description should operate upon the reader.

Around Golgonooza lies the land of death eternal; a Land  
Of pain and misery and despair and ever brooding melancholy:  
In all the Twenty-seven Heavens, numberd from Adam to Luther;  
From the blue Mundane Shell, reaching to the Vegetative Earth.

The Vegetative Universe, opens like a flower from the Earth’s center:  
In which is Eternity. It expands in Stars to the Mundane Shell  
And there it meets Eternity again, both within and without,  
And the abstract Voids between the Stars are the Satanic Wheels.

There is the Cave; the Rock; the Tree; the Lake of Udan Adan;  
The Forest, and the Marsh, and the Pits of bitumen deadly:  
The Rocks of solid fire: the Ice valleys: the Plains  
Of burning sand: the rivers, cataract & Lakes of Fire:  
The Islands of the fiery Lakes: the Trees of Malice: Revenge:  
And Black Anxiety; and the Cities of the Salamandrine men:  
(But whatever is visible to the Generated Man,  
Is a Creation of mercy & love, from the Satanic Void.)

The land of darkness flamed but no light, & no repose:  
 The land of snows of trembling, & of iron hail incessant:  
 The land of earthquakes: and the land of woven labyrinths:  
 The land of snares & traps & wheels & pit-falls & dire mills:  
 The Voids, the Solids, & the land of clouds & regions of waters:  
 With their inhabitants: in the Twenty-seven Heavens beneath Beulah:  
 Self-righteousness conglomerating against the Divine Vision:  
 A Concave Earth wondrous, Chasmal, Abyssal, Incoherent!  
 Forming the Mundane Shell: above; beneath: on all sides surrounding  
 Golgonooza: Los walks round the walls night and day. (13:30-13:55)

Lines 13:30 to 13:55 seek to interpret for the reader, first through definitional language and then by stylistic allusion, the character of Los's city of art and its surrounding lands and their inhabitants. Just as the "golden builders" text moves immediately to translate the idea of Golgonooza into idealistic emotional terms, lines 13:30-31 summarize everything lying outside of Golgonooza as characterized by "death" and "pain and misery and despair and ever brooding melancholy." As with the images appearing alongside the "golden builders" passage, this message is corroborated by the images that run alongside the bottom right margin of Plate 13 (Figure 5). The one human figure is far more darkly colored than those on Plate 12 and holds his hat out behind his body in a somewhat desperate gesture. There is tension in his form as he grips the wing of what appears to be a bat, colored with black. The colorations and emotional suggestion of these images thus concur with the bleak content, tone, and jarring stylistic effects of the passage alongside of which they appear.

Where the "golden builders" passage employs a terminology of human feelings for its duration, however, Blake's verses here move suddenly into a more difficult, abstract, and seemingly obscure perspective. Terms from the Blakean mythology – "Twenty-seven Heavens," "Mundane Shell," "Vegetative Earth" in the first stanza, and "Earth's Center," "Eternity," "Stars," "abstract Voids," and "Satanic Wheels" in the next

– come rushing in. Along with the speaker’s apparent intimacy and comfort with the concept of “Eternity,” these terms signal that the poet’s bardic vision, which “Present Past & Future sees,” is now prevailing over the geography and significance of Golgonooza.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the affective style of the passage comments self-reflexively on that of the Golgonooza description – especially the long stanza beginning “There is the Cave,” which exemplifies what Bloom calls Blake’s “catalogue of dread.” These verses’ stylistic patterns are anchored in the device of repetition and apparently attempt to simulate some of the affective techniques from the Golgonooza passage. Yet they do not have the same impact. Bloom’s label of “catalogue,” in fact, captures in a single word how the passage fails to achieve the incantational effects of Blake’s Golgonooza account. Sonic repetition and listing (clearly cornerstone techniques for both passages) have a transfixing effect in the Golgonooza text. But in the subsequent passage they never achieve the type of patterning that obscures their appearance as stylistic *mechanisms* and that generates, therefore, the paradoxical process by which the reader is captured by the hypnotic effects and yet free from a consciousness of the devices behind those effects. Consider how in lines 38-43, for example, the regularity of the rhythm – the staccato punch of phrases of roughly equal length – comes across merely as harshness, whereas the Golgonooza passage employs a foundation of rhythmic repetition but also breaks that pattern from time to time with subtle variations or surges of syncopated intensity. The pattern, in the city description, is just regular enough to be lulling, but not so regular as to reveal too nakedly its full *modus operandi*.

Furthermore, although the staccato crudity in the catalogue passage generally masks the sonic networking it contains, the mismatched, off-kilter nature of the rhyming



is a subtly present force that keeps the passage from hypnotizing the reader as the Golgonooza description does. For instance, “an” or “en” sounds that occur early in the stanza, such as “Udan Adan,” “bitumen,” and “Plains,” network themselves with later instantiations such as “sand, “Islands,” “Revenge,” “Anxiety, “ and “Salamandrine men.” These words appear visually linked, but they never achieve sonic cohesion: they grate against each other and thus create the opposite of that smooth, but never rote or dull, effect that characterizes truly incantational language. A muddling of affective power also occurs with the visual block of lines occurring in the middle of the stanza. This block vertically coheres its layers with their common incipient phrase, “The land,” but lacks the dramatic impact of the “mini-walls” in the Golgonooza description, being crammed into a catalogue that from the start comes across as cluttered with ill-organized sonic and visual effects. This less than arresting word-wall, coupled with pervasive slightly off-key sonic techniques, conveys by stylistic means that the lands “around Golgonooza” have nothing of the potentially magical power of Golgonooza itself, or at least of its description. The account of the “lands surrounding Golgonooza” thus helps to define the ideal operation of Blake’s words in the Golgonooza passage: the enfolding pleasure of the incantational language playing through and off of the small-scale sublime effect of mini-walls and cooperating with the passage’s occasional, provocative hints of the “Eternal” perspective. All of these features, that is, ideally would work simultaneously to sedate and to stimulate the reader – to saturate the senses in comfort and pleasure while providing the catalyst for the mind to aspire to imaginative seeing. Such differences between the potential effects of the Golgonooza description and the effects of the following stanzas are metaphorically

implied in Blake's own terms for Golgonooza's outlying territories, "Chasmal, Abyssal, Incoherent!" (13:53).

The last line of the three stanzas immediately following the city description, "Golgonooza: Los walks round the walls night and day" (13:55), appears as merely an afterthought, but it is actually a crucial moment in the stylistic plot of the poem. Literally it is the first entry of Los onto the scene after the city description (the last time he appeared was at lines 12:10-11, just before the Golgonooza passage). Yet within the figurative schemas that the poem has established, Los's appearance has a far richer meaning. Interpreting Los, once again, as a poet-figure, this line constitutes Blake's figurative entrance into his poem after he has retreated from the narrative surface during the Golgonooza passage proper, so that the deluge of physically affective description can take over in all its autonomy. Moreover, the notation that Los is walking around the walls of Golgonooza acknowledges two aspects of the poem's affective style: that its illuminated plates, as wholes, operate as "walls of words," and that the mini-walls in the Golgonooza description, mortared together by the verses' dense sonic networks, literally form the stuff of a city instead of just "representing" one in language, as De Luca suggests when he writes, "Golgonooza is the sum of the words used to make its existence known to us."<sup>40</sup> Now indeed that the city walls, and even the walls of the "smaller cities" outside of Golgonooza, are finished being "built" (i.e., described in intensely material verbiage), Los can "walk round" them and "view" them (13:55-56). But Blake's poem is not speaking literally. The coded message here, borne out by the reams of interpretive verse that follow, is that Blake has now begun a process of hermeneutically "viewing"

the body of physical affect he has created in the Golgonooza description, and on a smaller scale, in the stanzas that immediately follow it.

This viewing consists in a rhetorical *tour de force* by which the poem attempts to show that Golgonooza – figuratively, Blakean art – has the broadest possible human significance and potentially offers a revolution of perception even for those who subsist outside it in the Mundane Shell. Los’s “viewing” has three major discursive phases. These are all in different ways rhetorical, because they seek subtly to convince the reader of some truth about Blake’s art or demonstrate conscientious concern about the reader’s comprehension and opinion. However, they are also interpretive because they try somehow to translate both the concept of Golgonooza and the stylistic presentation of the city of art in the foregoing passages. The first phase, occurring over 13:56-14:1, illustrates Blake’s self-consciousness about the linguistic maneuvers he has executed in the Golgonooza description and in the following stanzas, and his desire to demonstrate to the reader the broad human relevance of his poetic vision.

He views the City of Golgonooza, & its smaller Cities:  
 The Looms & Mills & Prisons & Work-houses of Og & Anak:  
 The Amalekite: the Canaanite: the Moabite: the Egyptian:  
 And all that has existed in the space of six thousand years:  
 Permanent, & not lost not lost nor vanished, & every little act,  
 Word, work, & wish, that has existed, all remaining still  
 In those Churches ever consuming & ever building by the Spectres  
 Of all the inhabitants of Earth wailing to be Created:

Shadowy to those who dwell not in them, meer possibilities:  
 But to those who enter into them they seem the only substances  
 For every thing exists & not one sigh nor smile nor tear,

One hair nor particle of dust, not one can pass away.

These meanings appear largely through the continued presence of the wall motif from the previous passage. This motif appears across Blake’s lines here through the visual and

sonic connections between the keywords of line 13:55, which are “walks” and “walls,” to the keyword of lines 13:56-66, which is “all” (“[Los views] *all* that has existed in the space of six thousand years . . . . Word, work, & wish, that has existed, *all* remaining still/In those Churches every consuming & ever building by the Spectres/Of *all* the inhabitants of Earth wailing to be Created,” my emphasis). These keywords assume the same kind of role that De Luca finds in Blake’s proper names in the prophetic works. Blake, De Luca argues, creates clusters of names which he repeats in an invariant, formulaic order as if they were a spell with special powers.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Blake here forms a word-cluster, *wall-walk-all*, that is cohered through both the physical traits of the words (their common “al” sound) and their figurative significance for Blake’s poem.

This series of words, in fact, encapsulates this chapter’s argument. First, Blake’s physically affective “walls” in the Golgonooza description, caulked together by rich sonic material, are charged sites because they strongly impact the reader’s senses and constitute a heightened example of Blake’s materially affective style in general, and because of the provocative acts of poetic self-reflection that precede and follow them, thus advertising their complex, multivalent significance. Second, Los’s act of “walking” around the walls of Golgonooza which he has built figurally represents Blake’s act of interpreting or translating both the physically affective description of Golgonooza – which, the poem suggests, risks not fully conveying the character of the Blakean vision or the authorial voice – as well as the ultimate meaning of the idea of a city of art. Finally, this act of “walking” around the “walls” seeks rhetorically to prove that the walls of Golgonooza, and, by extension, the Eternal City of Jerusalem that is the ideal version of the fallen city of art, can encompass “all” – in the double sense of all readers and of the entire meaning

of the cosmos. The continued presence of the wall motif also emerges in the frantic insistence in lines 13:56-66 that everything of the world's history, as well as all the world's people, are contained in the walls of the city of art and its surrounding cities. Consider, in this regard, the urgent claims and repetitions of line 13:60, "[All that has existed in the space of six thousand years] Permanent, & not lost not lost nor vanished, & every little act," and in lines 13:66-14:1, "For every thing exists & not one sigh nor smile nor tear,/One hair nor particle of dust, not one can pass away."

These verses metaphorically make a provocative connection between the physical form of poetry and its conceptual content and value, which is reflected in its truth and relevance for all time. Such a form of philosophical and spiritual significance, it is implied, cannot exist for poetry unless it also has literally a material weight or solidity. And yet, this combination of traits seems hard to attain in view of the Golgonooza text, whose strong physical effects tend precisely to overwhelm the reader's sensibility, to render Blake's vision of the city of art all but unseeable in the mind's eye as both Mitchell and De Luca suggest,<sup>42</sup> to occlude any glimmers of conceptual meaning in the passage, and to place at a remove any notion of what form a "city of art," fallen and of this world but characterized by Blakean ideals, might take in terms of human behavior. This is the paradox that clearly drives much of the self-reflexive discourse that precedes and follows the Golgonooza passage, which takes upon itself nothing less than the responsibility of conveying Blake's central visionary message: that the widespread exercise of the individual imagination ultimately can lead to communal benevolence and social justice.

Because they seek so urgently to convey this meaning, the translational passages that follow the city description so far imply an affirmative answer to the question that Blake's poem asks from Plate 10 onward and that I posed in the beginning of this chapter: Is the poet's "voice" the same as his "message" or "vision"? As to the other question of whether the poet's message can be clearly conveyed by physically affective style, the translational passages suggest that the reader's experience of words *as words* in the Golgonooza passage poses a potential danger to disseminating the meaning Blake wants to ascribe to the city of art; that meaning, in human terms, is the kind of cooperation and benevolence that is discussed ideationally in the "golden builders" passage, and that would also occur in the Eternal condition, Jerusalem, that Blake wants to bring upon England. The reader's combined sensibility of visually induced sublime blockage and sonically induced incantation or hypnosis in the city description, after all, could leave the impression that art is, literally, nothing more than the linguistic material that composes it.

Considering Los's wariness of sonic "cadence" elsewhere in *Jerusalem*, in fact, one questions whether Blake sees incantation as the most dangerous form of affective style of all. While Blake's other major technique, word-walling, is very physical in its impact upon the reader, the walls have the potential to make some sort of intellectual impression: they can offer, with their effect being concentrated into a single moment of presence, at least an illusion of importance and permanence that the reader may come to associate not just with a Blakean stylistic technique but with Blake's poetry more broadly. By contrast, the component letters, phonemes, words, and phrases of sonic networks tend to "pass away," in Blake's phrase, with their seductive sounds slipping in

and out of each other and only being “present” at the moment at which they are read. To use these effects in conjunction with word walls is thus to leave much to the particular perceptive patterns and predilections of the reader. The reader may notice that the sounds have the effect of melding the “mini-walls” of the Golgonooza description together, but he or she may also be so hypnotized by the sounds as hardly to notice the visual solidity of the word-walls at all. What is at stake, in this pair of possibilities, is the notion of art that the poem seems to endorse, both through its conceptual or terminological definitions and its stylistic presentation of the city of art. Either Blake’s elaborate description of Golgonooza achieves the dual goal of entrancing the reader through physical language while also managing to plant the seeds of new perception through its sublime mini-walls and glimmers of Golgonooza’s cosmic meaning, or it has a more purely incantatory effect that, though powerful while it lasts, finally must end, its value contained solely in itself and not in what it “represents.”

Yet even the binary composed of these two potential effects must “pass away,” for the poem comes to question the very notion of improved intellectual perception. Increasingly it ponders what it means to train the reader properly to “see,” to teach him or her “the Eternal” perspective or the Divine Vision,” or to make him or her “hear the voice of the Ancient Bard/Who Present, Past & Future Sees.”<sup>43</sup> This questioning appears in the distinctly different sets of terms that the poem will use in its foregoing passages to try to explain what Los the creator of Golgonooza, and by extension Blake the creator of *Jerusalem*, sees and understands when he looks at his own product. The new stanza at 14:1-14 paradoxically and inefficiently chooses the most oblique terms possible in which to gloss Golgonooza. As Bloom notes, these verses and the single-line stanza that

follows them roll out the primary symbols of the Fall in *The Four Zoas*, thus importing character names, places, and descriptive adjectives that would be doubly obscure to *Jerusalem's* contemporary readers and have also been so even to the best modern readers. The verses tell us that Los views the Daughters of Albion and Enitharmon and places such as Beulah, and they invoke concepts such as the threefold (plus its implied cousin, the fourfold). These characters, places, and subjects may appear regularly in *Jerusalem*, but they are little lessened in their inscrutability here because of the generally elusive, confusing narrational methods of Blake's poem. The stanza's interpretive unclarity is compounded even further by its mention of additional elements of the Blakean mythology that are not present in *Jerusalem* and only appear in an unpublished manuscript poem. Line 14:15, "Such are the Buildings of Los! & such are the Woofs of Enitharmon!", follows with the desperate near-imperative that the reader somehow recognize the previous lines' terminologies as related to the "buildings of Los" in Golgonooza. The abrupt, oblique nature of this line, crystallized in its frantic exclamation point, advertises the poem's fervent desire at this moment to explain Los's artwork for the reader, but its fear that, so far, everything has been "lost in translation."

In lines 14:16-34 the poem tries the different translational method of going back to the diction, the affective style, and the lofty visionary tone of the Golgonooza description itself. Blake thus affirms the spell-like verbal powers of the Golgonooza description by seeking to provide a version of it here. Yet this recycling of physical style can hardly communicate the magnanimous idea that Blake implicitly hopes to convey to the reader and that, partially because of the city description's physical style, has hitherto been somewhat oblique: how a city built in the bardic imagination is to be attained at the



practical level of human behavior. And yet these lines replay in abbreviated form the entirety of the Golgonooza passage.

And Los beheld his Sons, and he beheld his Daughters:  
 Every one a translucent Wonder: a Universe within,  
 Increasing inwards, into length and breadth, and height:  
 Starry & glorious: and they ever one in their bright loins:  
 Have a beautiful golden gate which opens into the vegetative world:  
 And every one a gate of rubies & all sorts of precious stones  
 In their translucent hearts, which opens into the vegetative world:  
 And every one a gate of iron dreadful and wonderful,  
 In their translucent heads, which opens into the vegetative world  
 And every one has the three regions Childhood: Manhood: & Age:  
 But the gate of the tongue: the western gate in them is clos'd,  
 Having a wall builded against it: and thereby the gates  
 Eastward & Southward & Northward, are incircled with flaming fires.  
 And the North is Breadth, the South is Height & Depth:  
 The East is Inwards: & the West is Outwards every way.  
 And Los beheld the mild Emanation Jerusalem eastward bending  
 Her revolutions toward the Starry Wheels in maternal anguish  
 Like a pale cloud arising from the arms of Beulah's Daughters:  
 In Entuthon Benthions deep Vales beneath Golgonooza. (13:56-14:34)

Keywords from before (Universe, Starry, gate, vegetative world, iron, tongue, and the four directional terms) appear again, as well as a direct allusion to the Eternal, eschatological perspective that occasionally appeared in the city description (“But the gate of the tongue: the western gate in them is clos'd”). Another strong resemblance is in the repetitive sounds, phrases, and syntax, which are clearly relied upon again for their strong affective character. The central piece of repetitive affect is the line-group 19-25, which anchors itself in the recurring phrase “and every one” and in the strong incantations of the thrice-occurring chant, “and opens into the vegetative world” (14:20, 22, and 24).

The phrase “Los beheld” at line 14:16 and the mention of the city's gates intensify the effort to give the reader an “Eternal perspective” on Golgonooza's meaning. The use

of “Los beheld” is a change from earlier stanzas’ phrase,”[Los] views.” But the change is not innocuous given that “beheld” is the verb that in the Golgonooza description signals the kind of “seeing” done from Eternity – the kind that can perceive not only the geographic “all” of the city of art, but also, perhaps more significantly, its application to the character and the life of humanity. This implication that the directional points of the city and its gates can be seen with Eternally-conditioned eyes is deliberately invoked again when the mini-Golgonooza passage mentions the city gates at lines 14:26-30. The derivative city description relies upon the word “beheld” and on the directional terms because they are parts of the original description that are specially concerned with visionary sight. Also, however, these verbal elements, like the others from the Golgonooza passage that are repeated here, are taken to have a mysterious, spell-like power.

The picture of Jerusalem hovering above the sleeping Albion on Plate 14, which appears beneath all the words on the plate, also tries to render what can ostensibly be seen from an Eternal perspective but is hard to glimpse through the effects of the Golgonooza description itself. The appearance of this image at this moment in the Golgonooza plates, because it communicates a key tenet of the poem’s meaning, testifies to a rhetorical desperation that the words of the poem have not done enough to communicate meaning to the reader. The last gasp of the translational movement of lines 13:56-14:34 reports that Los “beholds” the sight that is pictured on Plate 14: Jerusalem drifting out of the reach of Albion, or “eastward bending,” and feeling “maternal anguish” (14:31-34). The importance of this sight to the poem’s development and Blake’s

cosmic vision is reinforced on a verbal level in the use of the word “behold,” and in the fact that this is the first mention of the poem’s title character and concept since Plate 12.

#### V.

What apparently engenders the sudden intrusion of the first-person authorial voice into the poem is Blake’s fear that only he and Los, and not the reader, possess the Eternal vision that can perceive the sight of Jerusalem’s slipping away, and thus understand the import, urgency, and worth of the entire poem. In the most important moment in the Golgonooza plates other than the city description, Blake’s first-person voice bursts into the text to describe for the reader “his awful Vision” (15:5). This narration, along with the subsequent verse stretching to the end of Plate 16, tries to connect the geography and significance of Golgonooza with the present-day British Isles. These passages thus attempt to convey more directly than before that the description of Los’s city of art, in its ideal operation of creating sensory delight but also imaginative perception and good will in readers, is a blueprint of what could happen to real-life English readers through Blake’s art. More crucially, they suggest a definitive answer to the question raised in Plate 10 of whether the authorial voice is the same as his or her message. That answer, demonstrated by the urgent entry of the first-person voice, is that voice and message are not exactly the same, and that consequently nothing can replace the immediate power of the author speaking *in propria persona*.

The very word “Jerusalem” seems to spark the first-person entrance, which is the poem’s most honest and self-conscious suggestion to date that the city description’s intensely physical style has failed to make heard the voice of the poet and his message.<sup>44</sup> The multiple meanings of the titular word “Jerusalem” (summarized in the phrase that the

poem uses to describe Golgonooza and that I use for this chapter's title, "word, work, and wish," 13:61) appear to remind Blake of the importance of his task in his prophetic poem: to communicate accurately his "awful vision," and thus, it is hoped, allow that mysterious synaesthesia by which the reader can, through seeing in the mind's eye the vision Blake describes, also hear the voice of the poet. The poem has merely implied so far that there is a connection between being able to see, by way of the city description, the vision of Golgonooza's physical and human meaning and being able to hear the voice of the poet. That is, if a central meaning of Blake's poem is that benevolence and cohesion amongst citizens are the ideal both of the city of art and of Jerusalem, the city that Blake hopes England will become, then the reader's understanding of this meaning, if this can but occur, constitutes the speaking of the authorial voice. By constantly describing what Los "sees," the passages after the city description reflect the poem's anxiety about whether it has clarified or hindered the reader's physical and visionary sight; as with the earlier repetition of the word "wrought," the poem signals its concerns through the operation of certain leitmotifs that operate on a kind of subconscious verbal level. But the breaking in of the authorial voice at this point in the poem suggests that none of what has preceded is equated with it. The intrusion reaffirms the importance of that voice – both thematic and affective – that was earlier suggested through the addition of Plate 10. In this regard, Blake's initial first-person words, "such is my awful vision./I see the Four-fold Man" (15:5-15:6), have two different meanings. First, everything in the Golgonooza plates that follows line 15:5 is a depiction of Blake's "awful vision"; but also, paradoxically, everything in the plates before line 15:5 was also an attempt to relay that "awful vision," but one that failed. This failing is what engenders the new movement at line 15:6, which

still discusses Blake's imaginative sightings ("I see"), but hinges its affective success on some key revisions in the affective style of the Golgonooza passage and supremely on the power of first-person speech.

This passage, stretching from the first line of Blake's vision narration at 15:6 to Plate 16's last line (16:69), is a continuation of the poem's rhetorical case for the human relevance for the city of art and symbolically Blakean art. The opening stanzas of Blake's first-person speech make the key claims.

I see the Four-fold Man. The Humanity in deadly sleep  
 And its fallen Emanation. The Spectre & its cruel Shadow.  
 I see the Past, Present & Future, existing all at once  
 Before me; O Divine Spirit sustain me on thy wings!  
 That I may awake Albion from his long & cold repose.  
 For Bacon & Newton sheathd in dismal steel, their terrors hang  
 Like iron scourges over Albion, Reasonings like vast Serpents  
 Infold around my limbs, bruising my minute articulations

I turn my eyes to the Schools & Universities of Europe  
 And there behold the Loom of Locke whose Woof rages dire  
 Washd by the Water-wheels of Newton. black the cloth  
 In heavy wreathes folds over every Nation; cruel Works  
 Of many Wheels I view, wheel without wheel, with cogs tyrannic  
 Moving by compulsion each other: not as those in Eden: which  
 Wheel within Wheel in freedom revolve in harmony & peace. (15:6-20)

Clearly in the first stanza Blake seeks to take advantage of the directness of the first-person voice and to communicate succinctly and powerfully that he is the prophet who has an accurate view of what is wrong with England, and who can inspire readers to change. Lines 6-10, in fact, as if convinced of readerly fatigue and responding with urgency and efficiency, attempt no less than a summary of the vision of Golgonooza and its surroundings, and all that happens there ("I see the Four-fold Man. The Humanity in deadly sleep/And its fallen Emanation. The Spectre & its cruel Shadow"), an illustration

of Blake's bardic credibility ("I see the Past, Present & Future, existing all at once/Before me"), and a heart-felt plea for divine aid that intensifies Blake's humanity and humility before the reader ("O Divine Spirit sustain me on thy wings! That I may awaken Albion from his long & cold repose"). Yet this impressive, powerful series of statements is inextricably intertwined with the poet's confession that "Reasonings" impinge upon his verbal abilities, "bruising [his] minute articulations."

This verbal confession is corroborated by a pictorial one: the image at the bottom of Plate 15 shows a large bearded figure hovering menacingly over a smaller figure, who seems to represent Los in *Jerusalem's* illustrations overall. The struggle between the two figures represents the contest between the Spectre and Los, but also Blake's artistic angst. The words and the image together symbolically convey that an intense struggle to communicate underlies Blake's poetry, which appears concretely in the tumultuous stylistic and rhetorical developments of the Golgonooza plates. The occurrence of this image at this point in the poem also serves to humanize Los and by extension Blake, as if once again to advertise the poem's skepticism in the Golgonooza plates that it is conveying clearly the authorial voice.

Blake next attempts, in the manner of the "golden builders" passage, to use a vocabulary of proper names that would likely be familiar to his English audience, together with a general enough lexicon to foster readerly comprehension. The assertion, "I turn my eyes to the Schools & Universities of Europe" advertises the deliberateness of the attention upon familiar institutions and places. Such attention continues with the mention of Locke and Newton, whose enemy status the reader gauges with the mention of their "cruel works" and imagery such as "black cloth" in "heavy wreathes [folding]

over every Nation,” which advertises the broad and horrible results of their influence. In this general context of serviceable language, the continued employment of the key Blakean motif of the “Wheel” and the one Biblical term in the stanza 15:14-20, “Eden,” blend into the general sense of the lines. The mention of London at line 15:21 continues the trend of drawing on those familiar proper names that will bond Blake’s readers to his poem in interest. As occurs in so many places in *Jerusalem*, however, Blake falls from this clearer verbal ground quickly into the abyss of his own terminologies. As a result the former language gradually becomes more intertwined with the more privatized verbiage of the Blakean system and then all but disappears. Quickly the poem brings in Biblical names that seem obscure, given their intertwining with more abstract Blakean concepts, declaring “[I see how] Reuben enroots his brethren in the narrow Canaanite/From the Limit Noah to the Limit Abram in whose Loins/Reuben in his Twelve-fold majesty & beauty shall take refuge/As Abraham flees from Chaldea shaking his goary locks” (15:25-28). Of course, Blake’s contemporary readership, though small, would have been more familiar with the Bible than modern readers generally are, intimately knowing not only key names such as “Noah” and “Adam,” and “Abraham” but also Chaldea (15:28) and Canannite (15:25). Yet the key defamiliarizing factor here is not so much the direct intertwining of Biblical terms with Blakean abstractions, as in phrases such as “the Limit Noah” and “the Limit Adam,” as the general context and effects of Blakean systemic terminology. In Blake’s age and certainly now, the comprehension of this terminology would have required a constantly on-guard, alert, and translational mindset that all but consumes the reader’s mental energy.

Blake continues to connect what happens in real-life England with Golgonooza to imply that his art, as represented by the city, comprehends and can answer to England's state of affairs. Lines such as "loud the Corn fields thunder along/The Soldiers fife; the Harlots shriek; the Virgins dismal groan/The Parents fear: the Brothers jealousy: the Sisters curse" (16:5-7) crescendo from ills that are more specific to the portrait of England we see in the *Songs of Experience* toward more general human ills, aligning these phenomena with what happens in Golgonooza "[b]eneath the Storms of Theotormon" and "in the hand of Palamabron" (16:8-9). (The characters Theotormon and Palamabron exist at the edge of Golgonooza, and, according to Damon, respectively represent desire and the poet's pity.)<sup>45</sup> This process of connecting the places and people of England to Golgonooza continues as "Rintrahs strong grasp" is associated with Londons River (16:11, 14) and "Humber & Trent roll dreadful before the Seventh Furnace" (16:16), which lies in the interior of Golgonooza. Furthermore, Lincolnshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, plus counties from Oxfordshire to Norfolk, are said to lie on the Lake of Udan Adan on the edge of Golgonooza, and to be "[l]abor[ing] within the Furnaces" (16:18-20).

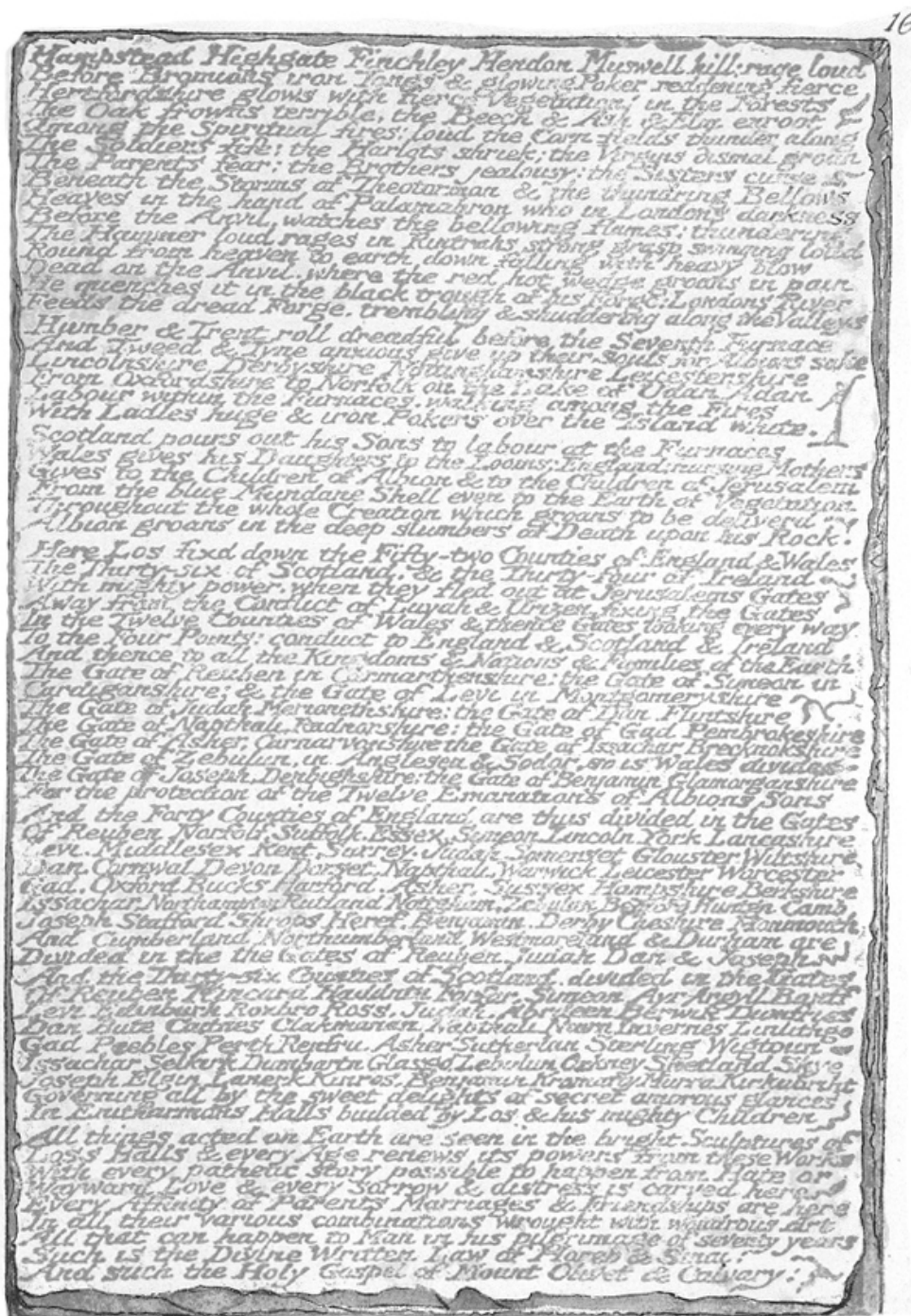
The entry of Blake's first-person voice signifies a peak in the poem's urgency to clarify what the city of art is and how its description in strongly affective language is to be experienced or interpreted by the reader; however, Plate 16, the last of what I have called the Golgonooza plates, raises that urgency even higher by attempting to resolve the tensions about affective style that have been at play up to this point. Whereas the translational passages following the Golgonooza description imply that physically affective style cannot adequately convey the vision of the city of art or the voice of the



poet, now the poem seeks to find a way that it can. It brings arresting physical style back into the poem – through the new technique of the power of the proper name – but with the crucial change of trying to balance such a style more evenly with the poem’s ideational arguments. Furthermore, Plate 16 redresses the tension between seeing and hearing that has existed from the Golgonooza description up to this point: that between the word walls’ visually shocking effects but impression of physical and intellectual solidity for Blake’s poetry, and the hypnotic, incantational, transient, and potentially mind-dulling effects of dense poetic sound. But this tension is not resolved so much as it is negotiated through a fresh abjection of sound. Sonic technique is all but banished from the poem at this juncture – a repressed technique and topic that resurfaces at other points in Blake’s poem, but whose relevance for conveying the text’s visionary meanings and inspiring perceptual change will not be redressed by the poem until the closing plates.

Coming from confessional, first-person utterance, line 16:1 shocks us with a bizarre, punctuation-less, and seemingly auto-generated listing of English names that, what is more, contorts syntax and readerly understanding by delaying the verb until the end of the line: “Hampstead Highgate Finchley Hendon Muswell hill: rage loud.” This listing technique is found yet again in lines 16:18-19, which also string out the names of English counties, and in more abbreviated form in the citation of name pairs such as “Humber & Trent” and “Tweed & Tyne” (16:16-17). These presentations announce that word-walling, this time with proper names as the “bricks,” is now the centerpiece technique of Blake’s poem, an impression only corroborated by a view of the illuminated Plate 16 (Figure 6), which De Luca rightly calls a “particularly notorious example” of word-walling and which is certainly the most striking example of the phenomenon, at the

Figure 6



William Blake. *Jerusalem*. Plate 16. Copy E. Facsimile edition. *William Blake: The Complete Illuminated Books*. Intro. by David Bindman. New York: Thames & Hudson, in association with the William Blake Trust, 2000.

level of the whole plate, in the group of Golgonooza plates.<sup>46</sup>

Word-walling, in fact, dominates the final affective phase of the Golgonooza plates: the cataloguing of the British counties.

Here Los fixd down the Fifty-two Counties of England & Wales  
 The Thirty-six of Scotland, & the Thirty-four of Ireland  
 With mighty power, when they fled out at Jerusalem's Gates  
 Away from the Conflict of Luvah & Urizen, fixing the Gates  
 In the twelve Counties of Wales & thence Gates looking every way  
 To the Four Points: conduct to England & Scotland & Ireland  
 And thence to all the Kingdoms & Nations & Families of the Earth  
 The Gate of Reuben in Carmarthenshire: the Gate of Simeon in  
 Cardiganshire: & the Gate of Levi in Montgomeryshire  
 The Gate of Judah Merionethshire: the Gate of Dan Slintshire  
 The Gate of Napthali, Radnorshire: the Gate of Gad Pembrokeshire  
 The Gate of Asher, Cardarvonshire the Gate of Issachar Brecknockshire  
 The Gate of Zebulun, in Anglesea & Sodor. so Wales is divided.  
 The Gate of Joseph, Denbighshire: the Gate of Benjamin Glamorganshire  
 For the protection of the Twelve Emanations of Albions Sons

And the Forty Counties of England are thus divided in the Gates  
 Of Reuben Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex. Simeon Lincoln, York Lancashire  
 Levi. Middlesex Kent Surrey. Judah Somerset Gloucester Wiltshire.  
 Dan. Cornwall Devon Dorset, Napthali, Warwick Leicester Worcester  
 Gad. Oxford Bucks Harford. Asher, Sussex Hampshire Berkshire  
 Issachar, Northampton Rutland Nottgham. Zebulun Bedford Huntgn  
 Camb  
 Joseph Stafford Shrops Heref. Benjamin, Derby Cheshire Monmouth  
 And Cumberland Northumberland Westmoreland & Durham are  
 Divided in the Gates of Reuben, Judah Dan & Joseph

And the Thirty-six Counties of Scotland, divided in the Gates of  
 Reuben Kincard Haddntn Forfar, Simeon Ayr, Argyll Banff  
 Levi Edinburgh Roxbro Ross. Judah, Ayrdeen Berwik Dumfries  
 Dan Bute Caitnes Clakmanan. Napthali Nairn Invernes Linlithgo  
 Gad Peebles Perth Renfru. Asher Sutherland Sterling Wigtoun  
 Issachar Selkirk Dumbartn Glasgo. Zebulun Orkney Shetland Skye  
 Joseph Elgin Lanerk Kinros, Benjamin Kromarty Murra Kirkubriht  
 Governing all by the sweet delights of secret amorous glances  
 In Enitharmons Halls builded by Los & his mighty Children (16:27-16:60)

These lines take the gates named for the twelve tribes of Israel, and divide up the counties of Wales, England, and Scotland and assign them to those gates. This involves the

repetition of the names of the gates, and even in an invariant formulaic order, but the repetition does not have the same intricately networked, dense, and overwhelming quality as that of the Golgonooza description. The continual interjection of the English county names amongst the gate names prevents the reader's strong aural experience of any of these words and encourages them to be perceived as large, visually stimulating clumps or walls. This happens in lines 16:43-51 and 52-60, which tend to place words in a kind of "staggered brick" style. By contrast, the word-wall at 16:35-41, the first one of the cataloguing passage, possesses the visual style of the Golgonooza description, where a string of distinctly vertically aligned repetitions (in this case, the phrase "The Gate of") distinguishes the line block as a unit.

In walling together all these names from the British Isles, Blake draws first on the general inherent power of their familiarity and connection to the English identity, which the poem advertises a few lines later when it implies that they are part of the "works" of "Los's Halls [from which] every Age renews its powers" (16:62), and second on the shocking, overwhelming effect they have when they are so densely packed together in the text's material structure. Yet an exploitation of name power occurs equally as much with the listing of the twelve tribes of Israel, whose association with the gates of Golgonooza and whose physical juxtaposition with the English names makes the more rhetorical and thematic point that Golgonooza really does encompass "all" – not just the English "all" but the world's "all." The poem explicitly suggests as much when it declares in lines 16:31-34, "[Los fixed] the Gates/In the Twelve Counties of Wales & thence Gates looking every way/To the Four Points: conduct to England & Scotland & Ireland/And thence to all the Kingdoms & Nations & Families of the Earth." Stylistically, the feeling

that Blake's poetry must at this point muster its best powers for convincing the reader that the city of art can encompass "all" is reflected in the passage's choice of word-walling as its main technique, on the basis of the walls' connotation of solidity, permanence, and reliability where slippery sound by its very nature "passes away."

Blake's poem, finally, matches the stylistic emphasis on word-walls in Plate 16 with its closing stanza's auspicious emphasis on the solidity and permanent relevance of Golgonooza and, figuratively, the poet's art. As occurred in an earlier moment with the word-cluster *wall-walk-all*, the stanza that ends Plate 16 again succinctly states the argument that the poem has been making through its affective style and self-reflections: "All things acted on Earth are seen in the bright Sculptures of /Los's Halls & every Age renews its powers from these Works" (16:61-62). By describing Los's work, "Golgonooza," with the densely material names of "Sculptures" and "Halls" and the tactile verb "carved," the poem again associates Golgonooza with solidity and importance and metaphorically signals its methods of using the technique of word-walling in the Golgonooza plates.

The poem's claim that "[a]ll that can happen to Man in his pilgrimage of seventy years" (16:67) is "wrought with wondrous Art" in Los's buildings is these plates' closing argument that the city of art also has the greatest possible depth of human meaning and relevance. This is the point that the "golden builders" passage tried earlier to make, but the earlier passage is connected to the end of Plate 16 on yet another count: the repetition of the word "wrought." Repetitions of "wrought" earlier suggest that the Golgonooza description, and by extension Blake's materially affective art *in toto*, stakes its power upon its physical traits, or being "wrought" of "blandishments" and "well contrived

words.” Lying at the end of the process of stylistic exploration and self-reflection that the Golgonooza plates have undertaken, the stanza that closes Plate 16 still acknowledges that the city of art (especially its intensely affective presentation in the Golgonooza description) has special “powers,” but it tries to put this “wroughtness” of art in a positive light, given the poem’s suggestion hitherto that this is the very trait of Blakean art that runs the risk of working against the reader’s comprehension of meaning. The stanza does this, in part, by carefully controlling how it handles the physical connections amongst its words in the phrase “wrought with wondrous Art” (16:66). Like the word-walling passages on Plate 16, this expression strategically avoids exploiting the seductions of sound, since the repeated “ou” and “w” letters do not sound the same at all and achieve only visual echoes. This stylistic strategy is corroborated at the level of ideational sense, for the lines press home an idealistic argument that Golgonooza is, in fact, nothing less than “Art” – even “wondrous Art” – and that Los’s Halls are full of “Works” (16:62). To put the latter point in terms of the phrase, “Word Work and Wish,” that forms the title of this chapter and is used to describe Golgonooza at 13:61: Blake’s poem “wishes” that the “Word” that is so physically exploited in the Golgonooza description does not keep it or the city of art it presents from being anything less than that noble literary entity, a “Work,” nor from doing the “work” of making deep, lasting, and inspiring meaning or, more broadly, contributing to the transformative “work” of *Jerusalem* at the level of reader culture. This is the ideal of *Jerusalem*, that is, but the extent to which Blake’s physical style bears this ideal out can be summarily glimpsed through a comparison with Shelley, who ultimately unites physical style with meaning more completely than Blake

by having his sounds perform it, and by helping the reader learn how to gauge such meaning by modeling the process in his poet and reader figures.

## VI.

Plate 16's self-created settlement for the Golgonooza plates' stylistic quandaries and poetic preoccupations is only temporary: it occurs at what many of *Jerusalem*'s best scholars have seen as merely the end of the poem's first phase, which is then followed by an "extended middle" and an ending.<sup>47</sup> Curran's argument about the poem's structure espouses this theory: "One might suggest that between Plates 18 and 83 we are elaborating the basic conflicts enumerated in Plates 1-17 in order to understand how we can translate the imaginative organization of human reality, Golgonooza, into the eternal organization whose lines begin to form in Plate 84."<sup>48</sup> The stylistic plot of the rest of *Jerusalem* bears this structural theory out, revisiting the central quandaries about affective style that the Golgonooza plates introduce but then attempting to foster a more lasting resolution at Plates 85-86.

To return again to the problems with which this chapter began: Is a description of the authorial vision and message the same as the communication of the authorial voice, and can physically affective style accurately render that voice? *Jerusalem*, in the Golgonooza plates and following, tries to answer this question by struggling to find a synonymy between vision and voice. The Golgonooza plates imply that to be able to see in the mind's eye the physical appearance of the city of art is to have a form of visionary sight as well, which reveals the human relevance of the idea of art – some notion of what practical form it might take in the actions of real English citizens. "Seeing" Golgonooza in the most ideal way, that is, means grasping by way of the affective city description

how art can become a “building of pity and compassion” – in the double sense of *Jerusalem* “building” pity and compassion in its readers, and of the physical existence or “buildings” of London and England more broadly coming to look more like the city imagined in Golgonooza. If visionary sight helps the reader to comprehend these ideas, the he or she will have grasped the central meaning of *Jerusalem* and thus heard the voice of the poet. For when the Golgonooza plates use their obsessive rhetoric to argue the broadest human relevance and transformative power for art, they imply that the speaking of the authorial voice lies in finding art’s conceptual meaning and envisioning its practical social consequences. The urgent entry of Blake’s first-person voice, narrating his “vision,” generates from an anxiety that visionary sight and comprehension of art’s meaning have not yet been achieved in the reader, and forces a redefinition of “voice” as nothing less than the speech of Blake *in propria persona*.

But this voice’s entry by the end of Plate 16 does not resolve *Jersusalem*’s stylistic analogue of the potential tension between vision and voice: the tension between the technique of word-walling, which is primarily visual in its effects, and the technique of dense, incantational sound. As we have seen, the poem only “solves” sound’s potential vision-blurring effects in Plate 16 by repressing it as an affective tool and corralling all its energy into visually stimulating word-walls, while *Jerusalem*’s later passages simply recapitulate the poem’s associations between visual techniques and permanence or reliability and between sonic techniques and slippage or deception. Word walls, for example, appear once again to symbolize the poet’s strength following a moment of failure for Los in Plates 71-72. Los’s weak moment consists in “[speaking] not to Albion” and “reced[ing] before him” for fear of Albion turning his back against the



Divine Vision (71:58-60); as if to make up for this, Plate 72 comes in immediately after and is taken up with the catalogued naming of the 32 counties of Ireland. The physical solidity of stockpiled names in the verse visually conveys the impression of poetic strength that Los's voice has failed to embody. It also associates poetic success with naming through allusion to the creative act that recalls Adam's and through the physical amassing of names. This association is more explicit in Plate 75, where the lines "For Los in Six Thousand Years walks up & down continually/That not a Moment of Time be lost & every revolution/Of Space he makes permanent" are followed by a block of massed names of the "Twenty-Seven Heavens & their Churches" (75:4-10). On the other hand, the association in the Golgonooza plates between music or sonic technique and deception or transience continues to be made later in *Jerusalem* when Gwendolyn, while "drawing the cords[in the loom] with the softest songs," also "takes a Falsehood & [hides] it in her left hand/To entice her Sisters away to Babylon" (82:13, 16-17). Even more provocatively, the way the Daughters of Albion try to lure Los into "letting his voice be heard" is to "woo him all the night in songs" (84:25). This implied conflict between the seductions of song and the clear rendering of authorial voice loads the symbolic significance of the song from Los that follows at Plates 85-86.

Los's song responds by executing and figuratively describing a harmonic cooperation between soothing poetic sounds, and clear physical and visionary sight and ideational meaning. Its central portion demonstrates these efforts:

I see thy form O lovely mild Jerusalem, Wingd with six Wings . . . .  
 Holiness to the Lord, with Gates of pearl  
 Reflects Eternity beneath thy azure wings of feathery down  
 Ribbd delicate & clothd with featherd gold & azure & purple  
 From thy white shoulders shadowing, purity in holiness!  
 Thence feathered with soft crimson of the ruby bright as fire

Spreading into the azure wings which like a canopy  
 Bends over thy immortal Head in which Eternity dwells  
 Albion beloved Land; I see thy mountains & thy hills  
 And valleys & thy pleasant Cities Holiness to the Lord  
 I See the Spectres of thy Dead O Emanation of Albion . . .  
 [Thy Bosom, Jerusalem] A sublime ornament not obscuring the lines of  
 beauty . . .  
 I see the New Jerusalem descending out of Heaven (85:1-11, 15, 19).

This passage, together with the way Los's listeners react to it, presents a textual model wherein affective style fosters rather than hinders the communication of the authorial voice. Crucially, sonic effects are unobtrusive. The passage's network of sounds is composed of repetitions of "azure" and forms of the rhyming word "feather," all of which cohere sonically with "purple" and "Eternity," as well as repeated terminal "d" sounds ("ribbd," "clothd," "featherd") and "ing" sounds ("wings," "shadowing"). Yet these sounds are, from the beginning of the passage, subordinated in importance by being placed in a context of vision – the opening declaration, "I see." Furthermore, though challenging paratactic syntax exists from the first few lines onward, the subject of the vision, Jerusalem, and her qualities of Holiness and oneness with Eternity are clearly illustrated, as are the azure, purple, and red of her wings and her relation to Albion ("New Jerusalem" emerges from the "Dead" of Albion). A few lines after the above passage, the poem figuratively advertises the intentionally mild role of sound in Los's song when it declares that the vision it depicts, Jerusalem, "wears comforting sounds of love & harmony" (86:30). Creating harmony and gentle effect rather than a more intense form of sonic hypnosis, the sounds of Los's song are able to provide a serene background to rather than obscure the description of Jerusalem in the mind's eye, just as many ballads of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century period create a pleasant sonic background to their narratives. What is more, Los's song simultaneously describes its

own affective operations and subtly refers to the Golgonooza description when it calls the bosom of Jerusalem “a sublime ornament not obscuring the lines of beauty.” The blending of sounds in the Golgonooza description might blur the readerly vision of the “lines of beauty” of the city of art, but not here.

The poem directly suggests that Los’s voice has clearly been heard through his song in the reaction of various parties who serve as figurative readers – both poetic characters who are listening to Los and the elements of nature that form the scenery of the poem at this moment. “Thick hail stones” are described as “ready to obey his voice,” while threatening flames “surround him as he beats” and “tempests muster around his head” rather than touching him. Recalling the idealistic scene of reception that begins the Golgonooza plates, Los’s children respond to his song by engaging in their own “pursuits for the Building up of Jerusalem” (Plate 77): the Sons “labour[ing] in thunders/At his furnaces; his Daughters at their Looms sing[ing] woes” (86:34-38).

Los’s song and its reception figuratively depicts a successful communication of authorial voice, and Blake’s poem follows it with the ecstatic vision of Jerusalem, the Eternal city, that ends the poem. This vision, told over the poem’s last plates, evinces a harmony between Blake’s voice and physically affective style that the Golgonooza description does not permit: it interweaves authorial first-person speech with moments of sonic affect that are powerful but never allowed to achieve the hypnotic quality of the Golgonooza passage. Such a quality is prevented because sounds in these last plates are always deployed not as autonomous bodies of effects but always in a context of conceptual meaning. The last lines of the poem are exemplary,

All human forms identified even Tree Metal Earth & Stone. all  
Human forms identified, living going forth & returning wearied

Into the Planetary lives of Years Months Days & Hours reposing  
And then Awakening into his Bosom in the Life of Immortality,  
And I heard the Name of their Emanations they are named Jerusalem  
(99:1-5).

These verses merge repetitions of various kinds with the first-person confessional voice and with as clear a visual picture and thematic meaning for Jerusalem as could be communicated for an ideal that exists at a visionary level. Yet even these moving last lines cannot take away the fact that from the close of the Golgonooza plates at Plate 16 to Los's song to *Jerusalem's* ending, and in passages in between, Blake's poem has either critiqued or repressed the potentially hypnotic effects of dense poetic sound, suggesting that this is the aspect of physical poetics that most poses a potential problem to verse that hopes to engender social transformation or achieve greatness in the form of longevity. Blake's *Jerusalem* thus in the end displays his inclination to explore physically affective style but with some key reservations. What Blake's poem leaves a problem, however, Keats and Shelley treat as an opportunity, making intense sound effects the foundation for their deployment of poetry as enchantment.

### Chapter Three:

#### “Perplex’d with a thousand things”: Keats and the Charm of Words

Keats’s poetry is clearly preoccupied with altered states of sensibility, as can be seen in early poems such as *Sleep and Poetry*, in “Ode to a Nightingale”’s famous opening cry, “My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains/My sense,” and ending question, “Do I wake or sleep?”, and in *The Eve of St. Agnes*’s concern with medieval charms and dream visions. This preoccupation is a central subject for Keats’s major critics. Jack Stillinger identifies Keats’s “prolonged concern, from almost the beginning of his career to the very end, with dreams, visions, and the kind of imagination that he took them to represent” and even devises a parabola graph to explain the interplay between reality and various altered states or worlds in Keats’s verse.<sup>1</sup> Stuart Sperry dedicates a large section of his *Keats the Poet* to discussing Keats’s interest in the sensory perception of the “real world,” in how sensations change when they become ideas or are acted upon by the imagination, and in the nature of poetic perception and creation.<sup>2</sup> The contrast between the “beauty of art” and “the pain of actuality” is a regular theme of John Barnard’s study of the poet.<sup>3</sup> These are examples of critics who treat Keats’s interest in altered states across the poet’s entire oeuvre; there are also investigations across a smaller field of poems, as in Neil Fraistat’s suggestion that Keats’s 1820 volume coheres around a theme of “enchantment.”<sup>4</sup>

For all Keats’s concern at the level of poetic content with charm and enchantment, sleep and hypnosis, it seems no accident that these and other words for being overpowered dominate the vocabulary of readers who describe their experience of reading Keats – particularly the effects of the poet’s dense sonic language. Yet this

vocabulary, from Keats's earliest critics to modern-day literary scholars, is rarely used exactly or self-consciously: with a full acknowledgment of the specific methods by which Keats's style takes hold of its reader. Furthermore, the frequency of a language of enchantment among Keats's readers is not seen as evidence that the concept of the charm – language treated as a physical action upon the listener or reader – could be a useful critical lens through which to view Keats's poetic style.<sup>5</sup> Investigating how Keats's critics invoke the theme of enchantment helps to clarify certain features of that style and their effects; it also foregrounds the questions that Keats's poetry tends to raise and that, as we will see later, it itself contemplates: How much should “style” supersede “substance,” or “form” “content,” in poetry, and how much can the “representational” office of poetry appropriately be ceded to the “experiential”? This chapter will expose the particular ways that Keats's poetry considers these questions or ventures answers by exploring in depth, in verse across Keats's oeuvre, the most characteristic feature of the poet's language: its ability to absorb, or charm, the reader into a sensory experience of words as such.

## I.

For the earliest commentators, the “charm” or “force” of Keats's rhymes was the basis of severe criticism because it seemed to replace the poetry's intellectual content. Josiah Conder, in a review for the *Eclectic Review* in September 1817, makes this argument in his account of Keats's *Poems* (1817):

[P]oetry is that one class of written compositions, in which the business of expression seems often so completely to engross the Author's attention, as to suspend altogether that exercise of the rational faculties which we term *thinking* . . . . On what ground, then, does the notion rest, that poetry is something so sublime, or that so inherent a charm resides in words and syllables arranged in the form of verse, that the value of the composition is

in any degree independent of the meaning which links together the sentences?<sup>6</sup>

John Wilson Croker, writing in the *Quarterly Review* in September 1818, admits being “perplexed and puzzled” at Keats’s diction and versification in *Endymion* because it “wanders from one subject to another, from the association, not of ideas but of sounds . . . composed of hemistichs which, it is quite evident, have forced themselves upon the author by the mere force of the catchwords upon which they turn.”<sup>7</sup> Conder and Croker see Keats’s verse as problematic not only because it could cast its sonic spell on readers and thus set an allegedly poor standard for poetry, but also because it appears to have cast a spell on Keats himself (“the business of expression seems often so completely to engross the Author’s attention”; “[rhymes] have forced themselves upon the author by the mere force of the catchwords”). The latter suggestion also appears in another early account of Keats’s poetry, Peter Patmore’s unsigned review for the *London Magazine* in April of 1820, which grants a more positive appraisal to *Endymion*. The reviewer calls the poem “a glittering shower of words, and a confused and shadowy pomp of thoughts and images, creating and hurrying each other along like waves of the sea,” and claims that Keats is “[borne] along triumphantly” by these waves, “at *their* will and pleasure, not at his.”<sup>8</sup>

In critiquing the charmlike qualities of Keatsian rhyme, early reviewers also make the more specific argument that the sonic qualities of Keats’s verse have a hypnotic or soporific effect upon the reader. Conder, in the *Eclectic Review* article of September 1818 quoted above, calls Keats’s *Sleep and Poetry* a “half-awake rhapsody” and declares rhyming a “dangerous fascination” for its implicit sense-deadening effects. The charge that Keats’s style is sleep-inducing also appears as the grand finale of John Gibson

Lockhart's famous attack on Keats in August of 1818 in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*: "back to the shop . . . back to 'plasters, pills, and ointment boxes,' &c. But, for Heaven's sake, young Sangrado, be a little more sparing of extenuatives and soporifics in your practice than you have been in your poetry."<sup>9</sup> Even the celebratory review published in April of 1820 in the *London Magazine* and quoted above pinpoints the soporific element in Keats's style, mentioning the "lulling-sweet melody" of a passage in *Endymion* and comparing that poem to a "fantastic temple" with "numerous sleeping-rooms" (my emphasis).<sup>10</sup> Finally, a later reviewer of Keats, David Masson, writes for *Macmillan's Magazine* in November 1860 of Keats's "exquisite mastery in language and verse" and suggests through a comparison with Shelley its calming, if not soporific, effect: "In reading Shelley, even when we admire him most, there is always a sense of pain; the influence of Keats is uniformly soothing."<sup>11</sup>

Reviewers of Keats's 1820 volume find the rhymes there less offensive than those of the poet's earlier work, and so they less regularly complain of the seductions of sonic language. For example, Leigh Hunt declares in his review for the *London Journal* on January 21, 1835, "[l]et the student of poetry observe, that in all the luxury of the 'Eve of St. Agnes' there is . . . no heaping up of words or similes for their own sakes or the rhymes sake . . . [and Keats's] description of the painted window, however gorgeous, has not an untrue or superfluous word."<sup>12</sup> Even though reviewers of the later verse no longer focus their vocabulary of enchantment specifically on Keatsian rhyme, however, they continue to suggest that the poet's general style has charmlike traits or that it can induce some kind of readerly escape from reality. Francis Jeffrey, in a combined review of the early poems and the 1820 volume published in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1820, suggests



the spell-inducing effects of reading Keats through both his rapturous enthusiasm and a specific language of overpowerment:

[E]ven while perplexed and bewildered in [the] labyrinths [of Keats's works], it is impossible to resist the intoxication of their sweetness, or to shut our hearts to the enchantments they so lavishly present . . . . The thin and scanty tissue of [Keats's] story [in *Endymion*] is merely the light frame work on which his florid wreaths are suspended, and while his imaginations go rambling and entangling themselves everywhere, like wild honeysuckles, all idea of sober reason, and plan, and consistency, is utterly forgotten, and is "strangled in their waste fertility."

To all the vocabulary in this passage suggesting the loss of control – "perplexed and bewildered in [the] labyrinths," "intoxication," "enchantments," "rambling," "entangling," "forgotten," "strangled," "waste" – may be added Jeffrey's later repetition of the word "enchantment" to describe the effects of Keats's poetry, and, in the subsequent paragraph, his discussion of the verse's style in terms of its "force" and "attraction."<sup>13</sup>

Comments that specifically address imagery and description in the 1820 poems suggest that Keatsian language tends to create its own experiential reality instead of clearly referring to an external one. An anonymous reviewer for *Cambridge University Magazine* in March of 1840 finds that although Keats's images are almost invariably "taken from the world around us . . . . [t]hey seldom present to us a picture: they merely raise an impression."<sup>14</sup> Leigh Hunt, in the 1835 review for the *London Journal*, speaks even more specifically of the affective experience of reading the poet's work. Addressing descriptive passages in *The Eve of St. Agnes* and having enthusiastically quoted the closing of stanza 27, "[Madeline, being] [b]linded alike from sunshine and from rain,/As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again," Hunt comments upon the

ability of Keatsian language to reflect objects in the real world: “Thus it is that poetry, in its intense sympathy with creation, may be said to create anew, rendering its words almost as tangible as the objects they speak of, and individually more lasting; the spiritual perpetuity putting them on a level (not to speak it profanely) with the fugitive substance.”<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, Hunt’s words suggest that Keats’s descriptions are so vivid that they seem to bring the object(s) before the reader’s eye. On the other hand, Hunt’s use of the word “tangible” to describe the descriptive words themselves, and his subsequent quotation of Keats’s stanzas 28-30 and commentary, would seem to make the opposite point: that Keats’s words precisely fail to bring the object before the reader’s eye, instead inducing a pure sensory experience of language itself. In quoting Keats’s stanzas 28-30, Hunt chooses to italicize certain lines he finds striking, but the stanza receiving the most italicization, not coincidentally, is the one in Keats’s oeuvre perhaps most laden with sensory effects, stanza 30.<sup>16</sup> Hunt chooses to quote and/or italicize the most sonically rich and texturally thick lines – “[she slept] an azure-lidded sleep”; “spiced dainties, every one,/From silken Samarcand to cedar’d Lebanon”; “Lucent syrups, tinct with cinnamon” – and then comments, regarding the last phrase, that it “make[s] us read the line delicately, and at the tip-end, as it were, of one’s tongue.”<sup>17</sup> Such a focus on the physical experience of reading Keats, although uncommon in contemporary reviews and only occasionally present in modern criticism of Keats, is, as we will see, a crucial critical step in deciphering how Keats’s preoccupation with the absorbing powers of words appears in his poetry.

Like the critics of Keats’s time, modern literary commentators speak in terms of overpowerment or enchantment when they describe the effects of Keatsian style, but they

do not investigate at length the aspects of Keats's language that are responsible for such effects. For example, while Stillinger does not speak directly of the charmlike powers of Keats's style, he still suggests a kind of magical or mysterious quality when he argues that its pleasurable effects ultimately cannot be explained: "[o]ne can count up and tabulate [rhythmical variations in Keats's poems, such as departures from the metrical norm and caesuras] but the results never explain, except in the bare fact of its existence, how or why such variation creates pleasure. There is, however, no denying the pleasure."<sup>18</sup> Although the introduction to an edition is not a place where an argument about poetic style can be developed at any length, Stillinger nonetheless limits the possible ways one could discuss such subjects as the "sounds of the words" or "the concreteness and textural density of the words and images" by arguing that the effects of such devices cannot be precisely described or accounted for and by stating simply that they create pleasure for the reader. Stuart Sperry, in a chapter on *The Eve of St. Agnes* in his *Keats the Poet*, even more regularly uses the language of enchantment to describe the reader's experience of Keats's work:

Keats's contemporaries and the Victorians . . . in one way or another *came under [the poem's] spell* . . . . Of course *we are seduced*, along with Madeline, each time we return to the work, as *we submit* to its suggestions of *mystery*, the *rapture* of young love, and its *high romantic spell* . . . . The *poem, that is, achieves its magic*, but only in such a way as to dramatize the particular tensions that oppose it . . . . [I]t is the way *we are taken into the world of the poem*, what happens to us there, and the way *we are let out again*, that matters most [about the poem] . . . . For Keats's narrative, even while *enrapturing us*, progressively reveals the kinds of dislocation toward which romance, by its very nature, tends. (my emphasis).<sup>19</sup>

Sperry's awareness that some of the "magical" effects of *The Eve of St. Agnes* could be considered a device, not a coincidence, makes his use of language of enchantment here

more self-conscious than that of some contemporary reviewers who wrote in praise of Keats. And yet Sperry's argument that these effects are caused mainly by the poem's love plot, characters such as Angela, the Beadsman, Hildebrand, and Lord Maurice, and fixtures such as the castle and its galleries, arched ways, and chambers,<sup>20</sup> misses the crucial affective agency of Keatsian language, and particularly its complex absorbing powers at key descriptive moments in the poem.

The overpowering qualities of Keatsian style are acknowledged more directly in Marian Hollingsworth Cusac's article, "Keats as Enchanter: An Organizing Principle of *The Eve of St. Agnes*." Building on the premise that Keats's poem is organized as a series of concentric circles or narrative layers, Cusac investigates the narrator's role in leading the reader through these layers to the core of the poem and back out again. Cusac argues that Keats, in the person of the narrator, "demonstrates his presence as maker" of the poem at each entry into a new layer, through specific words and brief phrases such as "Ah!" and "Lo!", direct statements to a character or the reader, and the prominent use of figurative language such as the simile.<sup>21</sup> Cusac's essay is provocative for several reasons, but especially in its grasp of the general notion that the enchanting effects of *The Eve of St. Agnes* have as much to do with specific traits of its language as with the plot and the characters. Also, Cusac's thesis that the narrator is an "enchanter" begins to scratch the surface of Keats's use of language as an act of compulsion or control upon the reader. Yet because Cusac focuses on how specific words, phrases, and statements help the reader willingly to suspend disbelief instead of on the more directly physical effects of Keats's language, she only briefly addresses key descriptive moments in the poem. Cusac reads Keats's rich language merely as a means to keep the audience's attention or

“ensure that [they] do not escape his magic spell even momentarily” as the narrative drives toward the climax of Madeline’s and Porphyro’s union.<sup>22</sup> I will show, however, language in *The Eve of St. Agnes* and in other poems – especially in descriptive moments – qualifies as a “spell” or “enchantment” even more than Cusac suggests because it is treated by Keats as a complex physical action upon the reader.

Another important argument for the overpowering nature of Keatsian style – this time across the poet’s entire oeuvre – is Garrett Stewart’s in “Keats and Language.” After observing that among English writers, for Keats, vowels are “a passion, consonants an ecstasy, syntax a life force,” Stewart claims that “[t]here is no way to approach Keats with mere close reading. *Proximity breeds immersion*. Like his verse, reading operates from the inside out, silent music rippling with inference” (my emphasis).<sup>23</sup> Yet the assumption underlying this argument is that while Keats is “in” language – absorbed in the powers of language, “listen[ing],” as Stewart puts it elsewhere, “in to the shape of words”<sup>24</sup> – and while the reader’s natural response to Keatsian language is absorption in it (“And we respond in kind”), it is not appropriate for a critic analyzing Keats to give in to this kind of “immersion.” Therefore, even though Stewart calls Keats’s verse “music” – an art characterized, more than anything, by the patterned sonic absorption and release of the listener – he seems to feel obliged then to claim that the music “ripple[s] with inference” and that a critic, instead of “staying inside” Keatsian language, must move “from the inside out.” The latter phrase, for Stewart, means placing formal elements of Keats’s verse strictly in the service of content. Specifically, Stewart explores how devices that exploit the visual and sonic qualities of words such as internal rhyme, anagram, and liaison execute puns and establish secondary meanings for poetic phrases.

While puns and semantic play no doubt exist in the work of a poet so “preternaturally” aware of words, as Stewart puts it, the premise of his essay is that there must be a link between conceptual sense and the physical properties of poetic language. In discussing puns and semantic play in Keats, Stewart has addressed an important, if narrow, trait of Keatsian style without coming to terms with its most essential quality: its tendency to draw the reader into a sensory experience of words as such.

If critics have addressed the latter aspect of Keats’s style, they have done so in passing or only in reference to certain passages from Keats’s work. Andrew Bennett, for example, in arguing for the figuration of reading as “ocular fixation” in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, at the same time acknowledges that “the reader’s ability to ‘see’ the events of the narrative is precluded by the rich intensity of poetic language,” and that, paradoxically, “[in some descriptive passages of *St. Agnes*] the more the language approaches precise specification of concrete detail, the further it moves from verisimilitude.”<sup>25</sup> G.J. Finch attempts to define a notion of the “taste” or “oral gratification” of words in Keats, marshalling examples of descriptive moments in Keats’s verse in which the “feel of the word in the mouth . . . reinforces the meaning.”<sup>26</sup> Yet ultimately Finch names “taste” what are really the tactile sensations in the mouth that Keats’s words actually or imaginatively produce when they are read. Finch also assumes, as Stewart implicitly does, that intense sensory effects in Keats must be linked to conceptual sense, and therefore chooses to study only examples of Keatsian language that demonstrate this linkage. As a result, Finch, along with Bennett, does not investigate the interest in charm that founds the poet’s use of such tactile, not to mention sonic, verbiage.

Finally, while Marjorie Levinson addresses the sensory qualities of the poet's language in *Keats's Life of Allegory: The Origins of a Style*, she concentrates mostly on how Keats's style parodies various forms of literary language occurring in the texts of established, aristocratic poets or on puns that occur on the surface level of Keats's poem through visual and sonic likenesses between words; the "enabling estrangement from expressive, mimetic, and received discursive imperatives" in Keats's language, she argues, makes the poet's verse appear as "anti-Literature" or "non-literature."<sup>27</sup> My reading of Keats also stresses the threat to elevated notions of poetry or the literary that is made by the poet's style, but locates this threat in Keats's interest, across his oeuvre, in exploring how poetry can become a charm. In this last respect, Keats's style bears evidence not just of the social circumstance of the poet's class that Levinson addresses, but also of the newly commercialized culture in which Keats was living. The poet's investigation of how verse can operate as a charm upon the reader implicitly questions to what extent poetry could or should approach the status of a consumable good or experience.<sup>28</sup>

Keats's interest in charming appears at both theoretical and praxeological levels in various early verses but especially in the mature poems "Ode to a Nightingale," *The Eve of St. Mark*, and *The Eve of St. Agnes*. These three poems define the salient ways in which Keats's verse employs and self-reflexively contemplates poetry as charm, developing into fuller form the different varieties of interest in physically affective style that, we will see, appear in Keats's earliest verse. "Ode to a Nightingale" places into practice the textual model that is sketched out on a theoretical level in the early poem "This tale is like a little copse": the poet's total absorption into the materiality of

language. In his ode, Keats spreads repetitions across the poetic field as if to lead himself, in a kind of act of hypnosis, toward the affective verbal core in stanza five. This crux of the poem, replete with non-representational descriptive language, operates as a kind of linguistic bower, a *locus amoenus* wherein the subject – the poetic speaker, but also, by extension, the external reader – “fade[s]” and “dissolves” into a “melodious plot” of poetic words that are treated as matter. In this passage, we see the notion of negative capability (the total absorption of the speaker into the poetic object) itself negated, since the visual distinctness and thus the very identity of that object – in this case, the bower which Keats’s speaker is describing – is finally eclipsed by a sonic experience of the language intended to depict it. What is more, “Ode to a Nightingale” matches its stylistic exploitation of the physical power of words by figurative reflection on that endeavor. The poem’s latter half considers different models of creation and reception and its last two stanzas, in particular, voice a special self-consciousness of the word as such through a key set of repetitions and their focus upon the “very word” of “forlorn.”

*St. Mark* and *St. Agnes* explore poetry as charm in a way different from “Nightingale” in both degree and kind. These poems take to greater heights than the ode the charm-inducing potential of repetition, sonic device, and description, and concentrate even more on how these devices can execute what Northrop Frye calls the central idea of charm: “to reduce freedom of action, either by compelling a certain course of action or by stopping action altogether.”<sup>29</sup> In both of these narrative poems, more specifically, Keats controls the pace and direction of the reader’s absorption through repetition, whether of archaic expressions, certain set phrases, or grammatical structures. He also strategically arrests plot-based reading at particular cruxes of each poem through



language that calls attention to its physical properties: in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, descriptive verbiage that is so saturated in sonic and tactile effects, it obscures the reader's ability to visualize the object of description and thus becomes more experiential than representational; in *The Eve of St. Mark*, a passage in Middle English that is presented as a reified "relic" of medievalism to be viewed by its reader. Furthermore, as I will discuss, indications both within the poems themselves and in Keats's letters announce that these verses specifically explore the charm as directed at external readers as opposed to Keats himself.

Yet *St. Mark* and *St. Agnes* also must be distinguished from each other in terms of the thoroughness and self-consciousness with which they explore a charming style. *St. Mark* constitutes a condensed experiment with the stylistic process of laying but not breaking a poetic charm. *St. Agnes*, however, seeks deliberately both to create and dissolve its charm upon the reader, and supplies a complex example from Keats's oeuvre of a poem that metacritically evaluates its own stylistic explorations. *St. Mark* does contain a form of metacritique of its techniques in that it features a heroine who is entranced by her reading of a book of saintly legends, but more by the physical beauties and embellishments of the book's pages than by the spiritual narratives they tell. *St. Agnes*, however, posits both reader and poet figures. As I will show, Madeline appears as an entranced reader who looks for romantic meaning in the ritual of St. Agnes's eve but finds only the crafty attempts of Porphyro, which represent Keats's stylistic activities in *The Eve of St. Agnes*. Porphyro seeks to overpower Madeline during the feast scene with sensory stimulation, and, in his repeatedly "anguished" state over his "stragem," reflects Keats's conflicts about the amount of style relative to substance in his poetry.

While “Nightingale,” *St. Mark*, and *St. Agnes* illustrate how Keats explores charming strategies especially well, there are additional poems in Keats’s oeuvre that evince the poet’s general interest in physically affective language. For example, in a kind of localized version of techniques in “Nightingale,” prominent repetitions in “Ode to Psyche” seem to serve the purpose of inducing Keats himself deeper into the act of composition. The poem features the almost identical appearances at the end of each of the middle two stanzas of the following line group: “[t]hou hast . . . [no] altar heap’d with flowers; Nor virgin choir to make delicious moan/Upon the midnight hours;/No voice, no lute, no pipe, no incense sweet/From chain-swung censer teeming;/No shrine, no grove, no oracle, no heat/Of pale-mouth’d prophet dreaming” (28-35). This refrain, furthermore, is itself full of repetitions in the form of negative words and catalogues. And to where do these repetitions lead? To a passage like the one I will discuss in “Imitation of Spenser,” where preoccupation with sonic play intrudes upon the clarity of the landscape being described, and like those in the crux of *The Eve of St. Agnes*, which render this same de-visualizing effect through intricate networks of assonance.

An even more prominent example of physical language elsewhere in Keats’s oeuvre is “To Autumn,” which compared with most of the other odes seems queerly stripped of the subjective presence of the poet and dedicated simply to exploring rich descriptive verbiage. Consider, for example, the dense sounds of these lines from the opening stanza:

To bend with apples the moss’d cottage-trees,  
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;  
To swell the gourd and plump the hazel shells  
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,  
And still more, later flowers for the bees (5-9).

Here we find the predilection for the terminal “d” that Keats displays in more intense form in *The Eve of St. Agnes* (“bend,” “moss’d,” “gourd”), as well as a strong emphasis on “l” sounds paired with vowels, as in “hazel” and “fill all.” These sonic strains are experienced by the reader as an imaginative sensation of fullness in the mouth, which performs the ripe, ample quality of autumnal nature of which the poem speaks at the conceptual level. This affective performance of what the poem names in line 1 as “mellow fruitfulness” also occurs in the enjambment at lines 8-9, where the idea of overflowing and excess is physically executed in the spilling over of the phrase “and still more” into line 9. The poem, what is more, shows awareness of its rich union of sound and sense in the lines beginning stanza three, “Where are the songs of spring? Ay, where are they?/Think not of them, thou hast thy music too, -- “ (23-24), and in the making of such music through the sonic play that closes the poem. The sound of gnats mourning, for instance, is heard in the low hum of “o” sounds in the lines that speak of them: “Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn/Among the river shallows, borne aloft” (27-28). The poem’s last lines continue this sonic acting out of what it describes: “full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn” (30) captures in its full “l” sounds and the near-onomatopoeia of “bleat” how lambs sound when they call out; and “gathering swallows twitter in the skies” renders distant bird sounds in the quiet sonic fade of “in the skies” and in another near-onomatopoeia, “twitter.” One, in fact, could argue that the larger sonic method of “To Autumn” is a subtle form of onomatopoeia: not as harsh a version as “buzz” literally equaling the sound of a bee, but a model wherein sounds richly but quietly embody the conceptual sense of the lines in which they occur.

Yet such a close union – even synonymy – between sound and sense is precisely the point of distinction between a poem like “To Autumn” and the other mature poems on which this chapter concentrates. For “Ode to a Nightingale,” *The Eve of St. Mark*, and *The Eve of St. Agnes* each in their own ways explore not how sound can express or embody sense but how sound can push away from it, constituting an enchanting experience in itself that divorces itself from representational objectives. This distancing from an ideational or mimetic model of language and exploration of a model wherein language is a physical action or effect is the essence of charm and of the Keatsian poems that investigate the charm. Yet as I will discuss, to conceive of poetry in terms of stylistic enchantment has implications beyond the affective dynamics of particular poems. At the level of culture at large, it throws into sharp relief the problem in this period of whether writing in a consumer era means producing sensationalized objects and experiences rather than poems per se. At the more personal level of Keats’s life and poetic career, the writing of “charm poetry” just after a failed effort at a poem that could not be more different – that weighty, ambitious attempt at Miltonic greatness, *Hyperion* – crystallizes the tension between the poet Keats was already becoming and the poet he wanted to be in the eyes of posterity.

## II.

Keats’s earliest poetry displays his interest in the physical properties of language, and particularly a conception of poems as entities that physically draw in their readers. The sonnet, “This pleasant tale is like a little copse,” depicts a relationship wherein the reader is overpowered and pacified, even hypnotized, by the physical traits of the text.<sup>30</sup>

Though the poem does not use overpowering physical techniques, it reflects on the experience of being physically overpowered at a theoretical level.

This pleasant tale is like a little copse:  
 The honied lines do freshly interlace,  
 To keep the reader in so sweet a place,  
 So that he here and there full hearted stops;  
 And oftentimes he feels the dewy drops  
 Come cool and suddenly against his face,  
 And by the wandering melody may trace  
 Which way the tender-legged linnet hops.  
 Oh! what a power has white simplicity!  
 What mighty power has this gentle story!  
 I, that do ever feel athirst for glory,  
 Could at this moment be content to lie  
 Meekly upon the grass, as those whose sobbings  
 Were heard of none beside the mournful robbins.<sup>31</sup>

The first line suggests that this verse will be primarily about a “tale,” but the terminology throughout implies that Keats is imagining a poetic text. Specifically, Keats is preoccupied in this sonnet with exploring a physical notion of a poem and of its operations upon a reader.

In the poem’s beginning, Keats’s speaker describes a reading experience that is contradictory: characterized both by being physically arrested by the text and by moving freely through it. By comparing the tale he is reading to a “little copse,” or a thicket of small trees and shrubs, Keats’s speaker at first suggests that to read this text is to be nested amidst its vegetation – to be packed in densely as opposed to roaming around. This suggestion is reinforced in verses 2-3, which describe how the tale’s lines “interlace” and arrest the reader’s motion by “keep[ing]” him in one “place.” Yet other lines imply the reader’s somewhat free motion: that he chooses to “stop” at places in the text (4), and even if led by its “melody,” still willfully “trace[s]/[w]hich way the tender-legged linnet hops” (7-8). These lines, furthermore, confirm this sonnet’s preoccupation

with the physical experience of reading poetry: “melody,” together with the subtle reference to a poetic line in “tender-legged linnet” that “hops,” refers figuratively both to internal sonic devices such as assonance and consonance that “interlace” a poetic stanza together, and to end-rhymes, which provide a place for the “linnet” to “hop” or land, and for the reader to “stop.”

If the sonnet’s octave ruminates on a readerly experience characterized, paradoxically, by both confinement and freedom, then the sestet appears to resolve that paradox. It suggests the text’s final power over the reader and provides the most interesting detail yet of the physical model of a poem that this sonnet is sketching. In lines 9 and 10, the speaker enthusiastically declares the “power” of the text he is reading, which he describes with the words “tale” and “white simplicity.” At first the speaker’s meaning in the latter descriptor seems unclear. Yet like the discreet reference to the poetic line contained in the phrase, “tender-legged linnet,” “white simplicity” may be read as a subtle reference to the page on which the text appears. In this sonnet’s physical conception of a poem and its effects, then, the poem is the “copse” or thicket of words imposed upon the “white simplicity” of the page. This page possesses power both because it highlights the words placed upon it and because it works as an intertexture with those words to “keep the reader in so sweet a place.” The final suggestion of the text’s power over the reader comes in the sonnet’s final four lines, which declare that the reader is compelled – indeed “content” – to “lie meekly” down in the copse.

The closing of the poem also reflects both Keats’s career-long preoccupation with fame and his desire to “be among the English poets,” and his anxiety about his poetic capabilities. With this biographical context in mind, the lines “I, that do ever feel athirst

for glory,/Could at this moment be content to lie/Meekly upon the grass, as those whose sobbings/Were heard of none beside the mournful robbins,” read hauntingly, as a poet’s imagination of never being heard by, or implicitly having to write to, a human audience. In fact, Keats’s entire sonnet could be read as a fantasy erected against a model of poetry that involves the risk of failure: one wherein a human voice, “sobbing,” passive, and vulnerable, is “heard” by human listeners. The fantasy consists at least in the idea that the poem could become an end in itself, or more elaborately, in the physical model of poetry that is conceived by the sonnet, wherein the human poet’s voice disappears into “thicket” of a text that transfixes the reader with its various physical traits. This idea of poetry as the risky bearing of the soul before human listeners, contrasted with the idea of poetry as a physical experience that absorbs the poet or an external reader, later appears in a more complex version as a conflict within Keats’s mature corpus.

“This tale is like a little copse” ruminates upon physical model of the text-reader relation at the level of the idea, but another of Keats’s early poems, “Specimen of an Induction to a Poem,” considers such a model at both the level of the idea and the level of poetic style. Keats’s title, first of all, announces a certain objective, technical interest in poems as affective exercises. His use of the phrase “specimen of an induction” implies that this induction is not one-of-a-kind, not created organically out of an inspiration to write this poem in particular, but a certain type of poetic beginning that conceivably could be repeated across multiple texts. Furthermore, the word “induction,” (from the Latin, “a leading in”) implies that a certain enclosure of the reader in the poem will occur. Under Bacon’s definition of reading – tasting, chewing, swallowing, or digesting – reading is an act of consumption and therefore control of the text. Yet the model of

reading suggested in Keats's title is the exact inverse of the Baconian one: if the text is leading the reader in – we might even say executing a charm – then the control clearly lies with the text.

This idea of a text as induction is reinforced by the poem's discussion of charming at the content level: "Large white plums are dancing in mine eye . . . . no mortal hand/Could charm them into such an attitude," and "how shall I revive the dying tones of minstrelsy" (2, 5, 7; 31-32). But it also emerges in the poem's phrase, "Lo! I must tell a tale of chivalry." Much in the manner of an oral poet, Keats's speaker spreads repetitions of this phrase fairly evenly across the poem – roughly, every eight to eleven lines – with the intervening passages describing medieval images such a knight's plumes or a lady in waiting; these repetitions continue the poem's ideational focus on charming. If the charm is a form of compulsion, as Frye suggests when he argues that it intends to compel a certain course of action or stop action altogether,<sup>32</sup> then in the word "must" the speaker emphasizes that he has been "charmed" by stories of chivalry into writing poetry that both discusses enchantment and explores its enactment through poetic style.

To this end, the evenly-spread recurrences of the phrase, "Lo! I must tell a tale of chivalry," explore how repetitions can become the basis of a form of hypnosis, or a channeling of the reader's attention. After the speaker adoringly describes the knight's plume and the lady in waiting, however, his latest repetition of "Lo! I must tell a tale of chivalry" takes a drastic negative turn when he utters, "Ah! shall I ever tell its cruelty!" (23). As the notion that chivalry has a dark side intrudes upon the poem, the speaker begins to describe the frightening flashing of a warrior's eye and a knightly tournament. Yet clearly such negative imagery is undesirable, and it is repetitive language to which



the speaker resorts in order to move himself out of this moment of crisis. As if to drive the “cruelty” of chivalry away from the poem with an illocutionary utterance, the speaker cries, “No, no! this is far off” (31), then moves into a cycle of repetitions that begins with “how shall I/Revive the dying tones of minstrelsy” (32), advances to “[h]ow sing the splendour of the revelries” (35), and eventually comes back to the stock phrase that began the poem, “[y]et must I tell a tale of chivalry” (45). This cycle of repetitions leads ultimately to an invocation of Spenser at the close of the poem, which serves as a kind of balm upon the wound of Keats’s disillusionment: “Spenser! thy brows are arched, open, kind,/And come like a clear sun-rise to my mind; And always does my heart with pleasure dance,/When I think on thy noble countenance” (49-52). In this early verse, “Specimen of an Induction to a Poem,” then, the repeated phrase, “[y]et [or “lo”] must I tell a tale of chivalry,” serves the threefold purpose of expressing Keats’s interest in charming at the level of the idea; experimenting with how to draw a reader more deeply into the poem – to “induce” him or her more successfully; and helping to get Keats out of the compositional crisis of realizing the dark side of chivalry. We will see that in “Ode to a Nightingale,” repetitions serve both as a localized charming strategy upon Keats as the reader of his own poem and as a device employed in moments of poetic crisis, while in *The Eve of St. Agnes* and *The Eve of St. Mark*, they are explored even more intensely as a means of physically engulfing the reader in the poem.

Another early verse, “An Imitation of Spenser,” showcases Keats’s other major physical poetic technique: descriptive language that, because of its densely packed networks of sound, tends to obscure the objects being described and instead induce an experience of words as such.<sup>33</sup> Because this poem is a fragment, it displays on a small

scale the pattern Keats's descriptions tend to achieve in poems across his oeuvre: focusing first on one or more single objects or scenes, in order to work in toward a more densely packed passage that more concretely explores the textures of descriptive language itself. The fragment's opening stanza surveys an entire landscape, various parts of which the poem will isolate and describe in more detail in subsequent stanzas.

Now morning from her orient chamber came,  
 And her first footsteps touch'd a verdant hill;  
 Crowning its lawny crest with amber flame,  
 Silv'ring the untainted gushes of its rill;  
 Which, pure from mossy beds, did down distill,  
 And after parting beds of simple flowers,  
 By many streams a little lake did fill,  
 Which round its merge reflected woven bowers,  
 And, in its middle space, a sky that never lowers. (1-9)

If the typical path of perspective in a picturesque landscape painting is to move from a low foreground, to a middle ground, to a background that contains a high-rising structure, then that path is obviously reversed here. The passage's movement from the high "verdant hill," along the path of the down-flowing rill, around the lake at the bottom of the hill, and in toward the middle of the lake imitates both the action of the sensuous language across the poem, which is to pack down and in to a close texture toward the end of the fragment, and the reader's experience of becoming entangled in that texture. This opening stanza features the kind of sonic continuities that appear in denser form in later poems: the cross-stanza internal rhymes of "orient" and "verdant," "Morning," "Crowning," "Silv'ring," and "parting"; the rhymes "Sil[v'ring] and "rill" that physically seal line 4; and the repetition of "beds" in lines 5 and 6 that helps to unify the stanza. The stanza's main purpose, however, is to map out the way of the more intense description to come.

The latter gets underway immediately in stanza two, where we find a characteristic Keatsian narrowing of focus down toward the lake.

There the king-fisher saw his plumage bright  
 Vieing with fish of brilliant dye below;  
 Whose silken fins and golden scalè light  
 Cast upward, through the waves, a ruby glow:  
 There saw the swan his neck of arched snow,  
 And oar'd himself along with majesty;  
 Sparkled his jetty eyes; his feet did show  
 Beneath the waves like Afric's ebony,  
 And on his back a fay reclined voluptuously. (10-18)

In stanza one, sonic continuity is achieved through relatively simple devices such as internal rhyme and repetition, but in this stanza we find a more intense experience of that continuity. While internal rhymes are still a key device, they assume more complex patterns and are assisted by the parallel placement of similar words within lines as well as anagrammatic transformations of words.

Keats spreads these devices evenly across the stanza so that the smooth sonic similarities and subtle transitions lull the reader along through the bending rills that are the poetic lines; it is as if Keats means the reader's experience of the stanza to imitate the actions of oaring and the movement of the waves that are described at the level of content. The string of internal rhymes begins in "bright" in line ten, which connects with "[v]ieing" and dye" in line 11; "brilliant" (11) is carried forth into the "n" sounds, "silken" and "golden" in line 12, whose end-rhyme "light" connects with "cast" in line 13. Across lines 13 and 14, internal rhymes begin mixing with anagrammatic transformations, as "glow" is referenced in "saw," "swan," and "snow." Additional sound continuities – "arched" (14), "oar'd"(15), and "sparkled" (16); the paralleled "jetty" and "feet" (16); and the links between "waves" and "fay" and "ebony" and "[a]nd

on” that cohere lines 17 and 18 – perpetuate the smooth motion of the stanza through to its end. The lulling effect of the stanza’s sounds not only tends to obscure the objects being discussed – the fisherman, the fish, the swan – but also to allow the strong colors, which are its other major sensory focus, to flash more brilliantly upon the mind’s eye of the reader.

The speaker’s first-person entry into the poem at the beginning of stanza three seems a distraction from the sensory experience of the poem thus far. Yet the speaker’s reflections on the island in the lake, coupled with the subsequent description, provide insight, even in this early poem, of the function of description in Keats’s oeuvre.

Ah! could I tell the wonders of an isle  
That in that fairest lake had placed been,  
I could e’ en Dido of her grief beguile;  
Or rob from aged Lear his bitter teen:  
For sure so fair a place was never seen,  
Of all that ever charm’d romantic eye:  
It seemed an emerald in the silver sheen  
Of the bright waters; or as when on high,  
Through clouds of fleecy white, laughs the coerulean sky.

And all around it dipp’d luxuriously  
Slopings of verdure through the glassy tide,  
Which, as it were in gentle amity,  
Rippled delighted up the flowery side;  
As if to glean the ruddy tears, it tried,  
Which fell profusely from the rose-tree stem!  
Haply it was the workings of its pride,  
In strife to throw upon the shore a gem  
Outvieing all the buds in Flora’s diadem. (19-36)

In lines 19-24, the speaker tells us that the act of description is intended to accomplish magical effects upon a reader such as “charming,” “beguiling,” or “robbing” of bitterness. Yet the description in this poem so far, especially that which closes the poem, suggests that what “charms” and “beguiles” is not the reader’s imagination of a beautiful

scene but the sonic hypnosis of Keats's poetic language. The speaker's conjecture, "[f]or sure so fair a place was never seen/Of all that ever charm'd romantic eye," has a literal truth, for, as we have observed, the soundplay of previous stanzas tends to obscure the objects of description.

These de-visualizing effects only intensify in the description of the island that closes the poem. It is difficult to imagine the island itself due to the intrusion of abstract words such as "amity," "pride," and "strife," and to spatial incongruities: the island shore is somehow composed both of "verdure" that slopes down and a "flowery side" that water can flow up, as well as an oddly distinguished "rose-tree stem." Yet these visual unclaritys seem the natural consequence of the rich sonic play that dominates these two stanzas. In the lines, "or as when on high/Through clouds of fleecy white, laughs the coerulean sky," the vowel echoes between "high" and "white" and "fleecy" and "coerulean," as well as the play of "s" and "f" sounds across the phrase, are the elements that dominate the attention, especially given the lines' unclear syntax and the lack of a clear logical relationship with the phrase that precedes them. Indeed, through to the end of the poem, we see the same rich interweaving of sounds as occurred in stanza two, only this time the flashing of clear, brilliant colors is absent. We hear only the callings of vowels across "luxuriously," "verdure," "were," "flowery," "workings," "shore," and "Flora," and the steady ring of the terminal "y" in "luxuriously," "glassy," "amity," "flowery," "ruddy," "profusely," and "[h]aply," and "d" in "dipp'd," "tide," "rippled," "delighted," "side," "tried," "pride," "buds," and "diadem." In these verbal networks, words that seem short on function according to the logic of mimetic description have a clear role according to the logic of sensory effects.

In “Imitation of Spenser,” then, we observe Keats’s early experiments in the absorptive power of sensory language: each stanza of the fragment evinces a descriptive language that is less and less mimetic, and more and more infused with soundplay that engulfs the reader in an experience of words as such. This kind of structured description is a crucial element of Keatsian style and will appear in more sophisticated and complex form in the later verse.

### III.

In “Ode to a Nightingale,” *The Eve of St. Mark*, and *The Eve of St. Agnes*, the physical conception of a poem and Keats’s interest in inducing a sensory experience of language is placed fully into practice. Keats more intensely exploits and combines the specific techniques he explores in earlier poems: the incantatory use of repetitions and non-representational descriptive language. Yet the poet’s exploration of the physical powers of verbiage in these poems extends beyond affective style and into the realms of theme and character. Specifically, Keats places his characters and speakers in literal or figural author and reader roles, contemplating the ultimate poetic value of charmlike language through their various scenes of creation and reception.

“Ode to a Nightingale” executes in a subjective context the interest in poetic charming that Keats also evinces in the *St. Mark* and *St. Agnes* narratives. But the postulation of both poet and reader-figures in the narrative poems, together with comments in the poet’s letters, suggest that Keats conceives of their charming properties as directed at an external audience. These elements thus tend to reinforce Andrew Bennett’s claim that “stories are inescapably oriented towards and written *for* readers: the irreducible ground of narrative *is* audience,”<sup>34</sup> whereas the lyric genre of

“Nightingale” encourages a scenario of the poet’s self-enchancement. Keats’s general interest in poetry as charm is reflected in his exploration of it in both the inward-focused genre of lyric and the more outward-focused genre of narrative. It has an analogy, we will see, in Shelley’s even more in-depth exploration of the spell of style in multiple genres: a personal lyric like “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,” a poem with both private and public objectives like “Ode to the West Wind,” and finally a lyrical drama with ambitious public aims, *Prometheus Unbound*.

Particularly in the first four stanzas of “Nightingale,” the speaker takes the forms of physically affective language that appear so heavily elsewhere in Keats’s poetry, repetition and cataloguing, and treats them as kinetic forces; they become illocutionary utterances that are designed to deliver the speaker into an alternate state, as if he were literally moving from one place to another. If this state is achieved in stanza five, then the ode follows up by figuratively reflecting on the exploitation of the physical power of words which it enacts. This reflection occurs in the poem’s last three stanzas, which subtly portray different models of creation and reception and evince a newly heightened self-consciousness about the physical character of words.

The ode’s first stanzas define the nightingale’s state of supreme happiness toward which Keats’s speaker aspires: secluded embowerment, melodious singing, and freedom from the thoughts and situations of this world. The nightingale’s bliss inheres in the gorgeous musicality of its song and particularly in the fact that that song is achieved effortlessly: “That thou, “light-winged Dryad of the trees,/In some melodious plot/Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,/Singing of summer in full-throated ease” (7-10). These lines also suggest that the nightingale’s happiness depends upon being ensconced

deep in the forest (“of the trees,” “in some melodious plot/Of beechen green”), a point that is corroborated in the second stanza, where the speaker expresses his wish for the same seclusion: “That I might drink, and leave the word unseen,/And with thee fade away into the forest dim” (19-20). The third stanza further defines the nightingale’s ideal state as freedom not only from the pain and suffering of the human world, “the weariness, the fever, and the fret” (23), but also from the very condition of thought that inevitably brings on the world’s “leaden-eyed despairs” (27).

We learn these details of the nightingale’s happiness amidst the alternating advances and retreats of energy that are Keats’s verses. While readers commonly note the speaker’s alternating focus on the nightingale’s ideal state and on his own more despairing one, it is less commonly acknowledged that the see-sawing rhythms of the poem – so like a call and response pattern in music – are accomplished just as much through physical uses of the words themselves as through any alternation in the speaker’s conceptual focus. Helen Vendler, for example, avoids discussion of this physicality by arguing that the main trope of *Ode to a Nightingale* is reiteration but then subtly devaluing the stanzas which engage in that act. Vendler calls Keats’s reiteration – for instance, his multiple descriptive phrases for wine in stanza two – “exploratory tarrying” and sees it as risking “excess of description and obscuring of structural lines.”<sup>35</sup> Vendler also focuses on Keats’s repetitions of the word “fade,” calling them “feeble reiterative variations.”<sup>36</sup> She briefly suggests that Keats’s reiterations and repetitions may have to do with a “rhythm of expansion and sinking,”<sup>37</sup> but the overall demand of her commentary is that each line of Keats’s poem should have an intellectual significance and a place in an organizational structure that is dictated by a conceptual process or



argument. Though Garrett Stewart is often similarly inclined to require a linkage between sound and sense in Keats, his reading of “Ode to a Nightingale” is generally more alive than Vendler’s to the illocutionary verbal forces in the poem, or Keats’s use of words as energy. Stewart calls the ode a “drama about sounds that save” and argues that its desire is “to transfigure groan into chant, to widen the space for a here-and-now of alleviating melody.”<sup>38</sup> The comment that the verse aspires to a condition of “chant,” in particular, reinforces the idea that Keats’s language is being deployed as a poetic charm, since chant is a form of language that tends to have hypnotic effects. (Such a magical linguistic power is also suggested in the verbal link between “chant” and “enchantment.”) Stewart’s argument, too, corroborates what is borne out by the poems I have discussed so far, in which Keats is inclined to use repetitions less as conceptual tools and more as physical actions. Whether it is the recurrence of exact wordings and the same syntactical structures, or, as in catalogues, the gradual annihilation of the semantic identity of each element and its conversion into a paratactic sonic beat, Keats uses repetition as a charming device that indeed compels a certain course of action.<sup>39</sup> In the case of “Nightingale,” that action is to move the poem toward the immersion in words that occurs in stanza five. This immersion – Keats’s own linguistic “melodious plot” and enclosure among the “leaves” of the words themselves – is the only sort of union with the nightingale that the poem is able to achieve. It is the kinetic use of language in the first four stanzas, especially repetitions, that drives the poem toward the crux at stanza five.

The first stanza of Keats’s ode tells us much – not only about the nightingale’s supreme happiness, as we have seen, but also about the stylistic patterns of the poem and the telos toward which those patterns are driving.

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains  
     My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,  
 Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains  
     One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:  
 'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,  
     But being too happy in thine happiness, --  
         That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,  
             In some melodious plot  
 Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,  
         Singing of summer in full-throated ease. (1-10)

These lines capture the two vector forces that exert their pressure simultaneously throughout the poem: the horizontal expansion and retraction that each stanza's rhymes and stops achieve when the lines are read, and the vertical pull of internal sonic networks, which spread down single stanzas and groups of stanzas. The first four lines expand horizontally as the speaker elaborates his condition by stringing together conjunctions and adverbial qualifications. Yet this expansion is matched by the lines' retraction, which occurs through enjambment (for instance, the delay of "[o]ne minute past" from line 3 to line 4) and through the effects of the "d" sounds ("drowsy," "drunk," "emptied," "dull," "drains," "Lethe-wards," "had"), which, though less aggressive than those Keats uses in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, still exert a static force. The stanza expands again in lines 5-6, this time energetically, as the "reiterations" which Vendler finds in the poem and which occur in the first four lines turn to exact repetitions. The three-time appearance of a form of the word "happy" lifts the lines along until they reach another retraction, this one more subtle, in the concentration of focus on the nightingale and the "d" sounds in the line, "That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees" (7). Yet this retraction mainly serves as prelude to a shift from horizontal to vertical force at this point in the stanza. The sharp visual narrowing of the stanza at the line, "In some melodious plot," draws the eye inward and downward, as if spatially to mark off the "plot" of which

the lines speak. Then sounds spread down, with intertwining networks of “s,” “m,” “o,” and “e” that generate from the word “melodious” and run through “shadows,” “numberless,” “singest,” “summer,” “full-throated,” “beechen,” “green,” and “ease.”

It is inevitable that some rhythmic emphasis falls on the line, “In some melodious plot,” given the syllabic rules of the stanza Keats has chosen for his ode. But the line’s sonic role and symbolic meaning for the poem at large are more significant. The words, “In some melodious plot,” by naming and then actually generating a special, sound-rich region at the end of the stanza, express the telos toward which Keats’s ode is journeying: the creation of a “melodious plot” of words that may be enjoyed *as words*. This stylistic agenda – to erase the distance between speaker and language by treating the word as physical matter – parallels the union of speaker and nightingale, or subject and object, toward which the poem drives at the content level.

After the first stanza’s naming and then sketching of a “melodious plot,” the speaker lurches forward with enthusiastic repetitions in the next stanza, as if to move toward the fuller creation of what has been glimpsed. The general activity of the stanza is, as Vendler suggests, reiteration – specifically, of the idea and imagery of wine – but it does not necessarily follow that reiteration is a “static” trope through which the poem fails to advance.<sup>40</sup> One must pay attention to the repetitions within the reiterations, and particularly to the downward-moving map of repeated words that Keats’s speaker is plotting. Ringing repetitions of the same syntactical structure and phrase (“O, for a draught of vintage!”, “O for a beaker full of the warm South”) anchor the stanza and divide it into small regions, within which lists are allowed to run free (“Tasting of Flora and the country green,/Dance, and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirth!”, 13-14; “With

beaded bubbles winking at the brim,/And purple-stained mouth”, 17-18).<sup>41</sup> From a sonic perspective, the mixed horizontal and vertical motions of the poem continue, as similar sounds cohere single lines (for example, the “s” and “ur” sounds in line 14, quoted above) and spread into networks down the stanza: “bs” and “ds” call down the verses, but the aural focus is the richly repeated “ul” in the middle lines – epitomized in the three-time appearance of “full” (“full of the warm South,” “Full of the true,” “the blushful”).

In stanza two, Keats’s speaker also establishes the pattern of cross-stanza repetitions that maps the poem into its core at stanza five and that reappears, with rich significance, in the famous repetition of “forlorn” in stanzas 7 and 8. We see the repetition of “green” – from stanza one’s “beechen green” to stanza two’s “country green” and echoing “e” sounds in “leave,” “unseen,” and “thee.” Then, at the end of stanza two, “fade away into the forest dim” (20) echoes almost exactly in the beginning of the next stanza: “Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget” (21). Throughout stanza three, the speaker continues to give recourse to repetitions in the tolling “where” phrases down the lines; these repeated words, paradoxically, move the speaker along in terms of rhythm and sonic energy, and yet stagnate him in troubling thoughts of the pains of this world.

This intellectual dimension of stanza three threatens to destroy the momentum from physically affective language that the poem is creating. But it is frantically challenged – no surprise – by repetition, as the speaker recalls the words that were used in previous stanzas: “Away! away! for I will fly to thee” (31). Yet, in an almost masochistic counterpoint to this burst of energy, the speaker immediately returns to the

painful thoughts of illness and death that have just threatened his poetic motion in stanza three (“Though the dull brain perplexes and retards,” 34). This pitfall necessitates another frantic recourse to repetition: “Already with thee! tender is the night,/And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,/Cluster’d around by all her starry Fays” (35-7). These lines repeat in the word “already” the very look of the word “away,” and they reproduce the mid-line exclamation points from before. Yet the level of wish fulfillment they express is entirely new. Although line 35 could be understood to mean, “Already tender is the night, with thee,” the anxious cramming of “with thee!” between “already” and “tender” is a syntactical jumping of the gun in order to arrive at the illocutionary phrase, “Already with thee!” These words are the speaker’s almost physical attempt – or rather, his verbal attempt that functions as a physical attempt – to join with the nightingale’s blissful state. But the attempt falls short, as the narrowing in to his own world at “But here there is no light” indicates (38).

Yet even as the line, “But here there is no light,” is a low moment for the speaker, conveying the idea that he has failed to become the nightingale in his imagination, it also generates a passage that is an affective boon for him. The speaker reverses his pattern of previous stanzas, where a physical dalliance with the sounds of repetitious language falls back into a psychological focus on his own viewpoint. After “I cannot see” (41), he takes himself out of the poem and hides himself among purely descriptive language, just as the nightingale is hidden “among the leaves.” In this poetic moment that begins at the end of stanza four and lasts through stanza five, what the poem has told us at the content level – that there is no light, or capability of sight – merges with what the poem does at the

stylistic level – annihilate the visual clarity of what is being described in order to revel in a rich network of sound.

But here there is no light  
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown  
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,  
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,  
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet  
Wherewith the seasonable month endows  
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;  
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;  
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;  
And mid-May's eldest child,  
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,  
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves. (38-50)

The stanza divisions, imposed by Keats's transcribers, might suggest that the revelry in description does not begin until the first line of stanza five – a notion reinforced by the routine critical hailing of stanza five as the finest of the poem. Yet the sonic networks that so distinguish stanza five actually generate from “But here there is no light” in the stanza before. The dense sonic effect of this descriptive stanza, rendered in its listing action, number of sonic strains, and the complexity with which those strains intermingle, causes particular words in the description to lose their semantic identity. It also causes the intended object of description, the bower and the particular plants within it, to lose their visual clarity in the mind's eye.

Where we will see a thickness, even a paralysis, in the dense sounds of the descriptive passages in *St. Agnes*, however, the sounds at this crux of “Nightingale” move at a gently brisk speed. This velocity comes mostly from the “s,” which takes terminal positions in words but uses that station to create elisive, sinewy verbal motion instead of the glugged stops that Keats's terminal “d” sounds make in other mature poems.

Beginning at “is” of line 38, the “s” appears across the passage, but especially in lines 42, 47, and 50. The thread of “r” that begins in “here there” of line 38 is also a strong one in this sound-texture, appearing in all the lines but 48. Yet “l” and “m” are almost as plentiful. Line 38 again serves as a point of origination, as “l” comes down from “light” and moves through the words “blown,” “glooms,” “flowers,” “embalmed,” “seasonable,” “wild,” “pastoral eglantine,” “violets,” “leaves,” “eldest child,” “full,” and “flies.” And the “m” originates only two lines later in “glooms” and “mossy” (40), proceeding through many words in stanza five, notably “month,” “mid-May’s,” “musk-rose,” “murmurous,” and “summer.” Finally, this web of sonic continuity is strengthened by the “v,” “w,” and “y” sounds that appear at the end of stanza four and continue into stanza five. Where the poem’s journey toward this sonic richness began with the nightingale “sing[ing] of summer” in stanza one, now the journey ends with a reference to the singing of flies on “summer eves.” The sudden, brief punch of stanza six’s beginning, “Darkling I listen,” shifts Keats’s speaker into the role of listening to the sounds of the stanza he has just written.

The retreat into physical language that has just occurred generates a subtle form of critical reflection on poetic making and reception in the remaining stanzas of the ode. The speaker’s immersion in words as such yields an even stronger sense of the difference between a pure poetics of sound and the more humane poetics represented in the nightingale’s effortless expression of its whole character, that “pour[ing] forth [of its] *soul* abroad/In such an ecstasy!”(77-8) (my emphasis). Illustrating Vendler’s point that stanza six is where memory and judgment enter the poem,<sup>42</sup> the speaker moves to consider another of his forms of verbal creation: his calling Death “soft names in many a

mused rhyme/To take into the air my quiet breath” (53-4). Yet this address to Death is presented as an inadequate form of poetry: simple (the mere calling of names), labored and thought-requiring (“*many a mused rhyme*”), and weak (“to take into the air my *quiet breath*”) by comparison to the nightingale’s song. As the speaker’s comparative mood finishes out stanza six, he recalls the physical retreat into language of before by describing himself in exceedingly physical terms. He designates the body part, his ears, that the sonic passage has just stimulated, and inters himself below the words/flowers of stanza five by naming himself a “sod.” The nightingale, by contrast, is portrayed in glowingly spiritual terms, with a hint of immortality in “Still wouldst thou sing” and the name of “high requiem” for the song.

Stanza seven completes the poem’s idealization of the nightingale as a kind of perfect poet who successfully merges melodious singing, pure self-expression, and fame through the ages; it also suggests, more nakedly than any other stanza perhaps, Keats’s feeling that he cannot measure up to such a model, and has only to retreat into a poetry of sound, executed as charm, like that epitomized in stanza five. The speaker’s description of the bird’s immortality – “No hungry generations tread thee down” – hints in its first half of the devouring, critiquing readers who attacked Keats’s early verse and whom he had in mind when he uttered of *Lamia*, “[The poem has a fire] which must take hold of people in some way – give them either pleasant or unpleasant sensation. What they want is sensation of some sort.”<sup>43</sup> The second half, “tread thee down,” suggests Keats’s exhaustion in his obsessive effort to “be among the English poets” upon his death, and it strangely echoes the “treading down” of the nightingale ode into the physical passage of stanza five. The speaker then moves to reflect upon the inspirational power of the



nightingale's singing through time. In a moment that recalls Blake's idealistic depictions of the power of Los's voice in *Jerusalem*, Keats's speaker humanizes the bird by referring to its "voice" (63) and by saying that its song provides comfort to Ruth when it "[finds] a path/Through [her] sad heart" (65-6). The stanza's final description of the nightingale's song, that it "oft-times hath/Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam/Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn" (68-70), would seem a departure from the powers that were ascribed to it just before. After all, there is no audience but an inanimate window, and "charming" is a more superficial agenda for verse than speaking to and comforting another human being. At this point in the stanza and the poem at large, Keats uses his speaker to consider whether his own poetic endeavors are mere charms or whether they even begin to fulfill a more humanitarian ideal of poetry. This is the same question that is asked, famously, in *The Fall of Hyperion*: "Art though not of the dreamer tribe?/The poet and the dreamer are distinct/Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes./The one pours out a balm upon the world,/The other vexes it" (198-202), with the term "vex" connoting the magic of the charm that several of Keats's poems execute through their style.

Despite stanza seven's reflective self-consciousness, however, it also appears that in its casement description, Keats is trying to concoct another charm upon himself, as if the implicit comparisons between his own poetry and that of the nightingale's have again gotten to be too much to bear. Vendler also suggests this self-charming agenda. Yet where she locates the charm in the speaker's intellectual consideration of the "faery" world to which lines 69-70 refer (103-04), I locate it in the physical effects of the words themselves – the place where charming happens in other poems by Keats. Indeed, this

moment is the only one after stanza five where the speaker has recourse to rich networks of sound: the play of “o” in “opening” and “foam, “ and the consonance of “r” in “[c]harm’d” and “perilous” and of both “r” and “f” in “foam,” “faery,” and “forlorn.”

The charming attempt continues into stanza eight, as the speaker blatantly repeats the word “forlorn” with a frenzied exclamation point. Yet this attempted magic cannot be anything other than self-conscious at this late moment in Keats’s ode. The speaker, accordingly, calls attention to the repeated word to which he has just resorted: “Forlorn! *the very word* is like a bell/To toll me back from thee to my sole self!” (71-2) (my emphasis).<sup>44</sup> Now, as the realization that “the fancy cannot cheat so well” is voiced, other repetitions come forth in the sounding and re-sounding of “Adieu,” again with feverish punctuation. The tracking of the “fading” of the nightingale’s song recalls the repetitions of the word “fade” that brought the speaker toward the affective crux of the poem. This tracking, with its detailed map of the sound’s travel over the landscape in lines 76-8, also recalls this ode’s very physical mapping of its own sounds toward the dense packing in of sonic texture in stanza five, a poetic event that is recalled one last time in the report that the nightingale’s song is “buried deep/In the next valley-glades.”

This final stanza, more than any other in the poem, crystallizes the tensions surrounding the action of lyric self-enchancement for Keats. The phrase “the very word,” in particular, makes explicit the speaker’s self-consciousness about using words *as words* to deliver himself into an alternate sensibility. Keats’s implicit self-critique for using the lyric as a charm upon the self derives from his constant depiction, even as the technique of charming is being explored, of an alternate poetic model that is presented as more dignified and successful. In the case of this ode, that model is the nightingale’s “pouring

forth” of its “soul” – its complete self-expression that achieves instant power and a meaning so deep that the speaker calls it a “high requiem” when he is a “sod.” Shelley, we will see, takes a generally more open and assured attitude toward exploring the charm than Keats in several major poems, particularly using the lyric genre in his “Hymn” to test how the spell of style can summon an experience of a higher power, the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty, or can supply soothing effects in the face of that power’s evanescence. Yet this disposition toward poetic spellcasting is not possible for Keats because his higher power, the nightingale, is a figurative poet who models a form of poetic greatness that seems out of reach; the charm cannot be explored freely because of an always hovering consciousness of its implications for Keats’s poetic reputation and greatness. The distinction between Shelley and Keats turns upon how the charm is ultimately being regarded: whether it is seen as a test of poetic dignity or simply as a useful tool that can be employed for a variety of poetic functions. This distinction will also characterize the ways that Keats and Shelley explore and metacritically evaluate poetry as enchantment in genres besides the lyric.

#### IV.

Keats’s exploration of poetry as charm in the context of narrative is displayed in a condensed form in the *The Eve of St. Mark*, a poem that has received less critical attention than much of Keats’s other verse but that, for its clear interest in the entrancing powers of poetic language, has crucial importance for an understanding of Keatsian style. The poem, written within a few weeks of *The Eve of St. Agnes*, also provides us with a way into the latter more substantial and complex poem because it employs many of the same stylistic devices.<sup>45</sup>

*The Eve of St. Mark* is a fragment that went unpublished until 1848, but it originally appears in Keats's letter to George and Georgiana Keats in September 1819.<sup>46</sup> Keats's framing of his poem in the letter implies that he conceives of it as a physical exercise upon the external reader, but the peculiar stylistic traits of the poem support this point most strongly. These include a more detailed, intense application of the hypnotic repetitions that Keats uses in "Specimen of an Induction to a Poem," as well as cataloguing or listing strategies and sonically rich descriptive passages. *St. Mark* also displays structural model wherein inductive techniques such as repetitions and cataloguing lead toward a poetic crux, the Middle English passage, which overtly explores language as a physical phenomenon. This inductive model occurs, as we have seen, in "Ode to a Nightingale," and is repeated in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, complete with the movement out of the poetic crux. In *St. Mark*, however, the poem is curiously cut off the moment the crux is reached.

When Keats frames *The Eve of St. Mark* in his letter, he supplies only a few direct comments about the fragment. Just before giving the verses, Keats has been describing to George and Georgiana Keats the quiet side streets of the town of Winchester: "The side-streets here are excessively maiden lady like – The door steps always fresh from the flannel. The knockers have a very staid ser[i]ous, nay almost awful qu[i]etness about them – I never saw so quiet a collection of Lions, and rams heads – ." <sup>47</sup> After declaring, a few statements later, that "[t]he great beauty of Poetry is, that it makes every thing every place interesting," Keats introduces his poem: "Some time since [on February 13, 1819] I began a poem called 'the Eve of St. Mark' quite in the spirit of town quietude. I th[i]nk it will give you the sensation of walking about an old county Town in a coolish

evening. I know not yet whether I shall ever finish it – I will give it as far as I have gone. *Ut tibi placent!*”<sup>48</sup> Here, in the portrayal of an “old county Town” that Keats declares as the purpose of his poem, he goes beyond a mere agenda of *ut pictura poesis* to suggest that this poem will produce the very “sensation” of walking about the town for its most immediate readers, George and Georgiana Keats. Building on the implication that reading this poem will have both visual and tactile effects, Keats adds that the poem will reproduce the experience of strolling “in” – not “on” – “a coolish evening.”<sup>49</sup> While the goals suggested here may seem unattainable (how could a poem create the actual experience of walking in a town and the surrounding effects of the night air?) Keats’s comments show an interest in creating distinct physical effects through verse.

Keats continues to reflect on the general theme of the physicality and immediacy of writing after he records the lines of *The Eve of St. Mark*. He declares to George:

I hope you will like this for all its Carelessness – I must take an opportunity here to observe that though I am writing *to* you I am all the while writing *at* your Wife – This explanation will account for my speaking sometimes *hoity-toityishly*. . . . Writing has this disadvan[ta]ge of speaking. one cannot write a wink, or a nod, or a grin, or a purse of the Lips, or a *smile* – *O law!* One can-[not] put ones finger to one’s nose, or yerke ye in the ribs, or lay hold of your button in writing –<sup>50</sup>

Keats’s suggestion of “carelessness” may refer to the fact that the poem is at this stage a fragment, since its patterned repetitions and sonically rich descriptive language appears deliberately dedicated to exploring the absorptive powers of words.<sup>51</sup> What is noteworthy in this passage is that immediately after recording his poem Keats ruminates upon the extent to which writing can become an action (“I am all the while writing *at* your wife”) even though it lacks the physical immediacy of winking, smiling, and touching. Keats’s declared wish that writing could have a tactile effect, in particular, is

telling, given that his poems, particularly *The Eve of St. Agnes*, explore this form of verbal power.

That Keats conceives of *The Eve of St. Mark* in terms of its physical effects upon an external reader emerges in the poem's preoccupation, at both the level of content and the level of stylistic device, with reading as a process of transfixion. Although Keats suggests in the statement quoted above that the main focus of his poem is the "sensation" of walking through an English town, it soon becomes clear that the details of the town, given at various points in the first half of the poem, are not provided to the reader on the basis of their own interest but as a foil to its real interest, the character of Bertha. The poem narrates the details of the town outside in order to throw into sharper relief the figure of Bertha, sitting in her warm room inside and entranced by her reading of a book of saintly legends. What is more, the description of the town and of Bertha features hypnotic repetitions, cataloguing, and sound devices such as assonance, which create in the reader an intense absorption in the sensory traits of Keats's language that imitates Bertha's entrancement by her book. The question, then, that the poem implicitly asks at the plot level – is Bertha entranced by the actual story of St. Mark's saintly actions or by the vivid colors and images of the medieval pages? – is repeated at the level of affective style. Keats's poem contemplates whether its patterned application of hypnotic devices makes it primarily a series of sensory effects – a spell, in short – or whether it qualifies as a story with "content." The poem presents these possibilities as opposed to each other in the lines surrounding the Middle English passage that has transfixed Bertha and that is presented to the reader at the closing of the poem. *St. Mark*, at this moment, culminates the hints it gives at various points that this passage does not appeal to Bertha on the basis

of its information (its story of sainthood) but on the basis of the sensory experience it offers as a reified icon of medievalism that “take[s] captive [the reader’s] two eyes.”<sup>52</sup>

From the first lines of *The Eve of St. Mark*, it is clear that Keats is exploring the device of repetition. The opening stanza alone combines the various forms that will be used throughout the poem, repeating verbal units from the level of a single letter all the way up to whole lines.

Upon a Sabbath day it fell;  
 Twice holy was the Sabbath bell,  
 That call’d the folk to evening prayer.  
 The city streets were clean and fair  
 From wholesome drench of April rains,  
 And on the western window panes  
 The chilly sunset faintly told  
 Of unmatur’d green vallies cold,  
 Of the green thorny bloomless hedge,  
 Of rivers new with springtide sedge  
 Of primroses by shelter’d rills,  
 And daisies on the anguish hills.  
 Twice holy was the Sabbath bell:  
 The silent streets were crowded well  
 With staid and pious companies,  
 Warm from their fireside orat’ries,  
 And moving with demurest air  
 To even song and vesper prayer.  
 Each arched porch and entry low  
 Was fill’d with patient folk and slow,  
 With whispers hush and shuffling feet,  
 While play’d the organs loud and sweet. (1-22)

It is the appearance of “Twice holy was the Sabbath bell” at line two and again at line 13 that structures the stanza on a large scale, assisted by the recasting of line four, “The city streets were clean and fair,” into “The silent streets were crowded well” at line 14. On either side of these repetitions of entire lines, Keats’s speaker places line groups that are blocked together by their activity of listing and by their repetition of the same syntactical structures and/or letters appearing at the beginning of each line in the group. Lines 8-11,

for example, all feature the same prepositional-phrase construction beginning with “of” – a syntactical repetition reinforced by the visual one in the vertical column of capital “o” running down the left margin of the text. Another form of repetition occurs in the sonic echoes across the stanza: a network of “n” and “l” sounds blocks the first half, when the second appearance of “Twice holy was the Sabbath bell” ushers in the host of “d” sounds that block the second half. The stanza’s symmetrically placed and skillfully interwoven repetitions have the total effect, compounded by the brisk couplet rhymes, of moving the reader quickly through the lines and subordinating *what* is being said to *how* it is being said. In this kind of verse, the act of reading is like being carried along by a musical melody.

This mechanized, almost formulaic application of stylistic devices in the first stanza is repeated across the poem. On the largest scale, repetition occurs in the poem’s regularly alternating focus on the town square outside Bertha’s window and on the scene of reading indoors. After the opening two stanzas, which introduce the outside and inside scenes, the poem devotes remarkably equal descriptive attention to each location, alternating between eight lines focusing on the town (40-47), nine lines on Bertha’s reading (48-56), and nine lines on the town again (58-66). The almost mathematical regularity of the shifts from outside to inside tends to foreground the *motion* from scene to scene even more than their content. This effect is compounded by the speeding up of the reading pace encouraged by Keats’s use, in every stanza, of repetitions on a smaller scale. For example, stanza four begins with “All was gloom, and silent all,” and five with a slight variation of that line, “All was silent, all was gloom,” while stanza six, the poem’s last complete stanza and the longest in the poem, tolls a refrain of “Untir’d she



read,” until the poem reaches the passage in Middle English. Amidst these forms of repetition Keats’s speaker places another: cataloguing passages that are cohered primarily by sonic networks. At lines 30-38, for example, some of the “thousand things” in Bertha’s book that “perplex” her are listed:

The stars of heaven, and angels’ wings,  
Martyrs in a fiery blaze,  
Azure saints mid silver rays,  
Aaron’s breastplate, and the seven  
Candlesticks John saw in heaven,  
The winged Lion of St. Mark,  
And the Covenantal Ark,  
With its many mysteries,  
Cherubim and golden mice.

This catalogue is united sonically by the “r” sounds that align themselves along the left margin (“stars,” “Martyrs,” “Azure,” “Aaron’s”) and appear in “fiery” and “silver,”<sup>53</sup> as well as the “n” sounds that spread down the middle of the verses (“John,” “winged Lion,” “Covenantal,” “many,” “golden”). A similar catalogue, featuring objects in Bertha’s room, appears at lines 78-82; its even placement between the first catalogue and the end of the poem adds to the poem’s measured structure. Finally, Keats’s poem employs another form of repetition in generating synonyms for Bertha’s hypnosis by her book. These are the phrases that describe Bertha’s state, such as “[her two eyes] taken captive,” and those that describe other objects but also apply to Bertha, “sheltered” and “drowsy.” In the context of all the other hypnotic uses of repetition employed by *The Eve of St. Mark*, this vocabulary of enchantment coaxes the reader to slip off into a transfixed state – acting like the command, “You are getting very sleepy,” that often appears in popular portrayals of a hypnotist working upon a patient.

The poem's suggestion of Bertha's sensory and not spiritual transfixion by her book, hinted at in the phrases quoted above, is suggested by various other means over the course of the poem. The first mention of Bertha's reading in the poem, in fact, tells of "[a] curious volume, patch'd and torn,/That all day long, from earliest morn,/Had taken captive her two eyes,/Among its golden broideries;/Perplex'd her with a thousand things" (25-29), and then proceeds with the catalogue, quoted above, of some of those "thousand things." Bertha's physical captivation by her book and incomprehension of its spiritual message appears particularly in the use of the word "perplex'd," since the *Oxford English Dictionary's* two chief meanings of the word are "confused," "bewildered," or "puzzled," and "brought into an intricately involved physical condition," or "intertwined."<sup>54</sup> The theme of Bertha's visual interest is also stressed by the catalogue of "thousand things," for its components are indeed either mere "things" associated with saints or actions or people that are spectacular sights. Also, the sheer number of things associated with the saints that captures Bertha's fancy suggests a superficial perusal of the religious elements in her book instead of a concentrated, spiritual evaluation. This point is implied, too, when a language of physical darkness at one point suggests that Bertha is "in the dark" about her book's spiritual truths, "Again she tried [to read], and then again/Until the dusk eve left her dark/Upon the legend of St. Mark" (50-52). Further suggestions of sensory transfixion are that Bertha is "dazed with saintly imageries" (56) and that she studies not the legend of St Mark itself, but the "legend *page*/Of holy Mark from youth to age;/On land, on seas, in pagan-chains,/Rejoicing for his many pains" (89-92) (my emphasis). This last line, though, temporarily leaves open the question of whether Bertha is rejoicing

in St. Mark's martyrdom, which implies a more spiritual reading of her book, or whether the saint himself is rejoicing at his own sacrifice.

The passage that displays the Middle English brings the poem to where it has been journeying since the opening line, moving in closer and still closer until it focuses first on the page, and then on the very words, which Bertha is reading.

Untir'd she read the legend page  
 Of holy Mark from youth to age;  
 On land, on seas, in pagan-chains,  
 Rejoicing for his many pains.  
 Sometimes the learned eremite,  
 With golden star, or dagger bright,  
 Referr'd to pious poesies  
 Written in smallest crow-quill size  
 Beneath the text; and thus the rhyme  
 Was parcel'd out from time to time:  
 ----- "Als writith he of swevenis  
 Men han beforne they wake in bliss,  
 Whanne thate hir friends thinke hem bound  
 In crimpid shroude farre under grounde;  
 And how a liling child mote be  
 A saint er its nativitie,  
 Gif thate the modre (God her blesse)  
 Kepen in solitarinesse,  
 And kissen devoute the holy croce.  
 Of Goddis love and Sathan's force  
 He writith; and thinges many mo:  
 Of swiche thinges I may not shew;  
 Bot I must tellen verilie  
 Smodel of Sainte Cicilie;  
 And chieflie whate he auctorethe  
 Of Sainte Markis life and dethe." (89-114)

These lines bring to a head the conflicts developing throughout the poem of whether Bertha's enchantment come from the style or the substance of her book and, in the stylistic parallel of the same question, whether Keats's fragment, with its saturation of physically affective style, is merely a charm – a physical action upon the reader – or a

story with “content.” The references to the physical page and text of Bertha’s book, “golden star, or dagger bright/Referr’d to pious poesies/Written in smallest crow-quill size/Beneath the text” by a “learned eremite” (93-97), bring home the implication all along that Bertha has been visually rather than spiritually entranced. What is more, the strongly physical uses of language throughout this poem, which lead the reader toward this passage from Bertha’s book, also imply that the old text is being presented as a *par excellence* example of charm: a relic of medievalism displayed before the reader, and intended to elicit awe purely through its power as an icon of a former time.

As for whether Keats’s poem is a charm or a story with narrative substance, the question is decided in favor of charm when the text breaks off almost immediately after the Middle English passage occurs, as if it has reached its destination and has nowhere else to go. The four and a half lines of poetry that close the poem rail through the martyrdom of St. Mark in just a phrase – “[a]t length [Bertha’s] fervent eyelids come/Upon the fervent martyrdom” – and come finally, as if to bid goodbye to the subject of St. Mark, to the physical vestige of the saint in this world: “Then lastly to his holy shrine,/Exalt amid the tapers’ shrine/At Venice” (115-19). This moment is the first mention of the supposed subject of Bertha’s book – the legend of St. Mark. But the breaking off of Keats’s fragment, *The Eve of St. Mark*, at the precise juncture when the “induction” into the poem ends and its supposed plot begins suggests that Keats’s interests always already laid with the act of induction itself.

*The Eve of St. Agnes* shares *The Eve of St. Mark*’s stylistic interest in the charming powers of language and its character-based interest in the general issue of reading. Yet even though *St. Agnes* was written before *St. Mark*, it develops these

interests in greater depth. *St. Mark* raises the general problem of texts enrapturing their readers through style as opposed to substance, but it does not contemplate that problem on a deeper level. *St. Agnes* circumvents the limitations of *St. Mark* by several means. The charming of the reader in *The Eve of St. Mark* is carried out almost entirely at the level of style through the poem's multi-faceted use of repetitions; the text does not explore the idea or technique of poetry as enchantment any further once it has carried out its chief interest in inducing the reader into the poem. *St. Agnes*, by contrast, expresses more fully its preoccupation with charm by absorbing the reader into the poem through physical means and then taking steps to dissolve such a spell. That the poem was conceived as a process of enchantment to be first applied to and then removed from Keats's audience is suggested in the poet's comments about the end of his poem, recorded by Richard Woodhouse in a letter to Charles Taylor: "[Keats] has altered the last 3 lines to leave on the reader a sense of pettish disgust, by bringing old Angela in (only) dead stiff & ugly. – He says he likes that the poem should leave off with this Change of Sentiment – it was what he aimed at."<sup>55</sup>

The very devices used to enchant the reader in *The Eve of St. Agnes* also distinguish it from *St. Mark*. *St. Agnes* charms the reader with a more diverse arsenal of strategies: the combined effects of the interesting story, a hypnotic use of repetitions similar to that in *St. Mark*, and the added device of heavy description. The latter serves as a charming strategy because in the two main passages where it occurs (the passage at stanza 24 beginning "A casement high and triple-arch'd there was," and the feast scene at stanza 29, where Porphyro lays a table of "cates and dainties" and plays a song upon Madeline's lute), the description is so heavily saturated with aural and tactile effects that

it obscures the objects that it is supposedly trying to represent. These passages, which expressly halt the plot of the poem in order to explore the device of description, thus induce a sensory experience of language in the reader more than they fulfill any mimetic objectives. Keats's choice, in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, to foreground a traditionally representational type of language and yet to override that representational office announces his exploration of the "style versus substance" conflict at a greater depth than in *The Eve of St. Mark*.

The fact that the casement set-piece and the feast scene serve as the linguistic crux of Keats's poem is suggested in the extraordinarily controlled deployment of stylistic devices that leads toward these passages. We find in *St. Agnes* some of the same techniques used in *St. Mark*: repetition and an emphasis on motion from one point of interest in the story to another. Yet where *St. Mark* uses a large range of forms of repetition – especially the repetition of identical words, phrases, and lines – *St. Agnes* employs only a few, more subtle forms of the device.

The most repeated type of language in *The Eve of St. Agnes* is the archaicism. Keats's speaker uses this device only intermittently at first, skillfully intermixing it with other strategies to keep the reader focused on the world of the poem, although later, as the poem moves toward its crux, the archaicisms occur in a denser pattern. The poem's opening stanzas use archaic language in order to hook the reader:

St. Agnes' Eve – Ah, bitter chill it was!  
 The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;  
 The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,  
 And silent was the flock in woolly fold:  
 Numb were the Beadsman's fingers, while he told  
 His rosary, and while his frosted breath,  
 Like pious incense from a censer old,  
 Seem'd taking flight for heaven, without a death,

Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he saith.

His prayer he saith, this patient, holy man;  
 Then takes his lamp, and riseth from his knees,  
 And back returneth, meagre, barefoot, wan,  
 Along the chapel aisle by slow degrees:  
 The sculptur'd dead, on each side, seem to freeze,  
 Emprison'd in black, purgatorial rails:  
 Knights, ladies, praying in dumb orat'ries,  
 He passeth by; and his weak spirit fails  
 To think how they may ache in icy hoods and mails.

Northward he turneth through a little door,  
 And scarce three steps, ere Music's golden tongue  
 Flatter'd to tears this aged man and poor;  
 But no – already had his deathbell rung;  
 The joys of all his life were said and sung:  
 His was harsh penance on St. Agnes' Eve:  
 Another way he went, (1-25).

The first two lines saturate the reader in antiquated speech forms – the use of syntactical inversion in “bitter chill it was,” and, more notably, the single expression, “a-cold” – and, as Cusac also suggests, establish the mood of centuries-old oral storytelling with the utterance, “Ah!”.<sup>56</sup> After these opening lines, archaic verb forms such as “saith” and “riseth” are evenly spread across the stanzas before, in line 25, Keats's speaker abruptly changes to the past tense (“Another way he *went*”) and subsequently moves on to the next, more lively subject of the “hurry to and fro” and “silver, snarling trumpets” of the banquet fanfare (30-31).

In these first stanzas, the other strategy by which Keats's speaker keeps the reader engulfed in the poem is repetition of exact wording. As if literally to knit his stanzas together, Keats's speaker takes the last phrase of stanza one, “his prayer he saith,” and repeats it word for word at the beginning of stanza two. While this form of exact repetition does not occur in the movement from stanza two to stanza three, continuity is

preserved through the regular appearance of the archaic “th” verb forms (“passeth by” in line 17 echoes two lines later, at the beginning of stanza three, in “Northward he turneth”). We can also see Keats’s interest in exact repetitions as an absorbing device through a canceled stanza from a draft of *The Eve of St. Agnes*. This stanza appears in one of Woodhouse’s transcripts of the poem that is based on the now lost fair copy holograph of *The Eve of St. Agnes*. The stanza would have been the fourth of the poem, following stanza three’s closing scene of the Beadsman “griev[ing] for sinners’ sake” and featuring the narrator’s guiding voice:

But there are ears may hear sweet melodies,  
 And there are eyes to brighten festivals,  
 And there are feet for nimble minstrelsies,  
 And many a lip that for the red wine calls. –  
 Follow, then follow to the illumined halls,  
 Follow me youth – and leave the Eremite –  
 Give him a tear – then trophied banneral,  
 And many a brilliant tasseling of light,  
 Shall droop from arched ways this high Baronial night.<sup>57</sup>

Keats’s apparent intention was that this stanza be left out of the final version of *The Eve of St. Agnes* in the 1820 edition, although we will never be sure, given that the fair copy of the poem is lost and that Keats’s editors took it upon themselves to change some of the poet’s preferences according to their own standards of propriety, particularly in the controversial passage on Madeline’s and Porphyro’s union. Nevertheless, we can see from the lines an interest in the same kind of inductive, almost hypnotic repetitions that occur more obsessively in *St. Mark*: the regular appearance, at line beginnings, of the phrase “[a]nd there are,” as well as the repeated imperative to the reader, “follow.” The repetition of the latter word, though canceled along with the rest of this stanza, resurfaces at a later point in *St. Agnes* – apparently intentionally since the usage appears



in Woodhouse's and George Keats's transcripts of *St. Agnes*, both based on the lost fair copy, and in the 1820 final version. In this later appearance of "follow," Angela orders Porphyro to fall in behind her so that he can tell her his desires for Madeline: "in this arm-chair sit,/And tell me how – Good Saints! not here, not here;/Follow me, child, or else these stones will be thy bier.'/He *follow'd*, through a lowly arched way" (106-09) (my emphasis).

As *The Eve of St. Agnes* progresses, the strategies by which the poem draws in the reader only intensify. Archaic expressions run rampant in Angela's nervous, exclamatory speech, and they, together with the poem's skillful shifts of the story's focus, move the narrative at a breathtaking clip toward its crux passages. After the poem's initial plunge into archaic language and an inductive use of repetitions, Keats's speaker keeps control through a masterful manipulation of readerly attention. For example, the motion and fanfare of the banquet in stanza five ("argent revelry," "plume," "tiara," and "rich array") are skillfully erased from the reader's imagination with a single phrase that introduces the new subject of Madeline: "These [things] let us wish away, /And turn, sole-thoughted, to one Lady there" (37-42). This same move of stopping motion in one element of the poem and starting it in another occurs when the narrator introduces Porphyro: "So purposing each moment to retire,/ [Madeline] linger'd still. Meantime, across the moors,/Had come young Porphyro" (73-4). Almost as soon as Porphyro arrives on the scene, the narrator's ironic reference to his own machinations brings in Angela: "not one breast affords/[Porphyro] any mercy . . . Save one old beldame, weak in body and soul./Ah, happy chance! the aged creature came" (88-91). Angela's first words feature the frenzied archaicisms that characterize her speech throughout the poem: "Mercy,

Porphyro! hie thee from this place;/They are all here to-night, the whole blood-thirsty race!” (98-99). This animated language, couched in a fast-paced dialogue between the “beldame” and Porphyro, speeds the reader’s movement through the poem, as do suspense-building strategies such as the narrator’s mention of “Porphyro’s strategem” (139), but delay of the plan’s elaboration until two and a half stanzas later.

The screeching halt of this fast narrative motion at the opening line of stanza 24 is so drastic that it all but announces: “something important is about to occur.” While, on the face of it, the kind of descriptive passage that follows would appear merely ornamental and ancillary in a narrative poem, it turns out to have central importance, both as a display of Keats’s preoccupation with the physical effects of words and as a site for his contemplation of those effects through the figure of Madeline.

Stanza 24 is the only stanza in Keats’s poem that completely erases the presence of the poem’s characters or overt evidence of the narrator’s voice. Human beings are replaced by the things the stanza is describing – or, more accurately, by the descriptive words themselves, which become physical things with physical effects.

A casement high and triple-arch’d there was,  
 All garlanded with carven imag’ries  
 Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,  
 And diamonded with panes of quaint device,  
 Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,  
 As are the tiger-moth’s deep-damask’d wings;  
 And in the midst, ‘mong thousand heraldries,  
 And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,  
 A shielded scutcheon blush’d with blood of queens and kings. (208-16)

The prominence of the main object of description, the casement, is announced in the stanza’s opening line by its syntactical foregrounding and the delay of the verb phrase, “there was,” until the line’s ending. Yet this verb, already weak in terms of action, loses

any chance of notice as the dense texture of words that Keats's speaker is weaving begins to overpower the reader.

The stanza relentlessly applies sonic and tactile repetitions. As is so often the case in Keats's descriptive passages, streams of different vowel emphases flow down the lines, providing continuity. Here, short "a" sounds (in the context of "ar" morphemes) and the strong long "a" in "casement" begin the stanza, but the long "a" takes over as the stanza continues in "panes," "stains," "saints," and "emblazonings." In the stanza's second half, Keats's speaker also allows both short "i" ("splendid," "in," "midst," "dim") and long "i" ("diamonded," "device," "dyes," "tiger," "twilight") to play a strong role in the vowel presence. But the latter is true only until the last two lines, when short "o" and particularly "on" ("emblazonings," "scutcheon," "blush'd," "blood") stream out, sonically mimicking the blood-gush they describe.

Yet if vowels appear to play only a subtle role here, it is only because they are so heavily dominated by the thick application of consonants. In contrast to descriptive passages from the early verse such as those in "Imitation of Spenser," where gentle vowel patterns mix with subtle consonantal emphases to create a strong but balanced sonic impact, this passage's heavy pressure of "d" and "nd" ("arch'd," "garlanded," "diamonded," "splendid," "deep-damask'd," "midst," "thousand," "dim," "shielded," "blush'd," "blood"), as well as "n" ("casement," "carven," "bunches," "knot," "panes," "quaint," "innumerable," "stains," "wings," "in," "mong," "queens," "kings"), blatantly suggests an interest in overpowering the reader with the physical effects of words. Those effects, furthermore, are not just aural, but also tactile, since the greatest impact of the consonants is the thick, slow-motion, stopped sensation they produce in the reader's

mouth as he or she enunciates them, or imagines enunciating them when reading silently. The proliferation of “d” and “nd” sounds, in particular, produces the feeling that one’s tongue – and thereby, one’s ability to form the words in the mind and in the mouth and thus to read – is paralyzed.

Yet paralysis of the reader – or, more accurately, entrapment in the physical texture of words created by stanza 24 – seems to be precisely what Keats has in mind at this juncture in the poem, because he goes on to figure the very affective process he has just created in the description of Madeline in the next three stanzas. Stanza 25, as Levinson notes, places Madeline at the center of the “nested” frames described by stanza 24: the casement and the scutcheon.<sup>58</sup> She kneels by the bed and prays, the unaware and passive receptor of the “warm gules,” with colors of “rose” and “amethyst,” that fall upon her. Here the effects of the moonlit casement upon Madeline represent the effects upon the reader of the stanza before, which describes the casement. But the casement frames Madeline primarily through visual means in stanza 25, and the verbal effects of stanza 24 upon the external reader are so aural and tactile that they actually de-visualize what is being described. How can a visual image of color falling upon Madeline represent the aural phenomenon of Keats’s language acting upon the reader?

One must consider that the contrast between aural and tactile effects in stanza 24 and visual effects in stanza 25 expresses Keats’s conflict as a poet about which affective methods he is inclined to use. The visual image in stanza 25 of Madeline, kneeling by her bed with the casement’s colors streaming down upon her, subscribes to the general philosophy of *ut pictura poesis*. Description exists to create a clear image in the reader’s mind. But the effects of Keats’s language in stanza 24 explore an entirely different

model: description that exists not to represent something else but to embody a sensory experience in itself. The verbiage in stanza 24, that is, has such dense sonic and tactile effects upon the reader that it obscures the visual clarity of what is being described in the first place. Moments of visual imaging in Keats's verse, like stanza 25 of *St. Agnes*, thus appear as a kind of flickering of the idea of verisimilitude in a general context of poetry that explores a more experiential model of the text. This juxtaposition of mimetic and experiential poetic models, at this moment in the poem, is important because it suggests that Keats has not wedded himself so completely to an idea of poetry as physical affect that he does not place more representational uses of language right alongside more experiential passages, as if still at times testing out differences between the two. This juxtaposition creates an antagonism between the notion that verse exists to refer clearly to an external reality (even if in this case that "reality" is technically part of a fictional narrative), and the notion that the text is intended simply to generate a sensory experience and thus to be an end in itself.<sup>59</sup>

The portrayal, in the character of Madeline, of a readerly experience of Keats's descriptive language continues in stanzas 26 and 27. Stanza 26 reiterates the poem's earlier point that Madeline "dares not look behind," suggesting a "hoodwink'd" reader's passive receptiveness to the devices of the poem at the precise passage when so many of those devices have been brought to bear. Yet the onslaught of synonyms for "charmed" or "entranced," all of which describe Madeline in stanza 27, is the firmest suggestion that her character reflects the kind of reader whom Keats imagines for his poem. Madeline is described in hypnotic and soporific language: "in a wakeful swoon," "by the popped warmth of sleep oppress'd," of "soothed limbs" and "soul fatigued away" Flown, like a

thought.” Also, like Bertha in *St. Mark*, she is described as “perplex’d” (236). This word’s expression of both bewilderment and physical entanglement accurately names the condition of the reader who is under the influence of Keats’s highly physical language. More adjectives that reflect the effects of Keats’s words on the reader are “clasp’d” (241) and “blinded” (242), the latter word nicely capturing the de-visualizing tendencies of Keats’s descriptions in stanza 24 and in the feast scene. Keats’s speaker closes stanza 27 with an echo of the rose imagery that previously described Porphyro – “[Madeline was] [b]linded . . . As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again” (242-43) – as if to announce that the portrayal of Madeline and by extension the reader is now finished, and that the account of Porphyro the poet-figure is about to begin.

If we consider the large section of the poem running from the descriptive embarkment at stanza 24 (“A casement high and triple-arch’d there was”) to the ironic closure upon the lovers’ union at the end of stanza 36 (“St. Agnes’ moon hath set”) as the poetic crux into which Keats is leading his reader, then this crux, and the two most important affective passages within it – the casement set-piece and the feast scene – repeat in little the inductive structure of the poem up to this point. The casement set-piece constitutes the first major plunge into dense sensory textures toward which the larger charming process of Keats’s poem leads, even though it induces the reader largely through the visual means of framing after its aurally and tactilely rich first stanza.

The feast scene at stanzas 28-30 is an even more intense plunge into highly physical language than the casement passage. It fosters a much deeper physical experience of language because it more openly treats words as matter, stimulating the sense of touch, or the tactile feel of the words in the mouth, far more than the “higher”

senses of sight or hearing. By placing the feast scene after the casement set-piece, Keats thus leads the reader both farther down into the physical experience of language at the core of this poem, and farther down into the body itself, from the eyes and ears down to the mouth and to the organ of touch, the skin.

Stol'n to this paradise, and so entranced,  
 Porphyro gazed upon her empty dress,  
 And listen'd to her breathing, if it chanc'd  
 To wake into a slumberous tenderness;  
 Which when he heard, that minute did he bless,  
 And breath'd himself: Then from the closet crept,  
 Noiseless as fear in a wide wilderness,  
 And over the hush'd carpet, silent, stept,  
 And 'tween the curtains peep'd, where, lo! – how fast she slept.

Then by the bedside, where the faded moon  
 Made a dim, silver twilight, soft he set  
 A table, and, half-anguished, threw thereon  
 A cloth of woven crimson, gold, and jet: –  
 O for some drowsy Morphean amulet!  
 The boisterous, midnight, festive clarion,  
 The kettle-drum, and far-heard clarionet,  
 Affray his ears, though but in dying tone: –  
 The hall door shuts again, and all the noise is gone.

And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,  
 In blanched linen, smooth, and lavender'd,  
 While he from forth the closet brought a heap  
 Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd;  
 With jellies soother than the creamy curd,  
 And lucent syrups, tinct with cinnamon;  
 Manna and dates, in argosy transferr'd  
 From Fez; and spiced dainties, every one,  
 From Silken Samarcand to cedar'd Lebanon. (244-70)

This passage down the body is actually broken into three distinct phases by the stanzas. Stanza 28 is visual, with Porphyro's gaze upon Madeline's empty dress, and stanza 29 is both visual and aural, with the flash of the colorful cloth that Porphyro lays down and the musical noises that "affray" Porphyro's ear. Finally, stanza 30, although replete with

soundplay, is largely tactile in its effects. We see again the thick stoppages of the tongue in the repetition of “d” sounds across the stanza. But the real intensity comes in the stanza’s other sensations: the mouth-filling plumpness of the “p” and “l” (“apple,” “plum,” “jellies,” “syrops”) and the open “ui” “u,” “ou,” “oo,” and “o” vowel sounds (“quince,” “plum,” “gourd,” “soother,” “curd,” “syrops,” “cinnamon”); the sharper interjections of “c” and “t” in “creamy curd” and “lucent,” “tinct,” “dates,” and “dainties”; and, the sticky pour of the “s” sounds oozing all around the other words.

This language of stanzas 28-30, together with certain moments in those that follow, is all the richer when we consider that Keats employs it figuratively to contemplate his physical uses of language as a poet and the general methods by which words are used as a charming device in *The Eve of St. Agnes*. This contemplation occurs through the actions and thoughts of Porphyro, as well as through details of the poem surrounding his portrayal, which appear not to have a clear purpose until treated as a figurative reading of Keat’s own poetic activities. Let us consider Porphyro’s “stragem”: to overpower Madeline so greatly with the sensory effects of his various devices – the cloth he lays upon the table, the foods he brings from the closet, and the lute he plays, as well as he himself – that she believes they are not devices but actually part of her dream, and thus of the ultimate reality that she will marry Porphyro. This agenda, as it happens, is suspiciously like Keats’s own stylistic one: to overpower the reader so greatly with the sensory effects of his words that he or she fails to see that they are devices and is absorbed – or “perplex’d,” to use the richest of the words that describe Madeline in an earlier stanza – by the “romantic spell” of the poem.



Furthermore, when we look closely we can see a conflict in Porphyro, and by extension Keats, about how to execute his charms and about the fact that he is executing them at all. Since Stillinger's ground-breaking reading of *The Eve of St. Agnes*, which maligns Porphyro as the ultra-conniving trickster of the "hoodwinked" Madeline, critics have been perhaps more likely to emphasize the unsavory elements of Porphyro's "stragem" and less likely to notice the poem's repeated suggestions of his anxiety. Yet consider the language and events of stanza 29: Porphyro is described as "half-anguished" when he throws down the colored cloth upon the table; as Porphyro does this, a voice calls out for reinforcement, "O for some drowsy Morphean amulet!" (255-57); and, just after this cry, the narrator describes, for no apparent purpose, how the sounds of musical instruments outside "affray" Porphyro's ears. In the phrase "half-anguished" and the disturbing wish for an amulet (a charm designed to protect against evil or injury – ostensibly, that of Porphyro's actions), we find Porphyro's anxiety about his trickery of Madeline, and, one might conclude, Keat's uneasiness about the honor of his own hoodwinking of the reader through physical poetic language. In the colored tablecloth and the intruding sounds of the musical instruments, there is a hint of Keats's conflict of whether to use visual, purely sonic (i.e. musical), or, as in the next stanza, tactile methods to charm the reader; it is as if the affective possibilities flash into Keats's mind at this crucial moment just before stanza 30, when he is about to exercise the most physical language of the poem. The same kinds of methodological uncertainty appear in Porphyro's sensory stimulations of Madeline: what Stuart Sperry calls the "frenetic" nature of Porphyro's activities in the feast scene,<sup>60</sup> as well as his "tumultuous" (read "anxious") recourse to lute music in stanza 33 after his appeals with the foods have not

caused Madeline to open her eyes and see him. When Madeline finally does open her eyes, furthermore, the contrast between her description of Porphyro in the dream and his real actions further suggests Keats's ruminations, through his respective reader and author figures, on the benefits and drawbacks of writing physically affective poetry. Madeline tells Porphyro, "but even now/Thy voice was at sweet tremble in mine ear/Made tuneable with every sweetest vow;/And those sad eyes were spiritual and clear . . . . Give me that voice again, my Porphyro" (307-10, 312). Here, what is in reality mere sound (the playing of a lute), Madeline experiences in her dream as Porphyro's voice uttering "vows" and his human face with "eyes" that are "spiritual and clear." This contrast between two images of Porphyro – one playing the lute, and the other speaking earnest vows – symbolically crystallizes Keats's larger ambivalence about making a charm of poetry.

A parallel is thus established between the problems the poem creates through its content and those it creates through its style. At the level of narrative, the poem sets up a tension between Madeline's romantic indulgence in the magical ritual of St. Agnes's eve, which she trusts will reveal her future husband to her in a vision, and Porphyro's demystification of this ritual's romance through his plan to enter Madeline's room, which when viewed most skeptically is nothing more than an elaborate ruse to sleep with Madeline. The poem creates this tension by loading its language with ambiguity. For example, the verse takes care to refer to Porphyro's "stratagem," suggesting a conniving aspect to his character, while also having him call himself an "hermit" who is devoted to Madeline. The latter reference implicitly defines Porphyro's love as the spiritual worship of Madeline. Keats's poem, then, is a romance that contains the seeds of its own

demystification: the dictional and tonal hints throughout that are allowed to infect the poem with a skeptical attitude about the romantic vision of love implied by the St. Agnes's eve ritual, and about the broader issue of the contrast between dreams and reality in Keats's poetry. The poem reproduces these aspects of its content at the level of its affective language and its metacritical reflection on that language, since it executes a charming style upon the reader and then posits within the poem the seeds of that style's demystification, or its exposure as nothing but a charm. These seeds are the poet and reader figures of Porphyro and Madeline, who not only help suggest that the means through which Keats's poem absorbs and transfixes the reader are devices, or "stratagems," but also illustrate Keats's anxieties about his poetry's style relative to its substance.

Every charm, once laid, must also be taken away, and the latter happens with breathtaking speed in the charm called *The Eve of St. Agnes*. After the lovers' union (stanza 36), the crux of the poem closes with the setting of St. Agnes's moon just as it began with the shining of that moon through the casement. The speaker shuttles us out of the poem with some of the same fast motions with which he brought us in: the rapid exchanges of dialogue, this time between Madeline and Porphyro, which is interspersed with the frenzied pattering of "flaw-blown sleet" against the windows. When Porphyro declares the "elfin-storm" to be "of haggard seeming, but a boon indeed," surely it is Keats's voice ironically suggesting, as occurs earlier in the poem, the very device that will accomplish something for him – in this case, the end of the poem. And, as Madeline "hurrie[s] at [Porphyro's] words," we hurry too, moved along by another of the forces, repetition, that brought us in ("Arise – arise!"; "Awake! arise!"; "They glide, like

phantoms, into the wide hall; Like phantoms, to the iron porch, they glide/By one, and one, the bolts full easy slide”). The rupture of the poem’s spell is finally achieved in the last stanza, which crudely tells us that Angela dies “palsy-twitched, with meager face deform” and that the Beadsman is left asleep “among his ashes cold” (376, 378). That these words are meant exactly to jolt the reader out of a charmed state, again, is suggested by Keats himself in the comments recorded by Richard Woodhouse.

#### V.

Yet if the reader’s absorption in the charming language of the poem is put to an end by the poem’s abrupt closure, Keats’s figurative contemplation of mechanistic versus humanistic models of poetry in *St. Agnes’s* last descriptive movement remains clear. Keats announces his awareness of his own poem’s “charm” status by symbolically representing it in Porphyro’s “stratagem,” and yet we find the poet’s ambivalence about this status in the dream of Madeline where Porphyro is heard as a human voice uttering that most truthful of statements, the “vow.” Through Madeline’s hearing of vows in the mere sound of Porphyro’s lute playing, Keats considers the contrast between his own verse’s absorbing sensory appeal and an imagined higher ideal of the poet’s speaking truths to the reader in a clear, personal voice. That Madeline awakens to Porphyro’s music, but points up the contrast between the spiritual nature of the dream and the sensuous nature of the reality, is thus Keats’s implication that the “charm” of *The Eve of St. Agnes* upon its audience is mere poetic trickery, which pales in dignity to a more humanistic poetic model like Wordsworth’s “a poet is a man speaking to men.” In exploring a charming style while at the same time symbolically ruminating upon both mechanistic and humanistic models of verse, *The Eve of St. Agnes* does not resolve the

problem of the proper balance between style and substance or form and content in poetry so much as it explores its contours. In his poem, Keats thus registers as a problem of poetic language the general focus upon the senses, especially in the forms of mass sensationalist culture and consumerism, which characterizes English culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century period.

Keats's exploration in *St. Agnes* of the style versus substance conflict, however, must also be seen as a crucial moment of reflection upon his poetic career. When Keats symbolically asks himself through the figures of Madeline and Porphyro whether his poetry is mere "stratagem," or plotting to entrance the reader by physical means, or whether it has the kind of truth-revealing power, depth, and sincerity reflected in Madeline's dream that her lover would speak "vows" to her in a "clear voice," the question already has a certain weight simply because *St. Agnes* explores the idea of the poem as charm to a greater degree than the other texts discussed in this chapter. But the auspicious place of *St. Agnes* in the drama of ambition and production that is Keats's *annus mirabilis*, 1819, gives the poet's self-interrogation a more personal significance. As Walter Jackson Bate has observed, one purpose that *St. Agnes* served for Keats was respite from the anxiety and failure associated with *Hyperion*. Keats moved toward a genre, narrative verse, which was easier to work in when the heavily overdetermined attempt at epic had just fallen short,<sup>61</sup> and toward a stanza, the Spenserian, that favored Keats's gifts for the rich description of objects and scenes when he could not sustain a Miltonic blank verse. Yet this recourse to *St. Agnes*, according to Bate's argument, does not compromise the dignity or greatness of Keats's poetry in *St. Agnes* itself or in the poems that come before it or after it during Keats's great year of production. Bate

streamlines Keats's poetic excellence from late 1818, the point when he began *Hyperion*, all the way through to "To Autumn" in September 1819 by arguing that over this period Keats consciously and consistently develops the group of stylistic traits that have appealed to readers over the ages. Rhythmically, Keats strives toward a weighty line, which Bate shows by finding a high incidence of spondees in poems that fall during the above period. Sonically, Bate argues that the poems from *Hyperion* through the odes put into practice a theory of vowels that the poet was developing and that he described to Benjamin Bailey thus: "Keats's theory was, that the vowels [in a line] should be so managed as not to clash with one another so as to mar the melody, -- & yet that they should be interchanged, like differing notes of music to prevent monotony."<sup>62</sup> To support these contentions, Bate selects poetic lines from poems across the period of late 1818 to late 1819 that demonstrate an even alternation between long and short vowels, which approximate what Keats means by open and closed vowels.

Keats's comments to Bailey demonstrate his concern with assonantal patterns and support the notion that he conceived of poetry in terms of its physical impact upon the reader. But Bate's presentation of similar metrical and vowel patterning in single lines from poems across the 1819 oeuvre tends to obscure the kind of poetic context in which these tools function and thus the way they are being used. That is to say, it obscures the part these devices ultimately play in the exploration of poetic charming that poems like "Nightingale," *St. Mark*, and *St. Agnes* undertake, as well as Keats's own rich figurative suggestion, particularly in *St. Agnes*, that to explore the charm is ultimately to compromise one's poetic dignity. In a poem like *Hyperion*, assonantal patterning ultimately contributes to the elevation of the epic subject, as is shown in the poem's

opening lines: “Deep in the shady sadness of a vale/Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,/Far from the fiery noon, and eve’s one star,/Sat gray-haired Saturn, quiet as a stone” (1-4). Here an intermixture of vowels and subtle alliteration move the reader along with graceful sounds, but not without hints of the powerlessness that is the poem’s subject here (“sadness,” “sunken . . . from healthy breath”), and all to the purpose of unveiling Saturn himself before the mind’s eye of the reader in line 4. But in “Nightingale,” *St. Mark*, and *St. Agnes*, as we have seen, the same devices run to less ideational and representational ends, pressing language into a sensory density explored primarily for its physical powers upon the reader. What is more, in Porphyro’s sensory seductions of Madeline, set against her dreams of vows being spoken in a clear voice, Keats faces the idea that in the drama of his own poetic ambitions and, more indirectly, in the sensationalist milieu of early nineteenth-century English culture, writing charm poetry wherein sound pushes away from conceptual sense or representation may be the most attainable or viable goal one can pursue.

This metacritical suggestion of *St. Agnes*, however, is not Keats’s last word on the proper relationship between sound and sense. We can now return to the poem I discussed in the beginning of this chapter, “To Autumn,” to view it from a different perspective: as Keats’s late response to the problem of sound and sense, which he explores in the other mature poems I have discussed but does not reconcile in terms of its impact upon his objectives of poetic greatness. Keats’s ode, occurring in the autumn of his life, is often read in an idealistic narrative as culminating both the poet’s biography and his march toward poetic excellence. Its imagery coheres the conditions of ripeness and the beginnings of a waning; its sounds, simultaneously rich and graceful, are seen as a

maturing of many of the poetic devices that Bate shows Keats developing across the year 1819. Yet from the perspective of affective style and the specific problem of how sound and sense should be related, the ode may be read not so much as a glorious culmination of a career as Keats's own very particularized bargain between sound and sense: one that allows sound to achieve rich effects while not jettisoning conceptual sense, but at the same time does not lend credence to a poetic model like Pope's, which gives priority to sense by demanding that sound merely "echo" it. Rather, in the method of near-onomatopoeia that "To Autumn" pursues and that I suggested in my earlier discussion of the poem, sound *becomes* sense by precisely embodying it. That is, in Keats's subtle form of onomatopoeia, sound does not reflect, suggest, or otherwise *represent* sense, but achieves a synonymy with it where one becomes nearly indistinguishable from the other. Ideas or images are thus no longer blocked out by or in tension with sounds but are one with each other – a "solution sweet" that preserves the sensory immediacy that is Keats's great stylistic interest as a poet and that founds his exploration of poetic charming, but also manages to avoid the kind of style that Keats metacritically suggests compromises his dignity and excellence as a poet. Furthermore, the recourse in "To Autumn" to pure description, which is evacuated of an ambitious and anxious first-person subject like that displayed in "Nightingale," fully embraces a physical mode of poetry but at the same time sidesteps the tensions surrounding self-charming that I have discussed in the earlier ode. Even given the delicate bargain of "To Autumn," however, it is Shelley who offers the most ambitious Romantic response to the problem of how to combine the representational and the experiential potentials of poetic language. As Chapter Four will show, this response is nothing less than to use the "spell" of strategically partnered



hypnotic and awakening affective styles in *Prometheus Unbound* to perform the verse's intellectual arguments and inspire a revolution in the reader's perception.

## Chapter Four:

### “At Once Mild and Animating”: Shelley’s Spell of Style

A Poet is a nightingale who sits in darkness, and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why.

a perception of the order of . . . [the] relations [among sounds is] connected with a perception of the order of the relations of thoughts

Dante was the first awakener of an entranced Europe; he created a language in itself music and persuasion . . . .

-- *A Defence of Poetry*<sup>1</sup>

Like Keats, Shelley displays a keen preoccupation with enchantment. In verse across the poet’s oeuvre, one can find examples of interest in altered states of being or consciousness. Shelley’s first major poem, *Queen Mab*, after all, is about the “queen of spells” who introduces the soul of Ianthe to a revolutionary state of perception, bolstered by special knowledge of the past, present, and future. “To Constantia” is a stanza-by-stanza description of the speaker’s various stages of enchantment as he listens to “Constantia,” or Claire Clairmont, sing and play the piano. The speaker describes these stages: “ecstasy,” feelings of being swept “as one in a trance, upborne,” a “deep and breathless awe,” “inchantment,” poetic ambition, and finally, as the result of too much ambition, the threat of becoming “lost” and of “dying.” At the same time, through the fluctuations of repetition and rhythm, the speaker formally imitates both the notes of Constantia’s music and the relative fervor of the psychological and emotional states they induce, as in these lines: “My brain is wild, my breath comes quick,/The blood is listening in my frame,/And thronging shadows come fast and thick/Fall on my overflowing eyes” (5-8). Shelley’s parallel syntax and parataxis in the phrases of line 4, the repetitions of the “ing” sounds, and the enjambment into “fall” in line 8 all

collaborate to suggest the surge of excitement collapsing into deeper, tearful emotion that the speaker is describing.

Shelley's poetry also offers many examples of passages wherein stylistic traits approach a spell-like role because they induce a strong physical experience of language that overwhelms or obscures intellectual content. This occurs through characteristic devices such as repetition, assonance and consonance, alliteration, and anagram, as well as swift, fleeting verse rhythms that are accomplished largely through enjambment and syntax and alternate with moments of rhythmic calm. To take a more descriptive moment in Shelley's work, these lines from "Epipsychidion" detail the island paradise to which the speaker imagines taking his lover:

And all the place is peopled with sweet airs;  
The light clear element which the isle wears  
Is heavy with the scent of lemon-flowers,  
Which floats like mist laden with unseen showers,  
And falls upon the eye-lids like faint sleep  
And from the moss violets and jonquils peep,  
And dart their arrowy odour through the brain  
'Till you might faint with that delicious pain.  
And every motion, odour, beam, and tone,  
With that deep music is in unison:  
Which is a soul within the soul – they seem  
Like echoes of an antenatal dream. (446-56)

Here, sound patterning overwhelms the visually representative capacity in the lines, as occurs in the thick descriptive moments that are the cornerstone of Keats's physically affective poetry. We find plentiful assonance (the long and short "o" sounds, respectively, in "lemon," "violets," "arrowy," "odour," "tone," "soul," and "echoes," and "flowers," "showers," "upon," "moss," "jonquils," and "unison"), and consonance such as the "s" sounds that provide sonic fluidity, the "l" strain in the terminal positions of "isle," "jonquils," "'till," "soul," and "antenatal," and the "m" and "n" that anchor words across

the passage. The lines also feature ample repetition, both of exact words, as with the “ands” running down the left margin, and of syntax, as in the listing construction of line 453. These lines’ use of the sensory powers of words is also illustrated by the unclear referents for Shelley’s phrase “that deep music” (454) and for “which” (455). Shelley’s “stream of sound” in the foregoing lines does not remove ideational sense from this passage; but it is an uneasy confluence nonetheless when at line 454 the verse flows out of an expansive descriptive mode signaled by the use of repetitive “and,” and into a more analytical, interpretive mode and a grammatical structure that forces the question of what referents go with what words.

Consider too the late lyric “To Jane (the keen stars were twinkling).” Shelley’s verse counterpoints its long, stretching lines with lines containing only single rhyme-words in order to reproduce trans-semantically the sonic experience of listening to a guitar, as in the poem’s opening:

The keen stars were twinkling  
And the fair moon was rising among them,  
Dear Jane.  
The guitar was tinkling  
But the notes were not sweet ‘till you sung them  
Again. (1-6)

“O World, O Life, O Time,” finally, especially investigates how words can become a physical action, for the drafts indicate that the poem begins in Shelley’s mind more as a pattern of pulses and sounds than as a verbal statement with ideational meaning. In fact, as Shelley works through each stage of his first draft of the lyric, he tries to insert various words in the tripartite opening line that assumes the final version of “O world, O life, O time.” These words – life, time, night, day, death – have a certain interchangeability, and

appear to be considered as much for their physical properties (sound and tactile sensation when spoken or read silently) as for their semantic identity.<sup>2</sup>

These poetic examples demonstrate Shelley's thematic interest in enchantment, and some ways that he explores how language can serve as a physical action or generate a physical experience, which are the central roles of language in a charm or spell. Above and beyond these poems, however, Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," "Ode to the West Wind," and *Prometheus Unbound* demonstrate a special preoccupation with spell at both thematic and stylistic levels, while also illustrating key differences between the way Keats and Shelley deal with their interests in words as affective power. For Keats, as we have seen, the charm never moves beyond its role as a definer or crystallizer of conflict about the role of the poet and of poetry, and specifically about Keats's poetic merit and standing within literary history – it is always only a half-repressed interest, a locus of anxiety. For Shelley, by contrast, the strategy of stylistic enchantment is a freer, less abject exploration. The "Hymn," "Ode," and *Prometheus Unbound*, I will show, together produce nothing less than a careful and self-conscious study of the concept and stylistic strategies of the spell and of the role of poetic spellcasting in the production of revolutionary thought in readers, whether they be poetic speakers, characters, or external readers.<sup>3</sup> Yet where Keats's critics speak freely of the charming effects of the poet's style, even if they do not use the concept of the charm as a systematic way of studying that style, Shelley's critics mostly avoid characterizing the poet's language in terms of enchantment. Perhaps a vocabulary that relates to enchantment has collected bad associations, given its negative exploitation in early reviews of Shelley and preeminently in F.R. Leavis's commentary, which implies that Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" is

unselfconscious, reckless stylistic hypnosis but, as Neil Fraistat and Donald Reiman have pointed out, curiously fails to acknowledge Shelley's description of his own work in the poem's closing lines: "And, by the incantation of this verse,/Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth/Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind."<sup>4</sup>

This chapter will demonstrate that attaining a proper understanding of Shelley's affective style depends, first, on taking seriously the poet's characterization of his verse as "incantation": examining the ways in which Shelley's poetry reflects upon this theme and exposing the stylistic strategies by which it seeks to foster this effect. Showing that enchantment in Shelley's verse is a serious preoccupation and not just a trivial, shallow stylistic move also means exposing how Shelley uses figuration in order to call attention to his poems' physical stylistic maneuvers, and how Shelley's poetic speakers and characters, appearing as reader figures, demonstrate models of how the poet's language is intended to work. Perhaps most important, however, is clarifying the fundamental and self-conscious connection between the incantatory and what Shelley calls "awakening" effects of poetic language in the two poems that most examine and enact that connection: "Ode to the West Wind" and *Prometheus Unbound*. In Shelley's "Ode," the overt, public agenda of the poem is to use its most prominent incantational stylistic strategies, such as the refrain, to call the reader into sympathy with the poet and his cause. Beneath this poetic surface, however, other, more subtle features of spellbinding style evince the poet's stanza-by-stanza formal "striving" with the incantational forces of inspiration in the figure of the West Wind, and depict his individual quest to understand the relationship between being spellbound and being awakened to a new mindset and attitude. *Prometheus Unbound* takes a surer, more organized approach to its study of the

affective offices of poetic language through its carefully planned interaction of two different types of style: a hypnotic style, intended to absorb readers in a spell of sound so as to break down resistances of the will and of previous modes of thinking, and a style that is syntactically, figuratively, and conceptually challenging, insistent upon the reader's keen attention, and even at times "painful" (as described by David Masson, the reviewer who compares Keats and Shelley in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1860) – in short, a style that is sublime. Because *Prometheus Unbound* stands as Shelley's greatest effort to use these two styles cooperatively, it is an affirmative answer to the question with which both Blake and Keats each in their own ways struggle: Can the poet be both an enchanter and a teacher? It is this combined capacity of the poet, in any case, upon which *Prometheus Unbound* stakes its success as a massive counter-charm against the spell of tyranny that Shelley sees resting upon English social and political institutions.

## I.

The tradition of discussing Shelley's style in terms of its "enchantment" of the reader begins with the earliest commentators, although the way these writers present the relation between this stylistic effect and the poetry's ideas is different from the reviews of Keats in which the "enchantment" issue is raised. Many contemporary reviewers of Keats's work, especially the early poetry, express concern that a stylistic trait such as rhyme tends to replace the poetry's "content" or "ideas" by exerting its "force" – or, what I read as a "charm" – upon the reader, and often, allegedly, to a soporific effect. The objection to the physical properties of Shelley's poetry – especially its sonic traits and the tendency of the verse to produce a sensation of being swept speedily along – is not so much that they replace intellectual content, which Shelley's poetry is assumed to possess

even if it seems incomprehensible. Critics claim instead that the verse's style, specifically its "harsh" sounds and its rhythm, which is seen as not "smooth" enough, offers no appropriate experiential payoff for the reader's struggle to understand Shelley. Or, they imply that there is a mischievous relation between the verse's style and its intellectual positions. The early reviewers suggest that Shelley uses certain devices like the repetition of abstract words (allegedly to the purpose of heightening the words' sonic, associative effects and decreasing their intellectual influence) to trick the reader into accepting moral and political positions that are seen as reprehensible.

These objections are expressed by the reviewer W.S. Walker, assessing the *Prometheus Unbound* volume for *The Quarterly Review* (October 1821), although Walker is ultimately more concerned about what he sees as a lack of clarity in Shelley's poetry than about the influence of Shelley's style upon readers' philosophical views:

Mr. Shelley's poetry all is brilliance, vacuity, and confusion. We are dazzled by the multitude of words which sound as if they denoted something very grand or splendid: fragments of images pass in crowds before us; but when the procession has gone by, and the tumult of it is over, not a trace of it remains upon the memory. The mind, fatigued and perplexed, is mortified by the consciousness that its labour has not been rewarded by the acquisition of a single distinct conception.<sup>5</sup>

Continuing the concept of the "reward" for the reader's difficulty that he has just invoked, Walker complains that "the ear, too, is dissatisfied: for the rhythm of the verse is often harsh and unmusical; and both the ear and the understanding are disgusted by new and uncouth words, and by the awkward, and intricate construction of the sentences."<sup>6</sup> The reviewer declares his "right to demand clear, distinct conceptions" from Shelley or any other poet and then, in an especially ironic moment, quotes the following passage from *Prometheus Unbound*. He accuses it of containing words that "hover on



the verge between meaning and no meaning” and ideas “which, taken separately, are sufficiently clear, but, when connected, are altogether incongruous.”

And lovely apparitions dim at first  
 Then radiant – as the mind, arising bright  
 From the embrace of beauty (whence the forms  
 Of which these are the phantoms) casts on them  
 The gathered rays which are reality –  
 Shall visit us, the progeny immortal  
 Of Painting, Sculpture, and rapt Poesy  
 And arts, though unimagined, yet to be.  
 The wandering voices and the shadows these  
 Of all that man becomes, the mediators  
 Of that best worship, love, by him and us  
 Given and returned, swift shapes and sounds which grow  
 More fair and soft as man grows wise and kind,  
 And veil by veil evil and error fall . . . (III.iii.49-62).

These lines are intended to corroborate the reviewer’s argument that Shelley uses words that sound as if they mean something discernible but really are exploited for their “sonorous” effects: “so many fine words are played off upon us . . . that a careless reader, influenced by his habit of associating such phrases with lofty or agreeable ideas, may possibly have his fancy tickled into a transient feeling of satisfaction. But let any man try to ascertain what is really said, and he will immediately discover the imposition that has been practiced.”<sup>7</sup> The irony here is that this passage, labeled as the exemplar of the incomprehensible, is one that precisely defines the process of comprehension and revolutionary perception that Shelley’s drama is dedicated to articulating and inspiring in readers, both individual and in the society at large. The other point of note in the reviewer’s comments is the motif of trickery and design – Shelley “plays off” words against his readers and makes “impositions” upon them – that also appears in other hostile reviews.

Consider, for example, the remarks of a reviewer for *The Lonsdale Magazine or Provincial Repository* (November 1820), who in evaluating the *Prometheus Unbound* volume stresses even more Shelley's alleged "trickery" out of fear that the poet's style will seduce the reader into radical philosophical commitments. The writer compares Shelley to a Siren who "captivate[s] [with her beauty and sweet music]. . . the heedless voyager . . . [who] found, when too late, that the most melodious tongue might be connected with the most rapacious heart." The reviewer further specifies the forces in Shelley's verse that work their enchantments upon the reader as "the flowers of rhetoric and music of oratory," although, in general, this writer offers a far less detailed consideration of Shelley's style than does Walker. The writer then launches into a list of social and moral consequences of readerly poetic seduction, both at the levels of the individual and of the Christian faith more broadly:

– to wander from the paths of virtue and innocence – to pursue the bubble, happiness, through the gratifications of sense – to feed on the fancied visions of an ideal perfection, which is to result from an unrestrained indulgence of all our baser passions and propensities – to revel in a prospective state of human felicity, which is to crown the subversion of all social order – and to figure to themselves an earthly paradise, which is to be planted among the ashes of that pure and holy religion which the Deity himself has revealed to his creatures . . . . [W]hen writers, like Byron and Shelley, envelop their destructive theories in language, both intended and calculated to entrance the soul by its melodious richness, to act upon the passions without consulting the reasons, and to soothe and overwhelm the finest feelings of our nature; -- then it is that the unwary are in danger of being misled, the indifferent of being surprised, and the innocent of being seduced. Mr. Shelley is a man of such poetic powers.<sup>8</sup>

With the language of enchantment now so familiar from Keats criticism, its presence should be obvious here ("entrance," "soothe and overwhelm"). But the reviewer a few lines later takes it to a new extreme when he declares: "But this is not all, the very decencies of our nature are to vanish beneath the *magic wand* of this licentious reformer

[my emphasis]. Every modest feeling, which now constitutes the sweetest charm of society is to be annihilated – and women are to be – *what God and nature never designed them.*”<sup>9</sup> We see again in this review the suggestion not just that Shelley’s style induces a form of altered consciousness upon the reader but that it has been meticulously planned to do so. When reviewers of Keats take note of charming effects, they tend not to intentionalize them so violently; here, the reviewer sees a spell of style as not only “intended” but “calculated,” the latter term implying a malicious agenda.

As it turns out, both this reviewer and W.S. Walker have identified the two Shelleyan styles that I will demonstrate in *Prometheus Unbound*. What Walker cites as a “harsh and unmusical” rhythm, “awkward, and intricate construction of the sentences,” and conceptual unclarity turn out to be the chief features of what I call Shelley’s “sublime style” in his lyrical drama. The *Lonsdale* reviewer judges the language of both Shelley’s and Byron’s poetry as “intended and calculated to entrance the soul by its melodious richness, to act upon the passions without consulting the reason, and to soothe and overwhelm the finest feelings of our nature,” identifying the other major linguistic mode that is displayed at moments in the “Hymn” and the “Ode” but preeminently in *Prometheus Unbound* – what I call the “hypnotic style” – and that is strategically employed alongside the sublime mode. These reviewers thus discern the most affective features of Shelley’s style as separate features, but they are not willing to see how they are joined and intended to cooperate toward a larger, perception-changing effect. In their suggestions of Shelley’s “calculation” and trickery, these reviewers also cast in a negative light the careful patterning of texts such as *Prometheus Unbound* that, we will

see, qualifies both the play as a whole and particular moments within it as poetic spellcasting.

T.S. Eliot's and F.R. Leavis's commentaries in the 1930s and 1940s constitute another landmark moment in Shelley's reception history, and they certainly need no discussion as far as well-known watershed claims like Leavis's "we have a recognized essential trait of Shelley's: his weak grasp upon the actual." Indeed, immediate scholarly reactions to Leavis's statement in the *Times Literary Supplement*, plus several decades worth of revived scholarly attention to Shelley's poetry since, have gone forth variously to disprove and discredit such remarks (although the remarks have nonetheless had their influence on the direction of Shelley studies). At the same time, Leavis's and Eliot's critiques deserve attention in the context of this chapter with respect to their treatment of the "enchantment" of Shelley's verse, their remarkably exact repetition of the statements of contemporary reviewers, and their competence in addressing the problem of the relation between form and content, or style and substance, that the contemporary reviewers uncover.

In his essay on Shelley and Keats in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, Eliot is no less hostile to Shelley's philosophical positions than the earlier reviewer W.S. Walker, remarking that Shelley's ideas are "repellent" to him and that his beliefs, "to put the case as extremely as possible . . . excite my abhorrence."<sup>10</sup> Like Walker, Eliot criticizes Shelley's poetry for failing to provide a pleasant experience of language to compensate for its ideological offenses: "But in such lines [*Prometheus Unbound*, Act I, 694-701], harsh and untunable, one is all the more affronted by the ideas." Yet even though Eliot claims to be trying to separate the style of Shelley's poetry from its

intellectual content – asking whether it is possible “to ignore the ‘ideas’ in Shelley’s poems, so as to be able to enjoy the poetry” – he cannot keep quiet about ideas long enough to give Shelley’s style its due attention. After disparaging the sound of Shelley’s language in the passage being addressed, Eliot immediately moves to critique its ideas, which, it is alleged, Shelley “bolted whole and never assimilated, [as is] visible in the catchwords of creeds outworn, tyrants and priests which Shelley employed with such reiteration.”<sup>11</sup> Eliot claims that supposedly “bad” lines like those he has just quoted from *Prometheus Unbound* Act I “contaminate the whole,” and that it is thus impossible to enjoy fully the lines where Shelley “rises to the heights,” which Eliot exemplifies in Act IV’s culminating passage. Yet in assessing this moment, Eliot once again immediately moves to evaluate on the basis of ideas: “[these are] lines to the content of which belief is neither given nor denied.”<sup>12</sup> Of course, Eliot cuts off his quotation at lines 573-74, “till Hope creates/From its own wreck the thing it contemplates,” instead of including the true climax of the passage, “Neither to change nor falter nor repent:/This, like thy glory, Titan! is to be/Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;/This is alone Life, Joy, Empire and Victory” (575-79), which, in the claim of the final line, overturns Eliot’s argument that there is no “belief” in the “content” of this passage.

There are many other problems with Eliot’s analysis, not least that he condemns *Prometheus Unbound*, acknowledged by most to be Shelley’s *magnum opus* and by the poet himself as “the best thing I ever wrote,”<sup>13</sup> on the basis of two short and incompletely quoted passages, and that the sole stylistic standard being used to evaluate Shelley’s poetry is that the language must have no stronger impact upon the ear than “delight,” to use the Horatian standard that literature should both instruct and delight. Or, to use yet

different terms, the language should be never sublime, only beautiful. Notably, this standard also appears in the Walker review in the comment, “[h]ad all the productions of our author been, like the above, calculated only to ‘soften and soothe the soul,’ we should have rejoiced in adding our humble tribute of applause”<sup>14</sup> and in Masson’s comparison of the affective styles of Keats and Shelley: “In reading Shelley, even when we admire him most, there is always a sense of pain; the influence of Keats is uniformly soothing.”<sup>15</sup>

Ironically, *Prometheus Unbound* and other poems are full of “tunable” language that has Shelley’s particular version of a “soothing” effect and that the poet often describes in the very passages designed to create this effect. The Shelleyan version of “soothing” language is words that act as a hypnotic spell, but the key point is that the passages that contain such language in *Prometheus Unbound* bear an intimate relation to the more “philosophical” passages that Eliot damns. This relation is hinted at by Eliot when he declares “in some of the most successful long poems there is a relation of the more tense to the more relaxed passages which is itself part of the pattern of beauty.”<sup>16</sup> Eliot here apparently refers to poems other than *Prometheus Unbound* and uses the inexact terms “tense” and “relaxed.” But he still hints, if unwittingly, that those passages that declare Shelley’s philosophies, whether directly or figuratively (are these the “tense” passages?), should not be considered apart from those with other purposes (apparently the more “relaxed” passages). Also, Eliot’s terms “tense” and “relaxed” suggest that affect in Shelley is not just about sound but also about tactile energy and motion; this is a point, I will show, that must especially be considered in the “multi-media” Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound*. It will be apparent that “enchancing” or “spellbinding” language

is not a reckless indulgence but a self-conscious preoccupation of Shelley's poetry at the levels of both content and form.

The theme of enchantment especially appears in F.R. Leavis's critique of Shelley's style. Yet Leavis tends to use this vocabulary as a superficial, mainly rhetorical form of recrimination: as a means, ostensibly, of trivializing Shelley's verse by association with supposedly less noble forms of language. Leavis does not discuss in depth the elements of Shelley's style that produce a spellbinding effect or address *Prometheus Unbound*, the text that more than any other in Shelley's oeuvre demonstrates the sophisticated way in which he contemplates and creates readerly enchantment. Leavis chooses to focus instead on "Ode to the West Wind" as the supreme example of the two chief traits he wishes to identify in Shelley's poetry: its tendency to sweep the reader up in its rhythms and to "[induce] a kind of attention that doesn't bring the critical intelligence into play"; and its use of imagery which fails to represent reality accurately, or displays a "weak grasp upon the actual."<sup>17</sup> Yet to point out the first trait is only a means of coming to the second, which is Leavis's greatest interest and a topic on which he dwells through a long series of rhetorical questions aimed to show that Shelley's imagery does not accord with physical reality.

Like the West Wind itself, Leavis blows by the two most defining affective properties of Shelley's poetry in just two short phrases – "[T]he sweeping movement of the verse, with the accompanying plangency, is so potent . . . " – without providing examples or elaboration, even though Leavis claims to be "examining the working of Shelley's poetry – his characteristic modes of expression."<sup>18</sup> The only further specification about Shelley's affective style appears in Leavis's last paragraph, where he

argues that the imagery of *Adonais* is only impressive to the “spell-bound, for those sharing the simple happiness of intoxication . . . and it is, in the voluptuous self-absorption with which the medium enjoys itself, rather nearer to Tennyson.” Then, to close the essay on a cheap note, Leavis declares, “But, as was virtually said in the discussion of imagery from the *Ode to the West Wind*, the Victorian poet with whom Shelley has some peculiar affinities is Swinburne,” and promptly refers the reader to “Note C,” a brief little denouement of Swinburne on the grounds of unmimetic imagery, a rushing verse rhythm, and what Leavis calls “the general hypnotic effect” produced by alliteration.<sup>19</sup> With these comments, placed so prominently at the end of his writing, Leavis all but calls any critic who looks too carefully into the most affecting features of Shelley’s style a simpleton, an aesthetic drunkard, and a person of bad taste in poetry (at the time of Leavis’s essay, this was taken to be evinced by any association with Swinburne, no matter how indirect).

Leavis’s critique has clearly been influential, echoed by other commentators such as Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom. His comments appear to have dissuaded critics from a sustained engagement with the concept, language, and agenda of enchantment, even though they are pervasive in Shelley, and pushed them instead toward a focus on the intellectual content and coherence of Shelley’s poetry. Critics writing in defense of Shelley have eagerly sought to demonstrate how Leavis fails to read the poet’s imagery correctly or sensitively (Bloom, Fogle, and Pottle), or to show that Shelley’s imagery does in fact accord with scientific reality.<sup>20</sup> Also, Leavis’s suggestion that Shelley’s poetry is intellectually vacant – a judgment reflected not just in his comments on imagery but also in the infamous claim, “Shelley, at his best and worst, offers the emotion in



itself, unattached, in the void”<sup>21</sup> – has been challenged by a spate of studies defending the intellectual basis of Shelley’s work, such as James Notopoulos’s study of Shelley’s Platonism and C.E. Pulos’s account of the poet’s philosophical skepticism.<sup>22</sup>

Recent decades have ushered in critical studies that address Shelley’s style more specifically, but one can still see in this work the tendency to focus on the conceptual integrity of Shelley’s verse. William Keach’s *Shelley’s Style* stands as the major example of criticism on Shelley’s style. This careful and perceptive book was written, according to Keach, as an attempt to revive and keep alive the debate about “Shelley’s characteristic way of using language.”<sup>23</sup> There is no question that *Shelley’s Style* is indispensable reading for anyone who engages in a serious study of the poet’s modes of expression. Keach’s work provides an anatomy of some of the most important traits of Shelley’s language, with its chapter-by-chapter exposition of the “styles within Shelley’s Style”: imagery based on “the operations of the human mind”; reflexive imagery; figures of melting, dissolving, and erasing; the imagery of speed; rhyme; and formal issues within the poet’s last lyrics.

Yet Keach treats only in passing the subjects of the affective dimension of Shelley’s verse and the self-consciousness and self-reflexivity of the poet’s major productions about their intended and imagined effects on readers – both because of a bias toward conceptual analysis and against affective approaches to Shelley’s poetry, and because of the approach and organization of Keach’s book. Keach openly declares his opposition toward an analysis of speed in Shelley’s poetry that is based on asserting a sensation of speed in the reader; he objects to such analysis because, he claims, it is often based on the assumption that “a reference to speed in the language or an abrupt transition

from one thought to another will necessarily produce a sensation of speed in the reader.”<sup>24</sup> Given that Leavis, in such an influential account of Shelley, makes this very assumption, it is indeed important both to clarify whether such junctures in the verse actually do produce the effect of speed, and to achieve a foundational understanding of the poet’s “disposition of ideas and images [of speed],” which is the subject to which Keach devotes his chapter instead of analyzing the sensation of speed in Shelley’s verse. But to sidestep affective properties in this way is to neglect studying that phenomenon which Keach himself acknowledges and which Shelley heavily explores and exploits in his verse: that “[m]ovement [of words on the page] is possible – one might also say necessary – only in the temporal experience of reading, and in that sense is a function of the reader’s eye, mind and voice.”<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, the catalogue of Keach’s chapters that is given above shows that *Shelley’s Style* is largely concerned with distinguishing different kinds of imagery in Shelley’s poetry, though the chapter on rhyme is an exception. This means that Keach spends much of a given chapter on a general type of imagery distinguishing subcategories within that type, and demonstrating how Shelley develops particular images or image sequences in specific passages. Yet in addressing Panthea’s description of her dream in Act II, Scene I of *Prometheus Unbound*, Keach hints that there are notable affective traits of the passage to be explored when he declares, “[t]his is the kind of writing that makes some readers of *Prometheus Unbound* give up in disgust or despair.” Instead of probing the lines’ most difficult and overwhelming stylistic aspects, however, Keach moves to redeem the passage on the grounds of its clear argument through images: “[through] willing attentiveness to the dominant sequence of images . . . [one can see] how cogently

Shelley articulates this moment of visionary ecstasy through an extraordinary diurnal sequence.”<sup>26</sup>

Keach’s concern to show a distinct conceptual logic in the passage prevents him from focusing on its most acute significance: it figuratively explains how Shelley thinks that sensory experience and thought should relate in the readerly experience of his text. Keach does comment briefly that “the action of Shelley’s meteorological imagery [in this passage and the lines following it] appears to be intricately co-ordinated with the motif of verbal expression and communication,” but he does not explain this “intricate co-ordination” or its significance. As we will see, this “motif of verbal expression and communication” tends to appear amidst the most stylistically difficult and affecting passages in *Prometheus Unbound* and at notable moments in other major poems, and it turns out to be a crucial ally in reading them. Verbal or textual metaphors are Shelley’s way of commenting on the stylistic operations of his poems, both in particular passages and holistically, and of suggesting how striking stylistic traits of the verse such as challenging syntax or overwhelming, “enchanted” sonic effects should be experienced and used by the reader in the quest for meaning. While Keach’s book provides a previously unavailable consideration of many aspects of Shelley’s expression, the implicitly imagery-based definition of style that underpins the study leaves open for scrutiny more explicitly affective elements of style.

Deconstructive approaches to Shelley’s work, particularly to *Prometheus Unbound*, have paid more attention to moments where the text seems to be describing itself or reflecting upon how it is to be read, and particularly to the interpretive problems in Shelley’s play that prevent unified meaning from emerging. As Tilottama Rajan has

discussed, *Prometheus Unbound* contains several contradictions, one of the most crucial being the differing descriptions of Demogorgon's identity. Demogorgon is identified during the course of the drama as the child of Jupiter and Thetis (III.i.54) and as "Eternity" (III.i.52) and yet at the end of the drama, Demogorgon refers to "Eternity/Mother of many acts" (IV, 565-66) as if Eternity were something apart from himself. "Between Demogorgon the first cause who resides in the realm of *res cogitans* and Demogorgon the effective cause operating in the sphere of *res extensa* or historical events," Rajan writes, "the link is unclear."<sup>27</sup> These different identities matter because Demogorgon is the one who overthrows Jupiter, and thus represents a revolutionary force against tyranny. How can the source of revolution be within history, if Demogorgon is the child of Jupiter and Thetis, and also outside time or transcendental, if Demogorgon is Eternity?

According to Rajan, the play's interpretive problems are not to be reconciled. But rather than lying helpless beneath the critic's deconstructing knife, the drama actually consciously attests both to its own interpretive quandaries and to the fact that any interpretation that tries to reconcile them is a desire-driven intention.<sup>28</sup> This "metafictional" quality of the play, Rajan claims, emerges especially in scenes that "reflect on the process by which a unified truth is constituted, communicated, and confirmed" such as the dialogue between Asia and Panthea at the beginning of Act II and Asia's visit to the cave of Demogorgon later in the act. In the latter scene, crucially, Demogorgon's refusal to communicate any form of ultimate truth yields Asia's own statement that one must make one's own truth through the desires of the heart. If *Prometheus Unbound*, after such scenes, is "a text of love and forgiveness" that grows

out of the “text of hate” that is articulated as the curse in Act I, then such an emphasis on love and forgiveness is defined only as an “intent of consciousness” that requires for its actualization a reader with “a similar emotional tropology.” Such is the reader, desired by the author, “who ‘produces’ the meaning of the text by intuitively grasping [the author’s] intention,” and thus “translating lyric into dialogue and finally drama, visionary intention into communication and action.”<sup>29</sup>

My reading of Shelley’s drama assents to some key points of Rajan’s argument: that Shelley’s play knowingly explores the discourse and ideal of love over and against its own contradictions, seeking no perfect reconciliation or organic unity for itself but desiring a certain set of values despite its own interpretive fissures; and, that Shelley’s play is metacritical or self-reflexive, figuratively representing and ruminating upon its own properties and on an ideal author and reader relationship. But I argue that the play’s various contradictions and its metacritical qualities may be usefully viewed not simply as a rumination upon reading and interpretation as desire-driven truth-making, but as part of a broader preoccupation with spell, or words used as a physical action upon the reader or listener, that extends across all four of the drama’s acts. As I will show, the drama as a whole was conceived by Shelley as a spell, but within this larger context, all four of its acts reflect on spells or stylistically cast them. Act I is a reflection upon words as action in the form of the curse. Act II is replete with various smaller spells in the form of lyrics, several of which were added by Shelley to the drama in a crucial series of late revisions. Act III ruminates upon physical action itself as what deposes Jupiter, thus creating an example against which the drama can weigh its consideration and use of *words* as physical action in its other acts; furthermore, the decree from Demogorgon that declares

the tyrant defeated is an example of spoken words that serve as deed. And finally, Act IV features scenes of voices mutually enchanting each other with their songs. What is crucial is the mutuality of this singing, or the fact that two voices are casting sonic spells upon each other, and that each of these spells blends what I call Shelley's hypnotic and sublime styles. Such antiphonal spell-casting is how Shelley figures both his drama's supreme value, love, and how he figures the ideal relationship between poet and reader, which is most elaborately represented in the lyrics of Act IV but prefigured in the exchange between the "Voice (in the air, singing)" and Asia at the end of Act II.

To see Shelley's lyrical drama in terms of its preoccupation with enchantment is also to acknowledge its historical uniqueness in a different way from Rajan. Rajan reads *Prometheus Unbound*, like other texts of the period such as Blake's *Songs* and prophecies, as of a "particular kind" because it resists a purely deconstructive reading that would see all texts as interpretable along the same lines. Shelley's lyrical drama is special, Rajan contends, because it disallows any interpretation that would try to find a unified meaning through its contradictions, but at the same time it refuses the impossibility of meaning by acknowledging that the act of interpretation, or meaning-making, is driven by desire. In other words, Shelley's text, particularly the scenes that dramatize and reflect on the process of reading and interpretation, simultaneously acknowledges its interpretive fissures but refuses its own complete deconstruction. Romantic texts like *Prometheus Unbound* that "assume the interaction between fiction and sociopolitical reality," are historically particular because of this complex relationship to deconstructive approaches that they evince.<sup>30</sup> Yet my reading of the play as a meditation on and stylistic enactment of spellcasting sees Shelley's text as historically

particular in a different way: it uncovers how the stylistic procedures of the drama record and respond to various forms of cultural sensationalism and to resulting questions about the identity and purpose of poetry in early nineteenth-century Britain. The problem of whether poetry should be written as a charm or a spell is one that is answered by Shelley in the affirmative, and the testing of how this might be so occurs through the spell of style created by key texts in Shelley's oeuvre. Shelley's exploitation of the spell as a tool that can aid his poetic objectives, in the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" and "Ode to the West Wind" but especially in *Prometheus Unbound*, thus approaches the idea of poetry as enchantment with a less experimental or ambivalent spirit than what we have seen in Blake and Keats.

General accounts of Shelley's affective style do exist, along with a few treatments of the issue of "enchantment" in Shelley's verse. But these studies tend neither to consider the reader's physical experience of Shelley's words in detail, nor to specify the relationship between the reading process and being placed under a spell that several of Shelley's major poems theoretically or actively explore, whether the reader is Shelley himself or an external one. For example, in his essay, "Frail Spells: Shelley and the Ironies of Exile," Forest Pyle contrasts the "frail spells" of "the name of God and ghosts and heaven" that Shelley disparages in the third stanza of the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" with the spirit of Intellectual Beauty, which is the "counter-charm," the "antidote to the 'poisonous names with which our youth is fed' (l.53)."<sup>31</sup> Pyle also argues that Intellectual Beauty is the "non-nationalist" spirit that, though it appears to Shelley to be exiled at the time of his writing, could potentially "preside over the idea or form of [a] national community."<sup>31</sup> Pyle also accurately observes that "to sing a hymn to intellectual

beauty is to invoke the incantatory ‘charm’ of the hymn form” and that “[i]f a hymn is not merely a song of praise or adoration but also a form of a spell, then one of the intended effects of this hymn to intellectual beauty is to extend its sacred powers to its singers and readers: it is intended to place those who utter it under the spell of love.”<sup>32</sup> Yet Pyle does not explain how the hymn form, as Shelley employs it, exerts an “incantatory charm” or qualifies as a spell, nor does he explore the possibility that the hymn’s spellcasting properties are intended primarily for Shelley as the reader of his own poem.

Both Marlon Ross’s “The Apprehending Reader in *Prometheus Unbound* and Chris Foss’s “Shelley’s Revolution in Poetic Language: A Kristevan Reading of Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound*” address the affective dimension of Shelley’s drama, but these studies are limited in scope and specificity. Ross provides some interesting brief observations about the “sensations” Shelley means to create through the lyric passages in Act II or the visual “vacuums” or aporias in Act IV, but overall his text is a more general account of the reading experience, or of how Shelley’s play pushes us to “visualize what we cannot see” and “people the world with dream-images.” Though providing some helpful attention to the physical properties of Shelley’s verse in Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound*, Foss’s piece does not detail how the drama fosters in us a new form of reading, what Foss calls “reading for sound and motion,” and what sensory and mental processes this reading involves. Foss, also, does not take his focus to other acts of the play – particularly the rich affective ground of Act II – or to Shelley’s other poems.<sup>33</sup>

Neil Fraistat’s chapter on the *Prometheus Unbound* volume in *The Poem and the Book* more amply characterizes Shelley’s affective style, suggesting that the lyrical drama



is intended to work as a charm or spell: “[s]cant attention has yet been given to the affective properties of Shelley’s language on the reader [in *Prometheus Unbound*]. Shelley, after all, seems to be straining for a poetic language that bridges the gap between mere words and ‘spells’ or ‘incantations,’ special orderings and choices of words that compel transformations regardless of the will of those upon whom they act.”<sup>34</sup> Fraistat further suggests, this time of the *Prometheus Unbound* volume as a whole, that the poems of the volume are “rather self-consciously crafted as scripts for readers who, in the act of reading itself, release whatever power is stored within. By reconstituting these texts, internalizing their rhythms and words, their promptings and cues, readers restructure their own minds.”<sup>35</sup> Yet Fraistat’s reading of the *Prometheus Unbound* poems, and preeminently of the lyrical drama itself, concentrates mostly on the internal scenes of affect in the drama: how the actions and speech of the characters themselves reflect upon and demonstrate “the transforming power of words,”<sup>36</sup> and specifically how words serve as affective catalysts at the most crucial moments in the processes of liberation, transformation, and relationship that Fraistat sees, respectively, as characterizing Acts I, II and III, and IV.<sup>37</sup> Fraistat performs helpful readings, for example, of Prometheus’s struggle “to liberate himself from the tyranny of his own words” in Act I and of Act IV’s assertion of the power of words to “refashion the universe.”<sup>38</sup>

Building upon Fraistat’s general observations about the spell-like powers of Shelley’s language upon his external readers, and on his account of how Shelley’s drama ruminates upon the affective properties of language internally, I wish to perform a more detailed study of the relationship between “enchantment” and the reading process in major texts from across Shelley’s oeuvre: *Prometheus Unbound*, because of its self-

conscious engagement with the theme and styles of enchantment as directed toward external readers, and the “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” and “Ode to the West Wind,” because these two poems involving a complex dynamic wherein Shelley negotiates the spell-casting potential of language as the reader of his own poems. This attempt to discern the spells of Shelleyan language will mean a critical attitude toward the poet’s style that permits being “bound/Borne . . . down, around/Into a sea of ever-spreading sound” but at the same time attempts to ascend to “those skiey towers/Where Thought’s crowned Powers/Sit watching . . . .”<sup>39</sup>

## II.

The early lyric “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” explores enchantment as both a theme and a stylistic effect. Shelley’s rumination in this poem upon the idea of magic and on related terms, and the formal strategies by which he explores the transfixing and transformative powers of words, serve as an apprenticeship for later poems: specifically, for the more urgent negotiation with incantatory style that is the “Ode to the West Wind,” and for the comprehensive, systematic study of the enchanting potential of language in *Prometheus Unbound*.

The formal characteristics of the “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” – particularly its ample imagery through similes – tend to be read by critics in one of two ways: either the poem’s form is trying to represent the nature and effects of “intellectual beauty” by speaking of them, or it is trying to present that nature and those effects by enacting or performing them. Harold Bloom exemplifies the first type of argument when he suggests that Shelley’s similes in the “Hymn” all describe some phenomenon that is “wavering,” and therefore accurately and appropriately express the evanescent, intangible, and

mutable wind that is the poem's subject.<sup>40</sup> Forest Pyle's more recent reading also exemplifies the representational argument, claiming that the poem is a controlled attempt, especially in stanzas one, two, five, and six, to narrate the effects of the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty in the natural world and on the speaker and to contrast those effects with the "frail spells" of "God and ghosts and heaven" that the poem demystifies in stanza three.<sup>41</sup> William Keach's brief treatment of the first stanza of the "Hymn" typifies the second method of reading the poem's form. Keach contends that the stanza's "figurative progression enacts the vanishing of an impalpable 'Power' named in the first three lines," claiming that the tenuous first image of "summer winds" gives way to more and more attenuated images until the act of comparison collapses in the lack of specificity of the line, "Like aught that for its grace may be."<sup>42</sup> Keach also argues, interestingly, that Shelley seeks to "arrest" the experience of the Spirit's fleeting nature by the "formal integrity" or "distinct and reproducible verbal shape" of stanza one, which Keach suggests is accomplished through rhyme and the "management of syntax and line length." While it seems generally true that Shelley is trying to challenge the inconstancy of the Spirit through the formal features of his poem, the strategies of this effort are more exact than simply to apply end-rhyme or to set rules of line length. And, in what particular ways does syntax help with the process of "arresting"? A more detailed study of these problems is needed, not just in stanza one but throughout the "Hymn," especially since one could argue that all poetry is an attempt to pin down an object, memory, or experience through the seeming solidity or stability of form.

A more specific explanation for Shelley's style in the "Hymn" is that it constitutes a charm, or language used as a physical action, but in a more radical way than in Keats's

poems. The spellcasting style of Shelley's "Hymn" – consisting in the speaker's persistent and at times desperate repetition and particular spatial arrangement of sounds, words, similes, and addresses – attempts to compel or conjure the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty itself. When the speaker apparently regards this as a failed attempt midway through the poem, he then employs the same stylistic strategies to a different end: repetitions, as a network of visual and aural likenesses, are ranged as a stand of material language against both the idea and the felt reality of the Spirit's "inconstancy." Such an argument about how form and the Spirit relate in Shelley's "Hymn" is similar to Pyle's claim about "England in 1819": "the poem is less an *expression* of [the poet's] historico-political understanding than [that]. . . . the poem itself – the poetic resources that are conjured in and by the sonnet [such as the sudden force of the enjambment in the closing couplet] – *produces* this sense of historical and political possibility."<sup>43</sup> Yet the "Hymn" does not finally make a choice between "expressing" what Shelley has experienced or learned of enchantment and trying to "produce" enchantment itself – or, to put it another way, a choice between content and form. Instead, the "Hymn" simultaneously works out some of Shelley's ideas about various "spells" that he sees at work in current English society and the more ideal spell of the Spirit that he has experienced, and he seeks to "produce," through the compelling, enchanting effects of poetic language, the experience of the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty. In short, Shelley uses this early poem as both a theoretical and praxeological exploration of enchantment.

The speaker's attempt to bring the Spirit through the power of specially ordered language occurs with the greatest intensity over the first half of the poem and reaches its pinnacle (or nadir) in the frantic repeated imperative, "Depart not," of the end of stanza

four. Each of the first four stanzas displays a different strategy for calling the Spirit into the speaker's company, as well as a subtle form of reflection or commentary upon the effectiveness of the previous stanza's method.

The poem's opening stanza hardly exhibits what Bloom calls a "restraint of style." It is free of the plaintive exclamations and abstract, seemingly unempirical imagery that detractors like Leavis disparage in Shelley's poetry,<sup>44</sup> but as far as the hallmarks of incantatory style – word repetition, internal rhyme, and parataxis – the stanza is a *tour de force* and an ambitious beginning.

The awful shadow of some unseen Power  
 Floats though unseen amongst us, -- visiting  
 This various world with as inconstant wing  
 As summer winds that creep from flower to flower. –  
 Like moonbeams that behind some piny mountain shower,  
     It visits with inconstant glance  
     Each human heart and countenance;  
 Like hues and harmonies of evening, --  
     Like clouds in starlight widely spread, --  
     Like the memory of music fled, --  
     Like aught that for its grace may be  
 Dear, and yet dearer for its mystery. (1-12)

As Keach notes, the poem's repetitions of the words "unseen," "inconstant," and forms of "visit" imitate the evanescence of the Spirit that is being described,<sup>45</sup> but one must add the important specification that it is the flickering, uneven positioning of these repetitions across the lines that creates both the feeling and the visual map of evanescence. Also, where Keach sees the whole of stanza one as a single phase, characterized by a gradual decline in the comparative force of its imagery as an imitation of the vanishing spirit, I contend that the stanza is divided into three distinct phases, each occupying a different moment in the strategic employment of words as power.

As just noted, the stanza's first phase, which is contained within lines 1-4, does use its repetitions to perform the fleeting nature of the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty. Yet instead of continuing throughout the stanza, this attempt collapses immediately in the stanza's second phase. The latter begins with an oblique comparative simile in line five. The relative clause beginning, "Like moonbeams that," seems at first to trail off without a verb; or, if "shower" serves as the verb, the clause has its meaning awkwardly delayed until the end of the line. Lines 5 and 6 then condense the flickering repetitions of "visit" and "inconstant" of the first four lines into a firm declaration, "[i]t visits with inconstant glance/Each human heart and countenance." It is as if the speaker, though noting the evanescence of the Spirit at the conceptual level, is trying to imitate what he later calls "[the Spirit's] firm state within [man's] heart" through the physical condensation of previously repeated words into a single short line. Line six, also, is the poem's first hint that the Spirit's evanescence affects the speaker emotionally.

The transitional moment of lines 5-6 fosters the third phase of the stanza, which is a movement not to perform the spirit's evanescence but to challenge it. This phase is defined by a rash of similes, each of a similar brief length and greater directness than the comparisons at lines four and five, and each followed by a dash that together with the powerful repeated similes provides a trans-semantic burst of energy to propel the verse. Within this opening stanza, the speaker has moved from an attempt to imitate the spirit in flickering, uneven repetitions, to an abandonment of that attempt, which only reminds him of the Spirit's painful inconstancy, to the eager embrace of a new, much more regularized and patterned form of repetition. This latter stylistic move is adopted according to a twofold logic: that the regular repetitions of lines 8-11 will bring the

speaker into an altered, perhaps hypnotic, state of consciousness that could at least mimic an experience of the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty; or more radically, that the lines' battery-style listing of phenomena that are like the Spirit, using the affective powers of repeated language and regular rhythms, will serve as a stylistic "calling" of the Spirit itself.

If the turning point in stanza one is the speaker's thought of the human consequences of the Spirit's inconstancy – that it affects "each human heart and countenance" – then that same thought dominates the whole of stanza two. The speaker begins the stanza with what seems to be a new strategy of direct invocation: "Spirit of BEAUTY, that dost consecrate/With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon/Of human thought or form" (13-15). Yet this statement, it appears, functions more as the speaker's self-reassurance that the Spirit has blessed the "human thought or form" that is his poem. Any notion that stanza two's opening lines constitute a confident address is also overturned when the entire construction metamorphoses into a question, "where art thou gone?" (15); this question suggests that stanza one's attempted stylistic calling of the Spirit has failed and fosters a mood of bewilderment that persists through the stanza and takes the form of repeated questions about the reasons for mutability and sorrow. These interrogations call to mind the frantic queries of "Ode on a Grecian Urn": in both Shelley's and Keats's verses, the rapid repetition of the questions and their searching tone suggest the speaker's alienation from the phenomenon he is addressing.

Stanza three's central insight sets the direction of the theoretical reflection upon enchantment, as well as the strategies and objectives of style, that will appear throughout the rest of Shelley's "Hymn."

No voice from some sublimer world hath ever  
 To sage or poet these responses given –  
 Therefore the name of God and ghosts and Heaven,  
 Remain the records of their vain endeavour,  
 Frail spells – whose uttered charm might not avail to sever,  
 From all we hear and all we see,  
 Doubt, chance, and mutability. (25-31)

Implicit in this statement is a condemnation of the invocational strategy of the previous stanza – the calling on the name, “Spirit of BEAUTY” – which does not occur again for the rest of the poem. While the poem, generally speaking, has faith in the Spirit’s ability to counter the “gloom” of the common experience of human beings, it has grown suspicious that a simple utterance of a name has the power to revoke powerful forces such as “doubt, chance, and mutability.” This skepticism about the power of the name is supported by other reflections across Shelley’s oeuvre on the diminished power and popular misuse of names such as Jesus. But at this particular moment in this particular poem, the speaker’s fear that the names of God, ghosts, and Heaven are “frail spells” whose effects, when uttered, “might not” accomplish the desired results also seems a symbolic apprehension that the attempted spell of his poetic utterance is also “frail” and ineffective.

The speaker’s response is twofold. From now on, whenever he calls upon the Spirit to whom his poem is addressed, he hails merely an aspect or a function of the Spirit and not the Spirit itself. Also, the most characteristic stylistic strategy of verbal magic – repetition – is heretofore applied with a particular attention to the physical placement of repeated words. In this latter sense, the “Hymn,” as it goes on, substantiates Keach’s argument about stanza one’s attempted “arresting” of the inconstant Spirit through form, but in a more extreme, literal sense than Keach suggests. Over and against mere rhyme



and lineation, Shelley's strategically positioned repeated words and phrases contrast with the flickering repetitions of stanza one or of various other words that remind the speaker of the Spirit's inconstancy or the weakness of his poem. This stand of material language, as such, challenges the "doubt, chance, and mutability" that threatens to capture both form and the feelings of the poet himself.

Stanza four, observing that "Man were immortal, and omnipotent,/Didst thou, unknown and awful as thou art,/Keep with thy glorious train firm state within his heart" (39-41), intensifies the poem's formal response to the Spirit's absenteeism: words themselves, as a specially arranged material presence, will have to be the "firm state" that the Spirit refuses to keep in the speaker's heart.

Thou messenger of sympathies,  
That wax and wane in lover's eyes –  
Thou – thou, that to human thought art nourishment,  
Like darkness to a dying flame!  
Depart not as thy shadow came,  
Depart not – lest the grave should be,  
Like life and fear, a dark reality. (42-48)

This response takes the form of a new rash of repetitions, which have a striking visual presence down the left margin of text ("Thou," "That," "Thou," "Like," "Depart not," "Depart not," "Like"). The fired-off addresses, in their unspecific use of "thou," betray the speaker's reticence about calling directly to the Spirit by name as he did in stanza two, and the double-command of "[d]epart not" suggests, in its frantic tone, that the speaker feels more alienated from the Spirit than ever and is especially anxious to experience that being again. Michael O'Neill argues that the last stanza's repetition of "thee" in the rhyming position "suggests an almost yearning drive to reach out to the presence which Shelley is invoking." Yet this claim actually applies much better to the

speaker's repetitions of "thou" at this crucial point in the poem: located at line-beginnings, these repetitions have a much stronger rhythmic thrust than the "thee" instantiations, whose sonic and visual distinction gets lost in the generally placid tone and unadorned verbal-visual field of the last stanza.<sup>46</sup>

The speaker's strong sense of alienation from the Spirit is also suggested in a variant of line 44 that appears in the version of the "Hymn" in the Scrope Davies Notebook: "Thou – that to *the poet's thought* art nourishment" (my emphasis). The changed phrase implies that at this moment, at least in the *Scrope Davies* version of the "Hymn," the dominant force is less the speaker's general thoughts of "humanity" and its relation to the Spirit than a more personal feeling of poetic failure. Yet this could also be true of the *Examiner* version of the poem, whose depersonalization of line 44 does not necessarily suggest that Shelley has resolved his feelings of alienation from the Spirit. In fact, as O'Neill has shown, the *Examiner* text's variations from the *Scrope Davies* version evince Shelley's subtle attempt, through particular word choices, to conceal his individual sense of isolation from the Spirit and, I would add, evidence that the attempted spell of the "Hymn" has failed to call the inspiring force of the Spirit.<sup>47</sup>

Pyle accurately suggests that the latter stanzas of the poem reflect upon the theme of enchantment in order to distinguish between the Spirit's spells and the "frail spells" of stanza three, but he does not take into account the psycho-stylistic dynamics of what is happening in these verses. According to Pyle, the speaker, in stanza six, seeks first to define more personally the "frail spells" of "the name of God and ghosts and Heaven" by saying they were the "poisonous names with which our youth is fed" and on which he used to call (53), and then to contrast the lack of response with the "ecstatic" experience

of the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty falling on him (60). In stanza seven, the speaker continues with terminological definitions, contrasting “phantoms” as vestiges of a previous positive experience with the more negative term “ghosts” and offsetting the unsuccessful past “callings” that he narrates in stanza six: “I call the phantoms of a thousand hours/Each from his voiceless grave: they have in visioned bowers/Of studious zeal or love’s delight/Outwatched with me the envious night” (64-67). The poem’s final stanza rounds out the contrast between the Spirit’s enchantments and “frail spells” by providing another description of the Spirit’s former effects upon him: “[I am one] whom, Spirit fair, thy spells did bind/To fear himself, and love all human kind” (83-84).

In light of the speaker’s stylistic exploration of the spell in the first four stanzas, however, the “callings” of stanzas five and six take on a more particular significance than Pyle suggests. The failure of affective language to create an experience of the Spirit in the first half of the poem is reflected in the speaker’s recourse to a different kind of calling in stanza five: a calling of past lived experience. The speaker’s attempt to show how the past proves his dedication to the Spirit where perhaps the words of the present poem have not occurs even more poignantly in stanza seven: “I vowed that I would dedicate my powers/To thee and thine – have I not kept the vow?” (61-62). The speaker’s reference to his “powers,” interestingly, characterizes the poem-as-spell and attempts to simulate, literally, the repetitions of spell language by the sonic and visual equivalence of the words “vow” and “powers.” Also, it is important that the speaker calls the youthful commitment he made to the Spirit a “vow,” since that, in itself, is a form of verbal magic: a “binding” statement that has force, or power, beyond merely its semantic meaning. As such, the “vow” is invoked by the speaker as an example of his prior power

and success in words. That the speaker does not feel that the current “Hymn” is a proper dedication of his powers to the Spirit emerges in the further non-linguistic proofs of sincerity which he invokes: his “beating heart and streaming eyes, even now” (63). The word “now” also continues the speaker’s spell-like use of repetitions, connecting sonically with “vow” and “powers” while at the same time pressing home the contrast between the “power” of the “vow” made in the speaker’s youth and the ineffectual nature of his attempted use of words as power “now.” Moreover, the “call” to the “phantoms of a thousand hours” that dominates the rest of the stanza is more than a mere conceptual contrast with the speaker’s youthful appeals to “poisonous names”: it is an attempt to prove the “joy” and “hope” with which the speaker regards the Spirit by recourse to witnesses of the past.

In the language of its act of supplication, the poem’s final stanza continues a material stand of form against the Spirit’s flickerings and the speaker’s waning “Love, Hope, and Self-Esteem”:

Thus let thy power, which like the truth  
Of nature on my passive youth  
Descended, to my onward life supply  
Its calm (77-80).

The speaker’s repetition of the word “power” in line 77 is yet another subtle attempt to establish a sonic and visual link between his reference to his own poetic “powers” in line 61 and the “power” of the Spirit which has apparently eluded his language throughout the poem. Also, the speaker’s description of his youth as “passive” is a subtle reference to the “active” and at times frantic attempts of the present to conjure the spirit through the language of the “Hymn.” Finally, the speaker’s use of the word “calm” in line 80 serves as another material challenge to the Spirit’s evanescence, although this challenge inheres

in Shelley's choice of the word "calm" over another option rather than in repetitions as before. The significance of the diction emerges when we look again at the *Scrope Davies* version of the "Hymn," in which one finds in the position of "calm" the word "hues," which is repeated so prominently in the poem's opening stanza. O'Neill notes that the use of the word "calm" in the *Examiner* text is an attempt to "stabilize" the transience of the Spirit which is, generally, reflected more in the diction of the *Scrope Davies* version of this poem.<sup>48</sup> This assertion is true at the semantic level: the speaker wants to "calm" both his anxieties about the Spirit's evanescence and the wavering of the Spirit itself. Yet bearing in mind the poem's material exploitation of words at various points, I would suggest a further significance for the use of the word "calm" in the *Examiner* text. With the dash that follows the word acting out its meaning by producing a firm pause, the use of the word "calm" is a final attempt to stand an effect of solidity in language against the spatial flickering of the repeated word "hues" that appears in stanza one and that would have continued had the word been used yet again at the end of Shelley's "Hymn."

### III.

The difference between the "Ode to the West Wind" and the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" is one of both degree and kind: the "Ode" is a more ambitious exploration of poetic language as affective power than the "Hymn," and it is a different type of poetic spell. The "Hymn" defines itself as a "soothing" spell, or a physical deployment of words in order to achieve a soothing effect. Though the speaker only makes this effort as a response to the early stanzas' subtle, uncertain, and finally unsuccessful attempts to summon the Spirit through the powers of style, he still spends much of the "Hymn" searching for "calm" through both poetic form – the molding of

words into a comforting material stand against the Spirit's inconstancy – and content – the direct petition in the last stanza for the Spirit to supply peacefulness.

“Ode to the West Wind” is a more intricate, complex, and self-conscious “incantation.” The poem is commonly seen as a straightforward prayer for the Wind to bring its inspiring power upon the poet and, through the message of the poet, upon an audience of readers who might help to accomplish the social change that the poet prophesies. Yet the “Ode” actually exhibits more of a discord between its functions as private and public incantation. As a public incantation, the poem seeks to compel the Wind, which is literally the force of seasonal change but figuratively the force of inspiration and transformation in hearts and minds, to help work perception-changing, revolutionary effects on readers. Chief stylistic strategies are the powerful, bracing effects of the poem's refrain, “hear, O hear!”, its driving rhythms, and the likenesses among its “wave, leaf, and cloud” imageries, which the poet conveniently recapitulates for readers in stanza four and which all suggest the giving of oneself to forces of change. By these means Shelley's “Ode” hopes to call its audience into an allegiance with the poet's voice and prophetic mission, which is most openly expounded in other poems in the *Prometheus Unbound* volume, especially the lyrical drama itself and the “Ode to Liberty.” In this role, the “Ode to the West Wind” serves as a kind of companion-piece to the poems in Shelley's volume that explicitly make intellectual arguments for social change and particularly to *Prometheus Unbound*. The “Ode,” specifically, serves as a kind of paratext to *Prometheus Unbound* that, even though it is not physically appended with the drama in the manner of a preface, still constitutes a blessing upon the efficacy of Shelley's revolutionary hopes as they are expressed in the poet's *magnum opus*. This

public incantatory agenda of the “Ode” is suggested both in the speaker’s request of the last lines that the Wind spread the poet’s words among mankind; it is also implied in the agreement of the poem’s refrain, “hear, O hear!” with the epigraph to the *Prometheus Unbound* volume, “Do you hear this, Amphiaraus, hidden away under the Earth?”, which is directed, aside from some particular literary and philosophical figures, to Shelley’s reading public.

The poem’s agenda of private incantation is more complex because it is not a simple “calling” of the Wind as inspiration for the poet, as the “Hymn” seeks to call the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty, nor is it an attempt, like that of the “Hymn,” to make the firm materialities of form stand against inspiration’s failure to show itself consistently. The problem in the “Ode,” rather, is that the gusty presence of the Wind is already making itself known to the poet from the first lines of his poem, threatening, paradoxically, as both a “Destroyer and Preserver” of the poet’s will and of the form and style of the poem. Whereas, in the “Hymn,” the speaker had to seek for both the immediacy and the constancy of the Spirit’s presence, in the “Ode,” urgency is already present and “moving everywhere” in the form of the especially pervasive tyranny in England in 1819 and thus in the consciousness of the poet. The poem’s act of private incantation, therefore, is not so much a calling of the Wind into the poet’s presence as a fundamental negotiation – both conceptual and stylistic – of what to *do* with inspiration. To put this another way, the poet’s question is not “how do I bring the forces of inspiration upon my poem through the spell-like powers of my language?” but “how do I use inspiration, which has the potentially transfixing power of a spell, once it is upon my language?” Much of the complexity of the “Ode” is registered in the speaker’s process of

reckoning with the force of inspiration upon his own words – a process which he, interestingly, calls “striving” in the fourth stanza – and in the way that the poem’s language figuratively records this process.

The first step toward seeing the intricacy and self-consciousness of Shelley’s negotiation with the physical powers of poetic words is to recall Frederick Pottle’s comment on the “Ode” in his classic defense of Shelley, “The Case of Shelley”: “When [Shelley] invoked the breath of Autumn’s being, he was not indulging in an empty figure. The breath (‘spiritus’) that he invoked was to him as real and awful as the Holy Ghost was to Milton.”<sup>49</sup> To give space to Pottle’s words may seem unnecessary in the sense that few would contest the validity of his observation about Shelley’s “Ode.” But his observation helps to make the point that my reading will prove through analysis of Shelley’s style: that the “Ode to the West Wind” participates, if not from an orthodox Christian perspective, in a long tradition of mystical prayer and poetry that ascribes great power to particularly ordered and arranged verbal utterances. Bloom asserts this when he compares the “Ode to the West Wind” with the Song of Deborah in the Bible, finding in Shelley’s poem what Martin Buber finds in the Biblical text:

It is known that many early lyric forms spring from a magical aim to set up against the hard, unbound, demonic element, one that was bound and binding: the secret of the likeness appears as something that silences and subdues. The class of Biblical forms especially noteworthy, the repetitive forms – alliteration, assonance, paronomasia, key words, key sentences, refrain, etc. – has the particular purpose of emphasizing the most important aspect of the religious message, to point again and again at the fundamental idea or ideas of the belief round which the rest are grouped, and which the recipient of the message is requested to perceive as such with concentrated attention.<sup>50</sup>

Bloom applies this quotation from Buber to Shelley’s poem by asserting that the “Ode” also has a “magical aim”: “its bound and binding structure is set up against ‘the hard,



unbound, demonic element,' the velocity and fierceness of the driving west wind ushering in autumn . . . . The greatness of Shelley's form in the 'Ode' is akin to the greatness of the structure of the 'Song of Deborah': each masters the turbulence of the events in relation to which the singer takes his stand."<sup>51</sup>

Bloom's argument here nicely summarizes the operations of form that I discussed in Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty": its attempted "binding" – through the exploited materiality of words themselves – against the "unbound" or "inconstant" flickerings of the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty. Yet in order to make Bloom's assertion apply to the formal dynamics of the "Ode to the West Wind," one must add the crucial qualification that Shelley seeks, through the workings of diction and rhythm, *both* to "set up against" the driving wind, or actively to work his stylistic will upon its influence, *and* to make its awakening, bracing effects affectively real to him, or to be passive to its influence. In short, Shelley wants both to master the wind through the structure of his poem and to be mastered by it. In this sense, the poet is trying, through the special patterns of his language, to relate to the Wind in a way not dissimilar to the way that particular prayer styles relate to God according to some Eastern Christian mystical writers: repetitions, chant-like utterance, and alternating turbulent and calm rhythms have a special power to bring the speaker into a closer experience of union with the divine, just as these speech-traits, when found in the supplicant's utterance, are evidence of God's transfixing power upon him or her.

The "Ode" begins with such energy that, as Bloom says of "Epipsychidion," it seems as if it has been in progress for some time. The inspirational force of the Wind manifests itself physically in the stanza's near-obsessive repeated addresses to it, "O wild

West Wind,” “Thou,” “O Thou,” “Wild Spirit,” “Destroyer and Preserver,” which are gusted into irregular positions within the verses’ rhythm. These cast-about addresses both struggle against and lurch forward the propulsive movement of the stanza, in the same way that a victim flails and jolts here and there in a body-lock with an assailant. Gone are the neatly lined up repetitions of the first stanza of the “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,” which try, rather naively, to hypnotize the Spirit and thereby compel its attendance to the speaker; here, in the “Ode,” repetitions can hardly evince even that small degree of speakerly control.

The opening simile figuratively provides us with a greater understanding of the poet’s struggle with the transfixing force of the Wind upon his language: “O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn’s being,/Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead/Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing” (1-3). The metaphorical link between the leaves of nature and the leaves of the poet’s book of poems will not be more officially made until the last stanza, but it is subtly present here, where Shelley suggests that his poetic language, in the figurative form of “dead leaves,” is resisting his attempts as the “enchanter” to bring it under control. The language is being “driven” by the West Wind, which performs the commanding actions of “charioting” seeds to their beds and of bringing green life to “plain and hill” in the person of sister Spring. The speaker comes early in the poem to a summary insight about the Wind’s relationship to his poetic words when he calls it “Destroyer and Preserver”: the speaker’s utterance is “preserved” in the poem, but the role of his individual will in the formal making of that utterance has been all but “destroyed.” This paradoxical power of the Wind is nicely registered in the poem’s refrain, first appearing as “hear, O hear!” at the end of the opening stanza. This

refrain, aside from its more public demand upon Shelley's readership to hear and attend to the poet's messages, also serves as the speaker's more personal plea that the Wind listen to what he is trying to say – even though, as I will show, it cannot be said in its full individuality until the last stanza, and even though the Wind has implicitly already “heard” the poet because it is the spirit that is now dictating his utterance.

The “striving” between the poet's control of the ode's language and the Spirit's transfixing power continues in stanza two, but more in favor of the speaker. As if simultaneously to acknowledge the incantational power of the Wind and to signal the ways in which form will try to gain ascendancy over that power, Shelley's speaker shifts from discussing what the Wind does to discussing what objects do when they are affected by the Wind, as in “Thou on whose stream/'mid the steep sky's commotion/Loose clouds like Earth's decaying leaves are shed/Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean” (15-17). Yet Shelley's prime method for demonstrating that his style is no mere sonic and visual record of the Wind's spell upon it is to foreground stylistic maneuvers that strongly display the machinations of the poet, or that, as Donald Wesling puts it, do not try to conceal the fact that devices are at hand.<sup>52</sup> These maneuvers – syntactical manipulation and radical enjambment – dominate this stanza more than any other in the poem. Shelley works the syntax of the stanza's central statement to exert a massive delay between the verbal phrase and its corresponding object:

there are spread  
On the blue surface of thine aery surge,  
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head

Of some fierce Maenad, even from the dim verge  
Of the horizon to the zenith's height,  
The locks of the approaching storm. (18-23)

Coming between “there are spread” and “the locks of the approaching” are the ranging prepositional phrases, which interestingly also stretch laterally out into the space at the right “verge” of the page. This stretching physically imitates the motion of the Maenads’ locks that the phrases describe and thus gains further control over the material condition of the poem’s language through which the spell of an external force – in this case, inspiration figured as the Wind – normally expresses itself. In the final phrases of stanza two, syntactical manipulation and enjambment work their forces together:

Thou Dirge

Of the dying year, to which this closing night  
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,  
Vaulted with all thy congregated might

Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere  
Black rain and fire and hail will burst: O hear! (23-28)

The second enjambment (26 to 27) is more radical than the first (23 to 24), but not because of any difference between the enjambments *as enjambments*: both take advantage of the radical effect of the spatial jump between *terza rima* units and make a prepositional phrase the delayed syntactical entity. What makes the second enjambment so important is its physical enactment, together with the stanzaic operations that have come before it, of the imagery of the “dome of a vast sepulchre,/Vaulted with all [the Wind’s] congregated might.” Although this imagery asserts the power of the Wind on the one hand, on the other it refers to the “congregated might” of the virtuoso uses of poetic device in this stanza: syntactical delay and enjambment make their own “dome” or “solid atmosphere” of affective energy and poetic suspense and then allow the stanza’s last line to “burst” from this construction. Although the poem describes its imagistic dome as a “vast sepulchre,” thus haunting the stanza with the notion that the poet’s

individuality is “destroyed” or suffers death at the spellcasting hand of the Wind, Shelley asserts his poetic powers in yet still more ways before this stanza is done: the speaker turns the address to the Wind at line 23 into an opportunity to characterize his own poetry at this moment, “Thou dirge.” Yet line 28 is an even more subversive move, reclaiming the color imagery of stanza one, “yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,” which before figuratively described the “leaves” of his text “fleeing” before the poet’s powers. Line 28 repeats “black” exactly and “pale” sonically in “hail” and joins these words with “fire,” a key reference to Promethean poetic power. The line also grants these words new life by claiming that they will “burst” from the “dome” or “solid atmosphere” that has just self-consciously described the action of the poet’s language in stanza two.

In the “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,” the speaker casts his mind back to the immediate bodily experience of the Spirit in his youth at a particularly challenging juncture in the poetic struggle with words as power. Similarly, Shelley’s “Ode” speaker, in the third stanza, recalls a simpler experience of the Wind in order to take respite from the effort both to absorb and to master its inspiring force in stanzas one and two.

Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams  
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,  
Lulled by the coil of his chrystalline streams, (29-31).

Although at the literal level these words tell of the Wind’s effects upon the sea, critics have long commented upon their reference to Shelley’s experience in Italy, which the poet indicates even more explicitly when he notes in the stanza’s next line the place where he had gone boating in December 1818, “a pumice isle in Baiae’s bay” (32).<sup>53</sup> Yet most crucially, the biographical moment of lines 29-32 features the first clear, struggle-free power relation between the Wind and the poet in the poem: the Wind is the active

awakening force and the poet is the passive presence, lingering about in his dreamy state. Line 31, which stylistically imitates the poet's dreamy "sleep," is also the poem's first moment of sonic and rhythmic calm. Here there are no harsh tones or jolts, simply the "coiling" of the string of alliterative "l" sounds from the end of line 30 and down through the end of line 31, and the gentle presence of the symmetrically placed "c" of "coil" and "chrystalline." The portrayal of the passive poet continues as the speaker tells of the "old palaces and towers," which, overgrown with flora and fauna, suggest the subconscious that is buried beneath the conscious mind and able to be accessed through the poet's dreamlike state; the speaker, indeed, says that he saw the palaces and towers through sleepy eyes and that they, even now, induce a swooning state, causing "the sense [to faint] picturing them!" (33-35). Yet this is the stanza's last moment of peaceful recollection, for now the poem acknowledges the Wind's "wakening" power of which it hinted at the beginning of the stanza.

Thou  
 For whose path the Atlantic's level powers  
  
 Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below  
 The sea-blooms and the oozy winds which wear  
 The sapless foliage of the ocean, know  
  
 They voice and suddenly grow grey with fear,  
 And tremble and despoil themselves: O hear! (36-42).

Suddenly the poem has shifted from personal biography to general reflection, as the past tense of before has given way to the present ("cleave," "wear," "know," etc.), and the specific reference to the Mediterranean now becomes a mention of the much larger Atlantic. The only trace of the "level powers" – or smooth sounds and rhythms – of language earlier in the stanza is now the assonance in "sea-blooms" and "oozy."

Otherwise, form physically evinces the awakening power of the wind, as the fourth *terza rima* line-group “cleaves” itself from the third, and the Wind blows a physical “path” in the space between the line groups that has just been created.

But how can enjambment, a device that in stanza two attempted to display the poet’s will to manipulate the physical deployment and effects of his language, now display just the opposite: the Wind’s power over the poet, who is thus “cleaved” by it like the ocean? This change in the role of enjambment occurs because of its new context. The stanza in which the above passage occurs has undergone the tactical risk of fully exploring, both conceptually and stylistically, what it means to be passive before the Wind, and bringing to the surface of the poem the problem of the power-struggle between two spellcasters – the Wind and Shelley – that has hitherto been more obliquely expressed in the verse’s formal features. Once Shelley goes down the road of remembering his passivity to the Wind, this leads to the more general reflection upon the Wind’s “cleaving” power, which culminates in the stanza’s terminal imagery of the foliage “trembling” and “despoiling” itself.

This ode began with the poet’s words, “dead leaves,” “fleeing” his powers as the “enchanter,” but has moved through the stages of the poet’s special demonstration of control over the physical powers of his words (stanza two) and the poet’s imaginative and stylistic reflection upon being passive to the wind (stanza three). But now words-as-leaves, this time “foliage,” initiate the poem’s most radical transition and a new phase by moving from “self-cleaving” earlier to physically “despoiling” themselves in the fourth stanza. Shelley’s choice of the word “despoil” is fascinating here, for the words of stanza

four are indeed on several levels engaging in “despoiling,” or depriving themselves of possessions or property through the use of force.

The poet’s language has stripped itself of its former “possessions” – the “treasured spells,” or power-displaying machinations, of lineation and syntax – and now moves to a simpler, more plaintive stylistic mode and a near-transparent confession of the poetic will’s struggle for ascendancy over the Wind.

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;  
 If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;  
 A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

The impulse of thy strength, only less free  
 Than thou, O Uncountrollable! If even  
 I were as in my boyhood, and could be

The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,  
 As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed  
 Scarce seemed a vision, I would ne’er have striven

As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.  
 Oh! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!  
 I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed  
 One too like thee: tameless, swift, and proud. (43-56)

Gone are the irregular, cast-about repeated addresses to the Wind in stanza one, which both audibly and visually express the speaker’s struggle with its force. Gone are the bold enjambments and syntactical power-plays. What has replaced it, at this late moment, are the stylistic marks of an incantation and supplication in one, as over and over the speaker makes his words a crescendo of kinesthetic imagery through syntactic and exact repetitions: “If I were,” “If I were,” “If even I were”; “Oh! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!;” “I fall . . . I bleed!;” “chained and bowed,” “tameless, and swift, and proud.” The only interruption of these stylistic movements is the cry to the Wind, “O



Uncontrollable!”, but this is not out of sync with the spirit that has caused the movements in the first place. “O Uncontrollable!” in fact, is both a physical centerpiece to the stanza and the ideational centerpiece to the stanza’s confession of the struggle of poetic will which has brought the poem to this point.

The poet sums the operations of material form in this poem in one word, “striven,” and calls himself by personality traits that also describe his poetic style, especially at the height of its self-empowering display in stanza two: “tameless, and swift, and proud.” If only, Shelley confesses, it were as simple as being the wind’s natural object (43-47), or imagining oneself to be stronger than the wind, as in the poetic ambitions of youth (47-51), there would never have been a need to meet formal forces with the Wind in this poem. The “heavy weight of hours,” not accidentally, is mentioned only at the physical “bottom” of this stanza, as if to attest, both in the spatial positioning and the dense tolling pauses of line 56, that the “heavy weight” of the whole poem is pressing down upon this moment. As has been implied all along in this analysis of physical stylistic acts of “despoiling,” Shelley’s fourth stanza is also a massive act of psychic unburdening, a dropping off of the “baggage” of the previous stanzas’ “striving” of the poetic will.

Throughout this discussion, attending to the question of how the “Ode” explores words as a physical action has brought to the surface a larger problem, to which the ode’s last stanza poses a tentative solution: What should be the relationship between the individual poetic will and those forces which are beyond it – in this case, Inspiration, which is figured as the West Wind? That solution, which is a cooperative, mutual relationship between the West Wind and the person of the poet, is arrived at by the

poem's "imagining that which it knows."<sup>54</sup> The poem already "knows" this solution and has only to "imagine" it now, that is, because the concept upon which the solution is based – the poet being able to develop his own "voice" while not being afraid to seek the help from or be the vessel of Inspiration when it strikes – has already appeared in the stanzas leading up to the poem's final moments.

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:  
 What if my leaves are falling like its own!  
 The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,  
 Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,  
 My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe  
 Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!  
 And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth  
 Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!  
 Be through my lips to unawakened Earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,  
 If Winter comes can Spring be far behind? (57-70)

In these lines, the poet still takes the supplicational mood of stanza four: his language, with its driving repeated addresses to the Wind and its regular exclamation points, is clearly marked with inspiration, and he asks that he become an instrument of the Wind's transformational power. And yet crucially the stanza is a careful revision of stanza four, for the speaker clearly invokes a notion of "instrumentality, but not without individuality." Where, as Bloom points out, in stanza four the speaker asks simply to be the passive object of the Wind's power ("Oh! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!"),<sup>55</sup> now he seeks to have his own poetic "voice."

Voice, as I have suggested, is the concept on which the entire poem turns at the end of stanza three, as the foliage beneath the sea and Shelley's words themselves do not begin the act of "despoiling" until they "know [the] voice" of the Wind. It is no less central a concept now, since the various media that the speaker imagines he will become in relation to the Wind ("lyre"; "leaves," or figuratively book leaves; "thoughts"; "incantation of this verse," renamed as "words"; "lips"; and "trumpet of a prophecy") all increase in the immediacy of the communication they enable and grow more and more human, or connected with the idea of speech. The imperatives to the Wind grow bolder and bolder, especially the construction "Be thou me, impetuous one!" which, James Chandler notes, enacts the impetuosity of which it speaks;<sup>56</sup> they also are increasingly focused on the poet's own identity, beginning with the appeal that the wind make the poet merely the carrier of its melody, "thy lyre," but after that centering in on aspects, tools, or powers of the poet himself ("my leaves," "my dead thoughts," "my words," etc.). But aside from these assertions of the poet's individuality, there appear other, less confident proofs of that force which perhaps most defines his humanity – doubt. Consider, for example, the question that begins stanza five, "What if my leaves are falling like [the forest's] own?", which suggests that even amidst poetic language that evinces the optimal combination of a passivity to forces beyond the poet and an active, creative assertion of the poet's individuality, one will still find "doubt, chance, and mutability," as Shelley's "Hymn" put it before.

Nevertheless, this model of a union of the active and the passive is accepted as the best one for the prophetic role of poetry that is imagined at the end of the "Ode to the West Wind," and for the poet's general attitude to how his poems must cooperate with

the larger process of history, or what Shelley calls “the spirit of the age.” Chandler, in his reading of how Shelley’s “Ode” imagines the latter issue, wittily sums such an idea of mutuality: “The Wind makes Shelley make the Wind make Shelley make the Wind.”<sup>57</sup> Indeed, Shelley’s “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” and the “Ode to the West Wind,” though they display different physical poetic styles and strategies, both ask whether the poet can be both the enchanted – a mere vessel of inspiring forces and a recorder of their effects in specialized language – and a more individual voice that, to recall the end of the “Hymn,” “fear[s] itself.” This query about the poet’s relationship with forces that influence his verse is a form of the larger question about the poet’s relationship with humanity that Blake, Keats, and Shelley all contemplate in some form: Can the poet be both an enchanter and a teacher? It only remains to show how *Prometheus Unbound*, in its keen preoccupation with words as power and its special combination of both “enchancing” and “awakening” affective styles, attempts to answer this question affirmatively.

#### IV.

*Prometheus Unbound* is a *tour de force* exploration of the physical powers of words, and one with an ambitious public aim: to serve as a successful counter-charm to the spell or, as Shelley calls it in the “Ode to Liberty,” “the “sleep,” of tyranny which is upon England.<sup>58</sup> Yet to use the term “counter-charm” to describe Shelley’s lyrical drama is not to apply it loosely or to make a merely abstract generalization, as several statements in Shelley’s other writings, writings about him, and in *Prometheus Unbound* itself suggest.

Let us first recall Shelley’s elevation of the drama in *A Defence of Poetry* not only as “poetry in its most perfect and universal form,” but also as an acute form of

magic. This magic, Shelley attests, possesses special powers to dispel the errors that are upon the vision of his immediate adversary in the *Defense*, Thomas Love Peacock, and by extension upon humanity in general:

The Author of the Four Ages of Poetry has prudently omitted to dispute on the effect of the Drama upon life and manners. For, if I know the knight by the device of his shield, I have only to inscribe Philoctetes or Agamemnon or Othello upon mine to put to flight the giant sophisms which have enchanted him, as the mirror of intolerable light, though on the arm of one of the weakest of the Paladins, could blind and scatter whole armies of necromancers and pagans. The connexion of scenic exhibitions with the improvement or corruption of the manners of men, has been universally recognized.<sup>59</sup>

This passage reveals that Shelley holds up the plays of Sophocles and of Shakespeare as great examples of drama, but it also implies Shelley's more personal notion that he is a poet-knight endowed with special powers and that *Prometheus Unbound*, because it is the poet's own supreme example of dramatic work, is itself "the device of [his] shield." This meaning is also suggested, however, by the reference to Shelley's family line in the phrase "the weakest of the Paladins" and corroborated by information about the Shelley line that the poet seems to have conveyed to his friend Thomas Jefferson Hogg. The story relays that Shelley comes from the line of the Paladins and that one of the most famous of these, Sir Guyon de Shelley, exerted special counter-charming capabilities when he blew three conch shells that he kept bound to the inside of his shield at all times. Hogg specifies the legend thus: "When [Sir Guyon] blew the first shell, all giants, however huge, fled before him. When he put the second to his lips, all spells were broken, all enchantments dissolved; and when he made the third conch, the golden one, vocal, the law of God was immediately exalted, and the law of the Devil annulled and abrogated, wherever the potent sound reached."<sup>60</sup> The connection between this legend

about the conch shells and *Prometheus Unbound* is suggested at Act III, Scene iii, when the Spirit of the Hour is charged with proclaiming the new Promethean age by blowing through the shell that Proteus gives to Asia with “a voice to be accomplished.” Thus the potential power of Shelley’s play, or its “voice to be accomplished,” is specifically implied to have the character of a spell.

Yet it is *Prometheus Unbound* itself that most powerfully suggests the poet conceived of it in terms of its verbal magic – specifically, its potential ability to defeat not just the “giant” of tyranny itself but also the ideological “enchantment” of tyranny upon people’s minds, and to exert, if not explicitly the law of God, then the saving “law” or “spells” of Love, Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance that the last lines of the drama name. That Shelley’s lyrical drama is conceived as one large spell is suggested in the careful, almost mathematical symmetry in the drama’s structure and language, which imitates the patterned, formulaic quality that spells traditionally possess. As Reiman and Fraistat note, the drama displays careful structural parallels: Acts I and IV are the outward flanks, each containing a single long scene that has clear divisions (Act I, 1-305, 306-634, and 635-833; Act IV, 1-184, 185-502, 503-78); Acts II and III are sandwiched in between the two outer acts, and they themselves evince additional structural parallels of the character dialogues at II.ii and III.ii, respectively; and, Acts II and III together contain nine scenes, with II.v, or the dialogue between the Voice and Asia, occupying the center scene and thus flanked, respectively, by the remaining four scenes of Act II and the four scenes of Act III.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, exact repetitions of certain lines and phrases within acts and across the drama lend additional structural division and establish important similarities and differences between events and character mentalities. For

example, Prometheus's refrain in his opening speech, "Ah me, alas, pain, pain ever, forever!", is repeated later in Act I, at the point when the Titan declares he can "see more clear" the works of Jupiter (634-38). Even more significantly, it is echoed in Asia's lyric at the end of Act II, Scene v, "My soul is an enchanted boat/Which . . . doth float upon the silver waves of thy sweet singing . . . . It seems to float ever – forever" (72-74, 78), whose lines suggest perceptive clarity attained through a self-surrendering in love. While in a sense it is true that the action of the drama is "woven into" its "abstract structures,"<sup>62</sup> one must emphasize that, from the perspective that Shelley's play is a carefully orchestrated deployment of words as power, these structures *are* the action of the drama. The particular arrangement and inter-relational dynamics of the words and, by extension, the play's scenes and acts, matter just as much and sometimes more than the semantic meaning of the words themselves, as especially emerges in the interchange between the Voice and Asia.

It is natural to read the play in a linear fashion, interpreting later acts as building upon earlier ones; this kind of interpretation, in fact, yields accurate and enlightening results about the play's conceptual and formal significance. How, for example, without linear-minded interpretation, can we see that a new vision of the world cannot be attained without the unification of Prometheus, the poet-figure, with Asia, the figure of Love; how can we see that the language of the Spirits sent to comfort Prometheus at the end of Act I, and the Semichora in Act II, Scene ii, crucially anticipates that of the lyrical interchange at II.v; or, how can we see that the explosive scattering of lines and lyrical voices in Act IV, intended to simulate joy and freedom both sonically and visually, is itself only effective after having come through the rest of the play and experienced its more linear,

less expansive spatial organization? Shelley, after all, exploits the reader's linear way of approaching the text with his spellbinding encouragement of the reader to "keep going": the lyric "Follow, follow!" at II.i.

However, one must also emphasize Shelley's metaphorical suggestions that he sees his drama more three-dimensionally – that he imagines its acts as of a piece, and sits back and "watches" them as composing a kind of sphere. The crust is the outer flanks of Acts I and IV and the inner layers are Acts II and III; within these inner acts, Act II, Scene v serves as the core from which the four-scene groups from Acts II and III radiate in either direction. Shelley suggests precisely such a spherical imagination of the drama in two significant self-reflexive passages. There are the lines in Act II, Scene i where Asia describes Panthea's eyes, in which she is trying to "read" Panthea's dream. Asia says the eyes are "like the deep, blue, boundless Heaven/Contracted to two circles underneath/Their long, fine lashes – dark, far, measureless, --/Orb within orb, and line through line inwoven" (114-17). As critics have confirmed in a general way, this description, namely the last line, may be read as Shelley's figurative characterization of his own text, especially given the pervasive presence of textual and reading motifs throughout the scene in which the passage is located.<sup>63</sup>

Yet this example is not isolated; it is, in fact, reinforced in Act IV with a longer, more complete figurative description of the drama. This comes from the "vision" that Panthea sees through an opening in the wood: "A sphere, which is as many thousand spheres,/Solid as chrystal, yet through all its mass/Flow, as through empty space, music and light:/Ten thousand orbs involving and involved,/Purple and azure, white and green and gold,/Sphere within sphere, and every space between/Peopled with unimaginable



shapes” (238-244). This language only reaffirms *Prometheus Unbound*’s identity as a cosmic vision of what the world could be, if only people had the right tools of perspective and feeling. Such an idea especially emerges in the words, “every space between/Peopled with unimaginable shapes,” which is foreshadowed in Asia’s comment that the *pauses* between Panthea’s words are where her own “forgotten sleep,” or dream, is filled with “shapes” (II.i.141-42). Such statements further prove that the play’s power to engender revolutionary feeling and thought in readers depends upon its material character: not just the physical presence of words themselves but even the spaces between. On this note, it is no wonder that Shelley found the punctuation of his drama so important, particularly in the lyrical passages. Given that the poet’s pointing is primarily elocutionary, or based on breath,<sup>64</sup> its exactness is crucial, since as Act IV tell us “Love, Thought *and* Breath” (my emphasis) are “the powers that quell Death,” as well as lift the flight of the Spirits whose “singing shall build/In the Void’s loose field,/A world for the Spirit of Wisdom to wield . . . [a] work . . . called the Promethean” (153-55, 158).

*Prometheus Unbound* also self-consciously attests to the fact that it is a partnership between the text and the reader that will release its enchanting powers; the play, to recall Fraistat’s description, can seen as a “script,” whose words are only waiting to be “spoken” by external readers.<sup>65</sup> The drama suggests this necessary cooperation between text and reader in Act III, at that moment when Prometheus declares that the one remaining “toil” required for the dawn of a new era of love is for the Spirit of the Hour to take the “mystic shell” that Proteus gave to Asia and blow through it “over the cities of mankind” with “a voice to be accomplished” (III.iii. 65-67, 70 and 76). Embedded within this moment is a complex reflection on the combined agencies and events that will

be required to make Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* the catalyst for actual social change. For the latter to occur, neither the agency of Shelley himself nor the text of *Prometheus Unbound* itself is enough, as the mention that Proteus gave the shell Asia and the phrase "voice to be accomplished" both imply. Proteus in some measure here represents the poet himself, since he was a sea deity who could change himself into different forms, thus fulfilling Keats's idea of the chameleon poet; and, Proteus could predict future events, thus fulfilling Shelley's notion of the poet as prophet. Yet the fact that he gives the shell to Asia suggests that it is the partnership between the poet and the reader that ultimately accomplishes change. The poet's voice, attempting to speak through the play, and the reader's voice, ideally spreading the poet's ideas through his or her own words, combine to create "a voice to be accomplished."<sup>66</sup>

This last phrase, however, is one on which we want to dwell also because it suggests *Prometheus Unbound*'s self-consciousness about its own meaning, style, and effect upon the reader. The play names the "voice" of the future, and figuratively the "voice" of meaning that will be produced from the text and reader working together, as yet "to be accomplished." This assertion by itself implies the play's interpretive challenges: the difficulty of one "voice" of meaning emerging clearly from the text and in this sense being "accomplished" due to the play's contradictions. But the dialogue between Prometheus and Asia at III.iii about the shell also refers in a more specific way to the play's interpretive challenges by addressing the key problem of the agency of transformation – or what Shelley's drama finally imagines as the actual catalyst for revolution or social change. This problem, as we have already seen, is registered in the play's differing descriptions of Demogorgon's identity as of Eternity but also within

history, but its expression in a new form just as the drama figuratively discusses its “voice to be accomplished” is significant. Act III, Scene iii brings up the fact that, on the one hand, the play presents the agency of change as mental or internal: Prometheus’s conversion early in the drama from an attitude of hatred to an attitude of love and forgiveness and his rescension of his curse upon Jupiter. This conversion, as critics have often noted, comes very early in the play, but is built upon by the exploration of love as the power of transformation and joy that the rest of the drama conducts; this exploration occurs especially in Acts II and IV, but also at III.iii, since when Prometheus asks the Spirit of the Hour to blow through Asia’s shell, it emphasizes the human unity and cooperation that in this play defines love. On the other hand, the play suggests that the action that deposes Jupiter in Act III is external: a physical wresting of the tyrant from his throne (though this act is technically unrepresented and only alluded to by the play).

As I will discuss in more detail later, the play does not resolve the contradictions it poses between these internal and external (and pacifist and violent) forms of action in the sense that it explicitly chooses one or the other or explicitly shows how they might work together. Reading the play in terms of its preoccupation with the spell does not resolve such contradictions either; any reading that orients itself toward such solution-making belies the fact that in *Prometheus Unbound*, and, as I will discuss, in another of Shelley’s important social poems, *The Mask of Anarchy*, such contradictions about revolutionary action are simply present, with their heels stubbornly dug into the soil of these texts. An interpretation of the play as spellcasting does unveil, however, that in place of a resolution to his play’s conflicts, Shelley enchants the reader – literally channeling his or her attention toward the idea of love and a set of related physical

sensations at prominent moments in the play. This channeling happens through the several small-scale exploitations of words as physical power that interact within the drama, and that help to convey the meaning it elects to emphasize over and against its contradictions: the human capacities of love, hope, and endurance. As I suggested before, Acts II and IV, and particular lyrical exchanges within these acts, most intensely examine and exploit the physical affective powers of words to perform the dynamics of these values as they are expressed between human beings. Acts I and III attest in other ways to the drama's general preoccupation with words as action or power.

Act I serves the important function of announcing this preoccupation. It lays down, both physically in the text and conceptually in the reader's mind, Prometheus's curse as the negative example of words as affective power; this example will be counterpointed by the more positive examples later in the drama. Prometheus's characterization of his curse upon Jupiter explicitly registers the play's and by extension Shelley's interest in the enchanting effects of language and in particular arrangements of words as spells.

-- The Curse

Once breathed on thee [Jupiter] I would recall. Ye Mountains,  
 Whose many-voiced Echoes, through the mist  
 Of cataracts, flung the thunder of that spell!  
 Ye icy springs, stagnant with wrinkling frost,  
 Which vibrated to hear me, and then crept  
 Shuddering through India! Though serenest Air,  
 Through which the Sun walks burning without beams!  
 And ye swift Whirlwinds, who on poised wings  
 Hung mute and moveless o'er yon hushed abyss,  
 As thunder louder than your own made rock  
 The orb'd world! If then my words had power  
 -- Though I am changed so that aught evil wish  
 Is dead within, although no memory be  
 Of what is hate – let them not lose it now!  
 What was that curse? for ye all heard me speak. (58-73)

Of general relevance here is Prometheus's statement, "If then my words had power . . . let them not lose it now!", which serves symbolically as Shelley's suggestion of his hopes for the revolutionary efficacy of this drama and by extension the *Prometheus Unbound* volume. More locally, this particular statement from Prometheus should be seen as the theme of Act I. For what ensues just after these lines is a host of voices resonating from various natural locations such as the Mountains and the Air, which recall and therefore mimic the effects which Prometheus's curse had upon them, or its "power." Yet this proof does not satisfy Prometheus, as he utters, "I hear a sound of voices – not the voice/Which I gave forth" (112-13) and requests the exact words of the curse, "for I would hear that curse again" (131). Stuart Sperry, along with other critics, has asked why it is so important to Prometheus to have the exact words of his curse recorded: "If Prometheus's recalling of the curse does not represent an act of deliberate self-recognition and repentance [as various pieces of evidence, such as the Titan's basic inability even to recall having cursed Jupiter, would suggest], what are its significance and function in the drama? This question [is] the most difficult in the play . . ."67

Consider, however, how much of the drama reflects and depends upon the physical affective power of recorded words (after all, Shelley's drama is itself a spell intended to counter-charm English tyranny, as suggested by both the passages from the play and the passages from the *Defence* and Hogg). With this in mind, Prometheus's need to have the curse's words laid down is a bit easier to understand. The physical appearance of the words of the curse is the material act that sets Shelley's drama in motion. Various passages in the rest of the play, namely in Acts II and IV, serve as positive, perception-changing spells that implicitly counter-charm both the negative spell

of the curse and possibly the deposal of Jupiter (on which the drama meditates as an act that symbolizes the tyrannical will of the poet). On this latter note, the fact that it is the Phantasm of Jupiter who utters the curse takes on special significance. As critics have pointed out, putting the curse in the Phantasm's mouth is Shelley's way of suggesting that Prometheus was like the tyrant when he uttered those hate-motivated words. But since the material recording of the words in Act I is so important for the new, materially affective spells that are laid down in Acts II and IV, and Shelley is the "crowned power" who literally arranges the dynamics of his drama's language, one might say that Shelley contemplates through the figure of the Phantasm of Jupiter in Act I whether there is something tyrannical or self-absorbed about the poetic will. We have seen that the dynamics of "Ode to the West Wind" evince a "striving" between that will and the force of Inspiration upon the poem; the poem suggests finally that the individual figure of the poet and the forces bearing upon his poetry must cooperate in order for his prophecies and revolutionary ideas to be spread. Similarly, Shelley's lyrical drama features in Act I the poet-figure Prometheus worrying whether his individual language – or his "will" – has power. Furthermore, in Demogorgon's deposing of Jupiter in Act III, Shelley further contemplates whether even the most powerful poetic words ultimately constitute a form of action in the world – whether words used as a physical action still cannot complete the task of overthrowing tyranny. Finally, one must acknowledge that Shelley is the author of the lyrical spells that take place elsewhere in *Prometheus Unbound* and that channel the reader's attention and sensory experience in a certain direction, and thus control the reader's will; such control, in fact, defines spellcasting. In this sense that Shelley's words wield "power" over the reader and exert the poet's "will"

that the reader learn the drama's value of love, his words could be seen as tyrannical. Yet the drama's final dependence on the reader's "awakening" from its poetic spellcasting, and its modeling of antiphonal rather than solitary singing at various points, offsets this aspect of the drama's spellcasting by emphasizing the cooperation between the poet and external forces that the "Ode to the West Wind" also finally extols. This is the sense in which it matters that *Prometheus Unbound* is a drama rather than a lyric, for the drama removes the poet as a subjective presence from the text and features interactions between characters that model the messages the author wants to convey. In Shelley's "lyrical drama," however, the way meaning comes through is tailor-made for the poet's interest in the spell: characters model the dynamics of human love through both content and the operations of physically affective style in their songs.

Though the drama suggests in Act III that physical deposal of tyranny may be necessary for actual change to occur, the key lyrical passages of Acts II and IV to which I have alluded urgently stress the interchange of powerfully affective words between multiple character voices rather than the powerful words and actions of one. They model love as mutual and sympathetic communication through both their ideational meaning and the dynamics of their physically expressive style, such as sound networks based on continuity-in-difference. As with Asia, whose "boat of desire is guided" toward a realm "where the air we breathe is Love," Shelley's desire to emphasize the transforming powers of love in the drama seems part of what dictates not only the writing of Act IV as the climactic closing of the drama, but also the supplementation of Act II in revisions with lyrics that emphasize human love in the above ways. The "voice" that the drama

attempts to “accomplish” is thus the ideal of love, seared into the reader’s consciousness through thematic emphases but also, crucially, spellcasting style.

The drama’s most important example of the model of mutual and sympathetic communication it celebrates is the song-exchange between an obliquely named character, Voice (in the air, singing) and Asia in Act II, Scene V: the famed “Life of Life!” and “My soul is an enchanted boat” lyrics. One cannot overemphasize the extent to which Shelley’s drama turns upon this passage. Perhaps all its forms of significance can be traced to the fact that it is the physical center of Shelley’s play and the fact that Asia’s response to the Voice’s song, the “My soul is an enchanted boat” lyric, was added to the poem along with other key revisions. If the scene containing the “Life of Life!” and “My soul is an enchanted boat” lyrics is the physical and spiritual center of Shelley’s drama, however, then the act containing that scene, Act II, can be seen as the most important one of the drama in the sense that it “schools” the reader in the knowledge and skills that will be required to read the lyrical exchange at the end of the act, and to read the rest of the drama. Through a cooperation of passages that evince what I will call sublime and hypnotic styles, it prepares the reader for the language and rhythms of the interchange between the Voice and Asia, which is an example of the two styles combined.

The passages in Act II that evince a sublime style (preeminently Asia’s opening speech in Act II, Panthea’s description of her dream, and the description of the avalanche that Asia and Panthea see before descending to Demogorgon) present some of the most challenging and stubborn syntax, rhythm, and imagery in the play. These passages feature heavily enjambed language whose syntactical and conceptual meaning is difficult to discern until the reader gets to the key word or syntactical unit that has been delayed.



In this cooperation between physically affective poetic devices such as enjambment and rhythm with more intellectually challenging tools such as syntax and imagery, Shelley's sublime affective style contrasts with Blake's, where intellectual understanding tends to be more completely blocked out, at least at first, by drastic physical verse effects. Sublimity, in the passages from *Jerusalem I* discussed in Chapter Two, is primarily experienced by the reader through the shock of visually blocked language in the midst of an otherwise primarily sonic passage. Furthermore, the incantational repetitions and rhythm of Blake's description of Golgonooza engender less an experience of the sublime than a kind of accelerated experience of the beautiful, characterized preeminently by smoothness rather than roughness, regularity rather than uniformity. Shelley's techniques in the sublime passages of *Prometheus Unbound*, however, force the reader to approach the text as a vehicle for information and as a physical experience at the same time; informational and experiential models of the text that, say, in Macpherson or even in Keats tend to be explored at different moments in the text are here fully explored simultaneously. The passages of sublime style that perform in this way thus represent at the local level a global truth: *Prometheus Unbound* uses the spell of style ultimately in aid of and not in separation from or tension with its content or intellectual arguments.

In contrast to passages of sublime style, hypnotic passages (preeminently the "Follow, follow" and "Down, down" lyrics) are characterized by easy, soothing rhythms and sounds, which tend to absorb the reader's attention and to glide him or her through the verse with regular repetitions. In other words, passages of sublime style encourage active resolve in the reader, with a reward of some degree of clarity at the close of rhythmic or grammatical segments, while passages of hypnotic style encourage the reader

to be passive, more by compulsion than persuasion. Although these two styles are radically disparate in terms of language and rhythm, they are alike in that the ultimate object of each style is “teach a rhythm” to the reader. Not just empty rhythms either, but ones that turn out to be crucially linked to the poem’s intellectual arguments. The values the drama emphasizes, after all, of hope, endurance, and above all, love, as well as the wisdom and virtue that attend these values, are only attained through the careful union of the assertion of the individual will and the giving up of that will: where hope and endurance require active resolve, love is the supreme value that paradoxically demands both a retention and an abandonment of the individual identity.

Some examples of the sublime and hypnotic styles demonstrate their respective methods of “music and persuasion,” as Shelley characterizes Dante’s language.<sup>68</sup> One need only to read the opening words of Act II, spoken by Asia, to experience the act’s first example of sublime style:

From all the blasts of Heaven thou hast descended –  
 Yes, like a spirit, like a thought, which makes  
 Unwonted tears throng to horny eyes  
 And beatings haunt the desolate heart  
 Which should have learnt repose, -- thou hast descended  
 Cradled in tempests; thou dost wake, O Spring! (II, i, 1-6)

The subject of the utterance is delayed until line six, “O Spring,” and it bursts from the rhythmic and conceptual densities that the passage has built up. While we do find repetitions here which gently propel the verse – “thou hast descended”; “like a spirit, like a thought” – they are not regularly placed. Recalling in a milder degree the deliberate sonic and tactile clotting of Keats’s most physically absorptive verse, terminal “d” and “t,” “nt,” or “st” sounds dominate the passage. As in Keats, these slow down the reader’s

progress through the lines, and that rhythmic stalling, coupled with the delay of the very subject of the sentence, creates a stubborn, unyielding effect that requires the reader to push on if he or she wants to collect the sense of the passage. While the breaking burst, “O Spring!” in line six does not present a distinct conceptual lesson, it does clear up the basic thought of Asia’s utterance and emphasize the imagery of spring that is so crucially linked in the drama with the dawning of revolutionary hopes. The passage thus describes this symbolic meaning of Spring and the effect upon the reader of the physical phrase, “O Spring,” when it declares: “thou dost wake.”

Awakening, after all, is what Shelley’s sublime style is all about, as the next example clearly shows in its rhythm, imagery, and language. Asia’s description of the avalanche comes just before the “Down, down” lyric, on whose “sound, [that] whirls around/Down, down!” Asia and Panthea “ride” to the cave of Demogorgon. As if to advertise the cooperation in Shelley’s drama between the sublime style and the hypnotic style and to identify the “Down, down” lyric as an example of the latter, Asia appeals to Panthea just before beginning her description, “Look Sister, ere the [oracular] vapour dim thy brain” (II, iii, 18). While Demogorgon is the “oracular vapour” and does “dim the brain” of Asia by refusing to enlighten her on the exact origin of the world, the “Down, down” lyric must also be considered an “oracular vapour” in the sense that its primary power is sonic and that it propels the reader along like a vapour or gust of air. Yet “as the lightning [draws] the vapour” (66), the avalanche description comes before the “Down, down” song:

Behold it [a wide plane of billowy mist], rolling on  
Under the curdling winds, and islanding  
The peak whereon we stand – midway, around  
Encinctured by the dark and blooming forests,

Dim twilight lawns and stream-illumined caves  
 And wind-inchanted shapes of wandering mist;  
 And far on high the keen sky-cleaving mountains  
 From icy spires of sunlike radiance fling  
 The dawn, as lifted Ocean's dazzling spray  
 From some Atlantic islet scattered up  
 Spangles the wind with lamp-like water drops.  
 The vale is girdled with their walls – a howl  
 Of cataracts from their thaw-cloven ravines  
 Satiates the listening wind, continuous, vast,  
 Awful as silence. – Hark! the rushing snow!  
 The sun-awakened avalanche! whose mass,  
 Thrice sifted by the storm, had gathered there  
 Flake after flake, in Heaven-defying minds  
 As thought by thought is piled, till some great truth  
 Is loosened, and the nations echo round  
 Shaken to their roots, as do the mountains now. (22-42)

As with Asia's speech that initiates Act II, this passage evinces a subtle rhythmic propulsion (the "ing" forms), but its main effect is to slow the reader down and enfold him or her in the densities of language – namely, again, the many forms laden with terminal "d" ("encinctured," "stream-illumined," "wind-inchanted," etc.). Also, the sheer multiplicity of both the "ing" and "d" sounds, combining together, creates so clotted an experience of words as such that it is difficult to visualize the landscape being described. But the passage's dense sounds are not the kinds of empty pleasures that Leavis finds in both Shelley and Tennyson when he argues that in their verse "the medium enjoys itself" with a "voluptuous self-absorption."<sup>69</sup> They are not the basis, either, of the kind of sonic hypnosis that Keats performs in *The Eve of St. Agnes*. These sounds are, more self-consciously, affective simulations of the "gathering" of the snow before the avalanche and, more importantly, of the "piling" of thoughts in the reader's mind before an intellectual breaking through. The form, having "gathered" its sounds and syntax, now bursts forth in the exclamations of lines 36-37, thus simulating the

natural and perceptual avalanche that is described immediately thereafter. The passage's final reinforcement of the natural half of the simile, "as do the mountains now," is Shelley's way of bringing home the affective and imagistic lesson the reader has just experienced: that an intellectual revolution is both desirable and possible through the aid of models put forth in *Prometheus Unbound*.

Through such sublime passages, Shelley thus uses affective style in order to instill more powerfully in the reader's mind the possibility of an intellectual awakening to the importance of endurance, hope, and love, which, the drama suggests, is a crucial means of dispelling tyranny in both the individual and the collective mind. Yet how do passages of hypnotic style come into the picture? As I have already suggested, the absorbing sounds and regular rhythms of these passages teach the reader, affectively, the basic lesson of yielding. By encouraging the reader's surrender to the sensory experience of language, the drama establishes a learned mode of openness that will eventually urge the reader to entertain the more conceptual points of the drama. This union of the sensory and the intellectual is, in fact, described by Panthea when she details her dream of Prometheus:

[Love] from his soft and flowing limbs  
 And passion-parted lips, and keen faint eyes  
 Steamed forth like vaporous fire; an atmosphere  
 Which wrapt me in its all-dissolving power  
 As the warm ether of the morning sun  
 Wraps ere it drinks some cloud of wandering dew . . . .  
 And I was thus absorbed – until it past . . . .  
 My being was condensed, and as the rays  
 Of thought were slowly gathered, I could hear  
 His voice (II, i, 75-78, 82, 86-88)

The gathering of thoughts is associated with the hearing of the poet-figure's voice and by extension the voice of love that is the emphasis of this drama. One key example of a

hypnotic lyric that is designed to carry the reader toward the hearing of that voice is the “Follow, follow” song, which features visually sinewy and sonically propulsive language that Asia characterizes as the “sounding” of the “liquid responses of [Echoes’] aerial tongues” (II, i, 171-72). The most dominant characteristics of the lyric are its hypnotic message to the reader, “follow” (read: “keep moving through the drama”), as well as its repetitions, of words, internal rhyme, and syntax, as found in this passage:

O follow, follow!  
 Through the caverns hollow,  
 As the song floats, thou pursue  
 By the woodland noontide dew,  
 By the forests, lakes and fountains,  
 Through the many-folded mountains,  
 To the rents and gulphs and chasms  
 Where the Earth reposed from spasms (196-203).

Yet the song also tempts the reader that if he or she will but give in to the affective sounds and motions of language, this will potentially mean hearing the “voice unspoken,” which ostensibly is the drama’s key message of meaning waiting to be communicated (191). This encouragement of the reader that a voice unspoken is waiting to be heard is one example of the way the drama idealistically portrays itself as possessing a clear meaning toward which it drives, and which it finally chooses in its stress on love in Act IV and in the lyrics Shelley added to the drama in his revisions – especially Asia’s response to the Voice at II.v.

The other major hypnotic lyric of the Act, “Down, down!” presents a similar set of affective strategies to those of the “Follow, follow” lyric. It offers directional encouragement to the reader, this time “down, down” the page itself, materially, and toward the cave of Demogorgon, in terms of plot. The lyric also features propulsive

repetitions, especially of similes, which suggest that a mysterious, ineffable source of meaning will be reached, as in,

While the sound, whirls around  
 Down, down!  
 As the fawn draws the hound,  
 As the lightning the vapour,  
 As a weak moth the taper;  
 Death, Despair; Love, Sorrow;  
 Time both, to-day, to-morrow;  
 As steel obeys the Spirit of the stone,  
 Down, Down! (II, iii, 63-71).

The lyric's final suggestion of impending magical revelation occurs in the line, "A spell is treasured but for thee alone" (88).

These absorbing lyrics, combined with the passages of sublime style, surely try to lead the reader to hear and comprehend the drama's "voice" of the love theme, which emerges on an ideational level in both Asia's conclusion at the end of the dialogue with Demogorgon (if not the cryptic, unyielding dialogue itself), "Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance, and Change . . . To these/All things are subject but eternal Love" (II, iv, 119-20), and in Act III's description of a new world that is free of tyranny and characterized by the forces of love. Yet the "spell treasured" to which the "Down, down" lyric refers is, most assuredly, the very last passage in the drama, if the reader can but get there: "Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance . . . . These are the spells by which to assume/An empire over disentangled doom" (IV, 562, 568-69). These conceptual "treasured spells," as well as the sonic and visual explosion that is the stylistic "spell" of Act IV, are contrasted in the symmetrical exactness of Shelley's drama with the hate-inspired Promethean curse that, in Act I, the Earth and others "preserve, a treasured spell" (184).<sup>70</sup>

While the sublime and hypnotic passages of Act II refer to later moments and language in the drama in these important ways, their most immediate task is to prepare the reader for the experience of the lyrical exchange that is at the heart of Shelley's drama: the "Life of Life!" and "My soul is an enchanted boat" sequence. Where up to now the sublime and hypnotic styles have been separated into distinct passages, applying their affective powers upon the reader throughout Act II in alternating fashion, Shelley's lyrics in this last scene of the act merge the two styles. In this combination, Shelley behaves as any good teacher would: he takes what the student, in this case the reader, has learned, and brings it to a higher level of complexity. This raising of the bar also operates at the level of character. For where the passages I have examined so far either are not explicitly addressed to any one auditor or, if they are, they are not followed by an extensive reply, the "Life of Life!" and "My soul is an enchanted boat" lyrics feature a fully mutual communication between the characters of the "Voice (in the air, singing)" and Asia.

What is more, Asia's response to the "Life of Life!" lyric, was added to the drama in Shelley's revisions of the fall and winter of 1819 while he was writing Act IV.<sup>71</sup> This addition transforms this crucial point in the drama from being lyrical to dramatic in character. Originally, the Voice's song was uttered in an effectual solitude because there was no respondent, but Asia's newly inserted song surely is a "transforming presence" upon the end of Act II (I.832). The method of teaching the reader that has occurred in the earlier passages in Acts I and II – the imitation or induction, through rhythm and sound, of the mental processes of resolve and awakening, and passivity and openness, respectively – now appears in a scene of ample interaction between characters. Through



melding both sublime moments, which challenge the understanding and demand a keen focusing of attention, and hypnotic moments, which demonstrate a more fluid operation of language, the exchange between the Voice and Asia suggests the kind of relationships – those of mutual awakening and soothing – that might take place in the kind of social world which Shelley’s drama imagines. Furthermore, Shelley’s earlier draft of this scene suggests that Prometheus, not the Voice, was the original character who uttered the “Life of Life!” lyric.<sup>72</sup> To make the speaker a “Voice” loads this exchange with a symbolic meaning that it did not possess before, especially given the emphasis on the theme of “voice” that has hitherto occurred in the drama. Here we have recasted the suggestion in the “Follow, follow” lyric that the reader will be able to hear the “voice unspoken” of the drama’s meaning if he or she will just keep going. For in this interchange, the “Voice” singing serves to represent the voice of Love that Shelley’s drama stresses: before, the Voice hailed an unknown transcendent being, but with the addition of Asia’s response, the Voice now clearly hails Love. The addition of Asia’s response to the “Life of Life!” lyric thus achieves a symbolic union between love and the “voice” of the drama, which is the meaning it foregrounds. This union will be further cemented in the songs between characters in Act IV.

The “Life of Life!” lyric is sung by a speaker who tries to articulate his experience of the personification of Love, Asia. These songs merge a sublime style that tries (by definition, without full clarity or confidence) to characterize that which seemingly cannot be expressed in language, and a hypnotic style, which demonstrates the speaker’s passive acquiescence to the overwhelming effects of Love’s force.

Life of Life! thy lips enkindle  
 With their love the breath between them  
 And thy smiles, before they dwindle  
 Make the cold air fire; then screen them  
 In those looks where whoso gazes  
 Faints, entangled in their mazes.

Child of Light! thy limbs are burning  
 Through the vest which seems to hide them  
 As the radiant lines of morning  
 Through the clouds ere they divide them,  
 And this atmosphere divinest  
 Shrouds thee wheresoe'er thou shinest.

Fair are others; -- none beholds thee  
 But thy voice sounds low and tender  
 Like the fairest – for it folds thee  
 From the sight, that liquid splendour,  
 And all feel, yet see thee never,  
 As I feel now, lost forever!

Lamp of Earth! where'er thou movest  
 Its dim shapes are clad with brightness  
 And the souls of whom thou lovest  
 Walk upon the winds with lightness  
 Till they fail, as I am failing,  
 . . . Dizzy, lost . . . yet unbewailing! (II, v, 48-71)

The exclamatory phrases at the beginning of three of the stanzas are the cornerstone of this attempt both to show allegiance to and adequately describe Love, even though many of their terms (Life, Light, Lamp; Fair, Earth) seem almost interchangeable both conceptually and sonically and they do not allow a clear visualization of Asia. The unclarity of the sublime style exerts its effects not only upon the external reader but also upon the expressive confidence of the speaker himself, generating his collapses into syntactical vagueness in the latter half of the each of the first two stanzas. In stanza one's construction, for example, "And thy smiles before they dwindle/Make the cold air fire; then screen them/In those looks," "them" has no immediately clear referent, but the

following phrases do redeem the syntactical lacuna by describing the reader's sublime experience of being "entangled in the mazes" of this lyric's language.

A textual metaphor that accurately describes the reader's experience again countermands a syntactical sticking point in stanza two: the at first unclear referent of "this atmosphere divinest" (58). The description of the "radiant lines of morning" burning through the clouds "ere they divide them" describes the language's keen beauty, especially in the stanza-opening appellations, "Life of Life!," "Child of Light!," and "Lamp of Earth!," which is impressed upon the reader before the lines of poetry "divide" and further description fades into unclarity. More importantly, "radiant lines of morning" describes the "liquid splendour" of the stanzas' words – a network of sonic and visual likeness – flickering here and there and slipping into and out of each other.<sup>73</sup> In stanza one, for example, "lips," "love," "smiles," and "looks," as well as "enkindle" and "entangled," all display alliterative likenesses in their "l" sounds and their "en" and "l" sounds respectively, as well as visual linkages across both word groups (in the first, the prevalence of "i" and "o," in the second, the similar word length and letter combinations). The material dynamics of the words thus imitate the experience of two bodies and personalities in Love that Panthea describes earlier in the act: "[I] only felt [Prometheus's] presence flow and mingle through my blood/Till it became his life and his grew mine" (II, i, 79-81). Something of the essence of Love, then, "shines" through – even is exactly performed in – this language that inevitably also "shrouds it" (59). These characteristic sonic and visual repetitions of the hypnotic style thus now come also to characterize the sublime style, as the two modes of language lose their identities in each

other like Panthea and Prometheus in Panthea's dream, and like Asia and the Voice, as can be seen in Asia's response to the "Life of Life!" lyric.

This lyric's awareness of what it calls a "failure" to characterize Love clearly comes through most poignantly in stanza three, in the fracturing of the naming attempts in the other three stanzas. The stanza begins with the non-sequitur, "Fair are others – none beholds thee" (60), and confirms, perhaps, the poem's loss of a clear picture of Love through a recourse to sound, "But thy voice sounds low and tender/Like the fairest" (61-62). Yet, as the other passages from Act II I have discussed suggest, to be able to "hear the voice" of Love, or the persuasive voice of the drama, is a beginning for a society based in love and not tyranny. The lyric, in fact, must conclude on this hope of the "sounding" of Love's voice, for the only sounds the speaker can emit are the alliterative and internally rhyming correspondences of his "feel[ing] lost" at the end of stanza three and his "failing/. . . Dizzy, lost . . . yet unbewailing" at the end of stanza four. This state of undoneness is also captured by visual means in the squiggly "z" that Shelley uses in the manuscript as he writes the word "dizzy."<sup>74</sup>

Through this flourish of surrendering style that is complete with repetitions and even the dazed, soporific pointing of ellipses, the speaker suggests his willed hypnosis by Love. And yet, as we saw in stanza one, the melting of word-correspondences in and out of each other, as in the likeness of "feeling lost" and "failing . . . lost," by now has become part of the sublime style, as the material operations of words themselves simulate the union of two in one that is Love. A final example of such material operations is the whistling "winds" of the last stanza's sonically similar words: "wheree'er, ""whom," "walk," and "winds."

Such sounds, as it turns out, are also those upon which Asia, the speaker's respondent, "floats."

My soul is an enchanted Boat  
 Which, like a sleeping swan, doth float  
 Upon the silver waves of thy sweet singing,  
 And thine doth like an Angel sit  
 Beside the helm conducting it  
 Whilst all the winds with melody are ringing.  
 It seems to float ever – forever –  
 Upon that many winding River  
 Between mountains, woods, abysses,  
 A Paradise of wildernesses,  
 Till, like one in slumber bound  
 Borne to the Ocean, I float down, around,  
 Into a sea profound of ever-spreading sound. (72-84)

Asia attests to the hypnotic, soporific properties of the speaker's previous song by declaring her soul to be "enchanted" and comparing herself to a "sleeping swan." Though her repeated mention of "floating" upon the sounds the speaker has sung would suggest that she is completely passive to his song's influence, her own lyric actually exhibits the union of the active, creative will and the passive surrender of oneself to another that, Shelley suggests both in the "Ode" and here in *Prometheus Unbound*, is crucial for the building of a society free of tyranny. For even to sing back to the speaker at all is to retain something of the individual will, as is also suggested in Asia's mention of her desire in the second stanza of her song, "The boat of my desire is guided" (94). Asia's words themselves, furthermore, simultaneously mimic those of the speaker in their sounds, appearance, and dynamics, and bear the particular character of her own voice.

As in the relationship between Shilrich's and Vinvela's words in Macpherson's *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*, Asia's words, "soul," "winds," and "winding" echo or exactly reproduce those the speaker has just uttered in his last stanza, and thus continue

the process of the flickering and melting of visual and sonic likenesses across the verbal field that was, before, just the speaker's, but now has spread to become Asia's as well. Thus again, the material operations of language come to imitate the two-becoming-one that happens in the condition of human love. But even in these continuities, the individuality of both the speaker and of Asia is retained. The speaker's language tends to foreground visual likenesses, as if, paradoxically, to try to secure in the materialities of language the coherent vision that he cannot achieve of the elusive, "shrouded" figure of Love. Yet Asia's song emphasizes sound, both semantically and in the omnipresent physical dynamics of internal rhyme, as if stylistically to reflect the melodious singing she discerns in the speaker's lyric and to enact her own transfixion by sound. The blending together in a single lyrical interchange of these emphases on the visual and sonic likenesses of words, respectively, prognosticates the cooperation of visual and sonic affect executed by Act IV.

The chief way in which Asia's voice retains its own distinctness is hinted in the fact that she calls the "sea of ever-spreading sound" into which the speaker guides her "profound." It is Asia, as it turns out, who demonstrates how sound itself, and the insights that can emerge from a hypnotic experience of sound, can become "profound," for out of her sleepy surrender to the speaker's singing comes her analysis of what the two figures, making music together, have accomplished. As if to demonstrate the "gathering of thoughts" that, Panthea says, follows an experience of sensory absorption in love, Asia conveys what has transpired through the beautiful mutuality – both material and emotional – that the "Life of Life!" and "My soul is an enchanted boat" lyrics record. Asia's voice, in this last stanza of Act II, is granted a special authority, seeming to

represent Shelley's by conveying larger meanings of the drama. The songs at II.v, we are told, have caused a reversal of the effects of time and of age, and an arrival at a fresh "Paradise of vaulted bowers" wherein the world is pure potentiality (104). Allowing the material form of language once more to make the essential point, this time about a new world to come, Asia declares, "[In this Paradise we will] rest, having beheld – somewhat like thee,/Which walk upon the sea, and chaunt melodiously" (109-10). The dash, in its stretching forth and its signification of the as-yet-unexpressed, captures the fact that the drama and by extension actual English society have yet to create the "Promethean" work that is characterized by love and all the positive values and attributes that stem from it. Yet, by attempting to characterize this world through the oblique simile following the dash, Asia suggests that its people will evince the union of the passive and active: they will both "walk upon the sea," ostensibly the "Sea profound of ever-spreading sound" that someone else has sung, as well as "chaunt melodiously" themselves.

The mutual singing represented in the songs "Life of Life!" and "My soul is an enchanted boat" lyrics, the melding of hypnotic and awakening physical styles, and the articulation of a "profound" vision emerging from a "sea of ever-spreading sound," are important both locally and in that they foretell the content and form of Act IV. It is clear that Shelley conceived a wish to represent these events on a cosmic level in the drama's concluding act, but in revision, he inserted lyrical passages that either prefigure or prepare the reader for the affective style and visions of the drama's grand finale, and that themselves emphasize the mutuality and continuity-in-difference of human love. After Act II, Scene v finishes on the glorious last note of Asia's singing, however, the reader comes not to Act IV but to the abrupt change in tone at the beginning of Act III. Jupiter

declares his omnipotence over all else but the rebellious Prometheus, and then Demogorgon unseats the tyrant. These events, as I have suggested, establish the chief contradiction of the play. On the one hand, the drama argues that love is the key to a harmonious and benevolent society, free of tyranny and oppression; the human traits and actions that must attend love, furthermore, are articulated in the play's last lines: Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance (IV.562). This elevation of love as the drama's central value is prosecuted, also, by Prometheus's change of heart from hate to love, as well as the union between Prometheus and the "transforming presence" of Asia, or Love, that is foretold at the end of Act I and symbolically accomplished in the mutual singing between the Voice and Asia at the end of Act II. Love is even held up as supreme in the cryptic dialogue at Act II, Scene iv. Asia seeks the secrets of the universe and Demogorgon refuses her clear answers, declaring that "the deep truth is imageless" as to Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance, and Change; at the same time, in the only firm answer he supplies, Demogorgon asserts that "To these/All things are subject but eternal Love" (119-20). On the other hand, it is the physical overthrow of Jupiter, not love, forgiveness, and endurance, which is the precondition for the new world described by the Spirit of the Hour in Act III:

And behold, thrones were kingless, and men walked  
 One with the other even as spirits do,  
 None fawned, none trampled; hate, disdain or fear,  
 Self-love or self-contempt on human brows  
 No more inscribed (III.iv.131-35).

Tyranny, the drama appears to suggest, must be physically unseated before true change can happen. Love, as well as Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance, may be exhibited by those who are "beautiful idealisms of moral excellence" during the period in



which tyranny is being suffered and following its overthrow. But an application of force, not restraint – an assertion of the will, not an abandonment of the will to the powers or enchantments of another – apparently must take place at some critical moment.

Like the problem of Demogorgon's true identity, this contradiction in the play's argument about what to do in the face of tyranny is not resolved by Shelley, in *Prometheus Unbound* or elsewhere. In fact, as Susan Wolfson has argued, Shelley's *Mask of Anarchy*, written from Italy after the poet hears of the Manchester Massacre, is preoccupied with a similar problem of passivity and activity – specifically, of whether and how writing poetry is an effective substitute for agency in an actual revolution. Wolfson quotes critic Thomas Edwards, “[this is] a public poem with revolutionary intentions having to face and cope with the fact that its generating consciousness, the poet's mind, is in no position to do more than write a poem.” Then she adds: “the *Mask* seem[s] ultimately self-addressed, a masque in the mind of a poet dreaming about being a political orator and projecting this figure as a fantastic epipsyche.”<sup>75</sup> Part of this preoccupation in the *Mask*, one must add, is the conflicting advice about actions and words that the poem gives to the workers who demonstrated in St. Peter's Field. On the one hand, they are told “let deeds [of Spirit, Patience, Gentleness] not words express/Thine exceeding loveliness” (260-61), yet on the other, “Be your strong and simple words/Keen to wound as sharpened swords,/And wide as targes let them be/With their shade to cover ye” (298-301). Within the last lines, furthermore, there is the added contradiction that the words must somehow serve as both offensive and defensive weapons. The questions that underlie such conflicts and drive the *Mask*'s meditations are whether words constitute action and whether they really have power.

The same questions underlie *Prometheus Unbound* and play a role in the drama's general preoccupation with spells, or words used as a physical action – as power – upon a listener or reader. Yet the difference between Shelley's drama and the *Mask* is that the drama's contradictory representations of love and endurance and of physical overthrow are part of its larger rumination upon different forms of action. The play's choice to emphasize the theme of love, and to enchant the reader over and against its contradictions with lyrical spells that teach the dynamics of love, culminates in Act IV. Shelley strategically elects to end the drama with scenes of characters mutually enchanting each other with their songs, and at the same time casting simultaneously hypnotic and awakening stylistic spells on the external reader. In this light, Shelley's addition of key lyrics to Act II may be seen as taking the style of Act IV and strategically "injecting" it into the earlier act. In this act of revision, Shelley thus appears to accept Keats's advice to him about poetry but in his own distinct way. He "loads the rifts" of Act II with the "ore" of poetic spellcasting as a kind of final insurance policy for the impact he hopes to make upon the external reader, using the "Life of Life!" exchange at II.v and the entirety of Act IV to bring home to the reader more exactly what love in practice looks and sounds like. In "To a Skylark" Shelley identifies the poet-prophet's central problem: How does a poet *teach* to his audience the "sweet thoughts" (62), the "skill" of joy (91-100), and "gladness" (101) that, implicitly, will bring the world into new consciousness, or "to sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not" (40)? In the affective style of these parts of *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley supplies the answer.

Act IV culminates the drama by demonstrating in an extraordinary degree its penchant for performing the love it is trying to teach. Building upon the material and

emotional mutuality displayed in the exchange at II.v, Act IV takes predominantly sonic expressions of love and joy and melds them with a more explosive visual expression of the same values. Act IV may also be considered the proper ending Shelley's drama because it self-consciously describes and enacts the relationship between the spell of style that is the Act itself and the generation of revolutionary thought out of such a spell. For these reasons, the last act of *Prometheus Unbound* is hardly an "aria tacked on to a three-act drama," as Rajan suggests,<sup>76</sup> but rather the climax of a play that has spent three acts meditating on or actively exploring how words can become a spell.

The sublime style, up to this point in the drama, has been defined by language that poses a combined physical and intellectual challenge to the reader. Such a challenge can assume one of two different forms in *Prometheus Unbound*. Either language makes the gleaning of concepts from reading more difficult through physically affective devices like syntactical delay and enjambment, as in Asia's speech in Act I that describes a physical avalanche and affectively imitates an avalanche of insight, or an awakening, in the mind. Or, the physical operations of language (whether visual, sonic, or both) teach by performance an abstract and sublime concept, like Love, that is difficult to grasp solely through the operation of reason, as in the Act II, Scene v lyrical exchange. Also, as we have seen, in the songs at II.v, traits of the drama's hypnotic style become incorporated into the sublime style. Forms of repetition and sonic density, for example, that serve incantational or soporific roles in the "Follow, follow" and "Down, down" lyrics of Act II, adopt a new purpose at II.v: they perform the mutuality and continuity-in-difference that characterize human love.

Act IV exhibits the second type of sublime style in a more unbridled form even than in Asia's and the Voice's songs, since the sights of language on the page as well as its sounds are exploited for their performative capabilities.

*[A train of dark Forms and Shadows passes by confusedly, singing.]*

Here, o here!  
 We bear the bier  
 Of the Father of many a cancelled year!  
 Spectres we  
 Of the dead Hours be,  
 We bear Time to his tomb in eternity . . . .

Haste, oh haste!  
 As shades are chased  
 Trembling, by Day, from Heaven's blue waste,  
 We melt away  
 Like dissolving spray  
 From the children of a diviner day,  
 With the lullaby  
 Of winds that die  
 On the bosom of their own harmony! . . . .

Semichorus of Hours I

The voice of the Spirits of Air and of Earth  
 Has drawn back the figured curtain of sleep  
 Which covered our being and darkened our birth  
 In the deep –

A Voice

In the deep?

Semichorus II

Oh, below the deep.

Semichorus I

An hundred ages we had been kept  
 Cradled in visions of hate and care  
 And each one who waked as his brother slept  
 Found the truth –

Semichorus II

Worse than his visions were!

Semichorus I

We have heard the lute of Hope in sleep,  
 We have known the voice of Love in dreams,  
 We have felt the wand of Power, and leap –

Semichorus II

As the billows leap in the morning beams! (9-14, 21-29, 58-68).

As these voices report, the world is now imagined as waking from the “sleep” of “hate and care,” or political and psychological tyranny, which has been upon it. These lines visually and kinetically perform both joy and the mutuality and cooperation that defines human love, as parts of sentences, “billows,” visually “leap” to finish one another. The latter action, moreover, exhibits a special kind of harmonic union between physical and conceptual capacities of language that has not been seen in the drama before. Earlier, in passages of hypnotic style, the physical effects of words tend to undermine or even replace conceptual sense; in passages of sublime style, the gleaming conceptual sense is also frustrated, but usually by devices like syntactical delay or enjambment or simply the difficulty of describing a transcendent object, as in the “Life of Life!” lyric. Globally, the exchange at II.v does use sonic networks to model traits of a concept, human love, such as continuity-in-difference. But locally, these songs, together with the sublime and hypnotic passages that I have discussed, establish a tension between the word as physical artifact or effect and the word as concept. The above passage from Act IV, and others in the act, work to erase this tension.

Furthermore, the above passage features the dense repetition, networks of internal rhyme, and rhythmic propulsion of the drama's hypnotic lyrics, but the features are pressed to sublime ends, performing the drama's human values in cooperation with the spatial bounding of the lines on the page. As if to summarize the process of the drama that has led to Act IV, in lines 65-67 Semichorus I describes the "lute of Hope," which was metaphorically played in the "Follow, follow" and "Down, down" lyrics because they provide directional encouragement to the reader to keep moving through the drama. The Semichorus also speaks of the "voice of Love" that we have seen performed in the "Life of Life!" and "My soul is an enchanted boat" exchange and in Act IV, and of the "Power" that is exhibited in and felt as one experiences the "leaping" of Act IV's lines.

Shelley's Act IV is even more self-reflexive some lines later when the Chorus of Spirits and Hours sings:

Then weave the web of the mystic measure;  
From the depths of the sky and the ends of the Earth  
Come, swift Spirits of might and of pleasure,  
Fill the dance and the music of mirth,  
As the waves of a thousand streams rush by  
To an Ocean of splendour and harmony. (129-34)

Here the language of this act describes its own operations with remarkable exactness. It refers only to the "weaving" in and out of lines that is the visual map and the readerly experience of Act IV, but also its melding of sublime style ("might") and hypnotic style ("pleasure"). Finally, this passage is just one of several in Act IV that speaks self-consciously of its yoking of affective sight and sound: "splendour" suggests figuratively the text's visual qualities while "harmony" suggests the sonic.

Perhaps the most important self-reflexive passage in Act IV, however, is one that also provides strong evidence for Fraistat's argument that the lyrics Shelley added to Act II in the fall of 1819 (in this case, Asia's song at II.v) derive stylistically from Act IV. In this passage, Panthea declares to Ione: "But see, where through two openings in the forest . . . . Two visions of strange radiance float upon the Ocean-like enchantment of strong sound,/Which flows intenser, keener, deeper yet" (194, 202-04). This description of visions floating upon sound – or, to put it differently, of insight emerging from enchantment – remarkably resembles the moment of Asia's song where she describes the Voice's "Life of Life!" lyric as a "Sea *profound* of ever-spreading sound" (II.v.84) (my emphasis), and then describes the wondrous reversal of time that has been accomplished through the mutual singing between her and the Voice. Panthea's declaration to Ione describes the drama's own operations because the events of the rest of Act IV feature profound insight emerging from or occurring through enchantment. The central instance of this process is the long duet between the Earth and Moon that occurs in the heart of the act. To introduce this duet, however, Panthea describes the two visions that she sees "floating" on the enchanting sounds that have just been sung by the Spirits and Semichori; these visions themselves contain several self-reflexive characterizations of the union of mutual visionary perception and spellcasting song that the duet between Earth and Moon exemplifies and that Act IV generally seeks. Panthea's first vision of the Moon in her chariot describes the vehicle's "guiding power [which] directs the chariot's prow/Over its wheeled clouds, which as they roll . . . wake sounds/Sweet as a singing rain of silver dew." It thus foretells the awakening of a song from the Earth that emerges from the Moon's singing during the duet. The centerpiece of Panthea's other vision –

that of the Earth – is the description quoted earlier in this chapter of a sphere, containing many other spheres that in their rotation “[kindle] with mingled sounds, and many tones/Intelligible words and music wild” (251-52). This second vision provides yet another characterization of the generation of visionary perception and conceptual sense (“intelligible words”) from sonic affect (“mingled sounds,” “many tones,” “music wild”).

As Panthea’s descriptions of her visions foretell, such coming of sense out of sound appears in this lyric sung by the Moon to the Earth. Where in earlier lyrics conceptual sense was sometimes held in a state of tension with sonic or rhythmic intensity, this song features their cooperation:

The Snow upon my lifeless mountains  
Is loosened into living fountains,  
My solid Oceans flow and sing and shine:  
A Spirit from my heart bursts forth,  
It clothes with unexpected birth  
My cold bare bosom – oh! it must be thine  
On mine, on mine!

Here the repetitions of the hypnotic style are taken to ecstatic heights rather than to soporific lows, featuring both repetitions of exact words (“mine”) and of parts of speech (the listed verbs, “flow and sing and shine”). Such singing literally does “kindle intelligible words” and visions “profound,” because the Earth responds with a lengthy description of the new mankind in a Promethean world, who is “a Sea reflecting Love” and “one harmonious Soul of many a soul” (384, 400). This pattern of densely sonic and rhythmic hymns yielding visionary perceptions continues after the duet between the Earth and Moon in the response of those who have listened to it, as after the duet’s last exchange at 450-502, Panthea declares: “I rise as from a bath of sparkling water,/A bath of azure light, among dark rocks,/Out of the stream of sound” (502-04).



The vision of the future to which Panthea rises is the question upon which *Prometheus Unbound*, and its preoccupation with words as power, finally depends. What she rises to, immediately, is the sight of “a mighty Power”: Demogorgon, who has come to deliver the drama’s final words. These words, however, are preceded by a series of exchanges where Demogorgon addresses various parts of the cosmos and they respond ecstatically, as in the Earth’s reply, “I hear – I am as a drop of dew that dies!” and the Moon’s, “I hear – I am a leaf shaken by thee!” (523, 528). The key moment in this series, however, is the one in which Demogorgon addresses Man, saying “Man, who wert once a despot and a slave, -- /A dupe and a deceiver, -- a Decay,/A Traveller from the cradle to the grave/Through the dim night of this immortal day” (549-553). Yet of all the parts of the cosmos Demogorgon addresses, Man is the only one who does not clearly and individually answer. Instead, Demogorgon’s address is answered by “All,” or the entire cast of the cosmos, who reply to him, “Speak – thy strong words may never pass away” (553).

This line possesses a crucial importance given its occurrence at the end of a drama that is so preoccupied with how words can be deployed as power and action, and given the fact that Demogorgon, just before beginning his exchange with the elements of the cosmos, is identified by Ione as “a sense of words upon [her] ear” and by Panthea as “a universal sound like words.” Line 553 corroborates these meditations on Demogorgon as a linguistic identity by identifying Demogorgon with his own “strong words.” The idea of Demogorgon being defined now as words, or as some form of communication (“a universal sound like words”), adds new complication to the play at this late moment, given that one of the central interpretive problems all along has been Demogorgon’s

identity. But bearing in mind the drama's symmetrical structure as a larger spell that enacts and meditates on smaller spells within itself, one can see Demogorgon as yet another means in the play through which Shelley reflects on his own identity as a poet and the power or effectiveness of poetic words. The drama's closing meditation on Demogorgon's verbal identity, that is, symmetrically matches Act I's extensive rumination on Prometheus's own identity, as a poet figure, relative to his words in the form of the curse. Also, as Rajan suggests, it is difficult not to see Demogorgon here as representing a part of Prometheus's character, given that the other central characters – Asia and Jupiter – are conceived as forces within Prometheus that must be embraced or overcome (Love and the tyrannical will, respectively).<sup>77</sup> Yet Demogorgon's implicit identity as his own "strong words" at the play's end is not one that is up for acceptance or rejection, as are Prometheus's tyrannical curse and the proposition of love. This equation of the character and his words is more Shelley's way of considering, at this significant last moment of the drama, whether he and his vision are summed up in the words on the page and whether those words have permanence. These implicit meditations resemble Blake's in *Jerusalem*, although what Shelley considers in a certain moment after more assuredly employing words as physical power across *Prometheus Unbound*, Blake more obsessively considers throughout the stylistic plot of his poem. Even if Demogorgon is conceived as something that is external to Prometheus as poet-figure – as Eternity, or as history – one can see that Shelley is using this character still to consider the problem of whether revolution comes from a transcendental source, from the agencies and periods of history, or from the words that poets write and readers experience.

Yet reflecting its action all along of choosing to emphasize love and its attending values, and of placing this emphasis by enchanting the reader through the spell of style, the drama closes in an idealistic hailing of the power of words. Holding aside the issue of a physical deposal of tyranny that the play has suggested may be the lynchpin for accomplishing change and that Demogorgon himself executed in Act III, Demogorgon's speech suggests that poetic words can indeed generate revolution.

Like the whole of Shelley's drama, the last three stanzas are made up of words that both perform and ruminate on poetry as a spell.

Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance,  
 These are the seals of that most firm assurance  
 Which bars the pit over Destruction's strength;  
 And if, with infirm hand, Eternity,  
 Mother of many acts and hours, should free  
 The serpent that would clasp her with its length, --  
 These are the spells by which to reassume  
 An empire o'er the disentangled Doom.

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;  
 To forgive wrongs darker than Death or Night;  
 To defy Power which seems Omnipotent;  
 To love, and bear; to hope, till Hope creates  
 From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;  
 Neither to change nor falter nor repent:  
 This, like thy glory Titan! is to be  
 Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;  
 This is alone Life, Joy, Empire and Victory. (562-78)

Here, the form of Demogorgon's words serves as a kind of textual mold, which will act as a spell by physically protecting, or preserving for future readers, some "seals" and "spells" against tyranny that these lines name. Also, these lines are presented as a spell that will protect the more local spells that are "cast" inside the "mold" of Shelley's drama – all the songs I have discussed – as well as the larger counter-charm against tyranny that is *Prometheus Unbound* as a whole.

Because these final words try both to perform and to mandate permanence and lasting value for the drama's words, however, they are not spell-like in the same sense as the sinewy hypnotic lyrics or the leaping "billows" of lines elsewhere in *Prometheus Unbound*. The rhyme scheme in all three of the drama's last stanzas (aa,b,cc,b,ee) layers solid couplets together with single lines, which act like mortar. Ample stanza length, compared to shorter stanzas elsewhere in Act IV, further suggests strength or solidity, as does the comparatively boxy shape of the stanzas. Finally, infinitives, timeless verb forms, appear in heavy concentration in the last stanza, while the string of capitalized virtues, which are called "spells" or "seals" against tyranny if it arises again, themselves "seal" off the last two stanzas of the drama by occurring at their beginning and ending limits (lines 562 and 578). This kind of spellcasting – literally, casting a mold out of words that act as a spell – brings this chapter full circle by recalling the speaker's attempts in the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" to stand the material solidities of form against the threatening evanescence of the Spirit's comforts, and it recalls Blake's association in *Jerusalem* of word walls with strength and longevity for the poet's language.

Yet what was private spellcasting in Shelley's "Hymn" takes on new meaning in *Prometheus Unbound*: the spell of style does not travel from the personal quarters of the lyric into the more public genre of the drama without acquiring a new significance. As we have seen throughout this study, poets write spells for their own private purposes: calling the Spirit or becoming the nightingale. They write spells for purposes that hover uncertainly between the realms of the private and the public: bringing a personal vision of a new and better city into the reader's imagination and understanding, as in *Jerusalem*.

Or, perhaps with a less definite purpose than these in mind, poets simply explore the difference and the relationship between words deployed as physical power and words used as vehicles of information, as in many of the texts discussed in Chapter One. Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, though, calls itself a "lyrical drama," and as such it crystallizes the final implications of deploying physically affective style in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Britain. This generic appellation asks nothing less than that a stylistic strategy that Shelley himself explores privately, in the confines of a lyric, will now be able to accomplish his goals in the drama, which is more public or social than the lyric both in a symbolic sense, since it is based not on solitary singing but on dialogue between characters, and in a more practical sense, since dramas are often performed onstage.

Songs such as the "Life of Life!" lyric, which before were solitary and without answer, take on a weighty symbolic significance when Shelley adds an answering voice, in this case in the form of Asia's response: now spell is answered by spell, and mutual enchantments inspired by Love become the model for social relations. This is the model, created to teach the external audience by example, but the uncertainty comes when the poet has to imagine how that audience will actually respond. Hence, when Demogorgon calls to Man, who becomes a figure for Shelley's audience on analogy to the poet's mandate that the West Wind "scatter [his] words among mankind," that audience does not provide a distinct answer. Instead, the play ends by moving into the realm of idealism: the entire cosmos cries out for Demogorgon to speak words that *may* never pass away. *May*. The word is simultaneously a mandate – a single word deployed as spell – that Shelley's drama's closing stanzas and whole self will live on and inspire

social change, as well as an uncertain speculation about whether words can really have such power.

The problem of how the audience will respond – of what kind of social role or ultimate value poetry will have if it pursues an experiential model of the text – is at the heart of the poems by Blake, Keats, and Shelley that explore and exploit the physical powers of words, and it drives the way these poets metacritically evaluate their own procedures. Of these three Romantic poets, Shelley is the one who answers most idealistically that poetry as enchantment can serve the most effective of social roles: teaching its audience love, mutuality, and continuity-in-difference through its performance of these values by way of affective style, and thus counter-charming the spells of tyranny that have fallen and may fall again upon England. The spell of style will meet with the evaluations of a new and different age some three to four decades later, when the Victorian watchdogs of poetry find the Spasmodics and A.C. Swinburne in their midst.

## Notes

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### Introduction

<sup>1</sup> Line 365, "An Essay on Criticism," *Pope: Complete Poetical Works*, Ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 75.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Johnson, "Dryden," *The Lives of the Poets* (1779).

<sup>3</sup> *William Wordsworth; Selected Prose*, Ed. John O Hayden (New York: Penguin, 1998), 296.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 294-95.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>9</sup> Peter T. Murphy also draws attention to Wordsworth's uncertainty about how the "charm" of meter plays into the ambiguous "complex end" of the poet, arguing that "casting a spell over readers, charming them, is very close to what Wordsworth seems to want in many parts of the Preface" but postulating "Wordsworth's incapacity to control his argument concerning the actual mechanism of the charm of verse." Murphy suggests that what bothers Wordsworth in all his arguments concerning meter is that they "all depend upon a mysterious principle of action which Wordsworth cannot quite capture. [The poet] desires the control of mechanism, but each explanation finds only some power that can only be asserted." See *Poetry as an Occupation and an Art in Britain, 1760-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 185-86. I agree with Murphy about Wordsworth's uncertainty about how the "charm" of meter operates upon the reader. But given the context of Wordsworth's repetitive return to the subject of the autonomy of meter in the Preface, I contend that Wordsworth is not as embracing as Murphy suggests about linguistic "spellcasting," but rather anxious about the potentially autonomous power of meter relative to any intellectual and emotional "content" in poetry.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

<sup>11</sup> This argument is made by G.J. Barker-Benfield in *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* as well as by other critics of sensibility, all of whom will be discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>12</sup> "Sensibility: A Poetical Epistle to the Hon. Mrs Boscawen," *Romanticism: An Anthology*, Ed. Duncan Wu (London: Blackwell, 1998), 29.

<sup>13</sup> John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

<sup>14</sup> Uvedale Price, *On the Picturesque*, Ed. Sir Thomas Dick Lauder (London 1842), 114-15.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>16</sup> Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 255-57.

<sup>17</sup> See especially John Barrell's discussion of Clare's natural descriptions in *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place*, as well as Hugh Houghton's "Progress and Rhyme: 'The Nightingale's Nest' and Romantic Poetry" and Douglas Chambers's "'A love for every simple weed': Clare, botany, and the poetic language of lost Eden," both in *John Clare in Context*, Eds. Hugh Houghton, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 51-86 and 238-58, respectively.

<sup>18</sup> These questions of perspective and the role of the poet's personal voice relative to the presentation of natural detail are also addressed by William Galperin in *The Return of the Visible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). Galperin focuses on the Romantic rejection or marginalization of the visible, specifically that "the 'I' demonstrably supplants the eye as the prime agent of perception in romantic aesthetics . . . [but, at the same time that] "[t]he very marginality of the visible in romantic writing is what ensures its centrality" (31). Galperin shows how the latter conflicts play out at the levels of the idea and of narrative voice and perspective in Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb, Hazlitt, and Byron. By contrast, I address the visual, as well as the sonic and the tactile, but as they are carried out in physically affective style. In focusing particularly on Blake, Keats, and Shelley in individual chapters, I also address poets whom Galperin largely does not treat, and who each, because they interpenetrate visual affective techniques with sonic or tactile ones in complex and sometimes conflicted ways, complicate the picture of how Romantic poets engage the visual.

<sup>19</sup> Neil McKendrick, "The Consumer Revolution of Eighteenth-Century England," *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England*, Eds. Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 9-33.

<sup>20</sup> Gillen D'Arcy Wood, *The Shock of the Real: Romanticism and Visual Culture: 1760-1860* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> Roland Barthes, qtd. in Wood (2).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Altick also shows how the presentation of art and cultural artifacts in museums, in our modern sense of the "high art" exhibit, was not fully disentwined from more popular, sensationalized exhibitions until the second half of the nineteenth century. See *The Shows of London* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1978).

<sup>24</sup> Wood, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Recent critics have suggested, too, that the question of poetry's relation to mass culture is particularly apparent in Keats, asserting, for example, the poet's economic motives in writing the Great Odes and particularly in focusing on the Grecian Urn, which, like other classical cultural objects increasingly on display for mass audiences, was an object of curiosity and spectacle in early nineteenth-century England. See Elizabeth Jones, "Writing for the Market: Keats's Odes as Commodities," *Studies in Romanticism* 34 (Fall 1995), 343-64. Orrin Wang, in an essay discussed below, has also discussed the relationship between *Lamia* and sensationalized visual culture.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. Perhaps the exclusion of Blake, Keats, and Shelley from Wood's book implies that they do not share such a negative stance toward visual culture in the first place, although Orrin N.C. Wang suggests the tension between sensual immediacy and abstraction in the visual descriptive techniques of Keats's *Lamia*. Wang discusses the latter poem in terms of its relation to the pre-cinema, arguing that *Lamia* reflects "how visuality becomes the preeminent recourse for negotiating between sensation and its abstraction in modernity." See "Coming Attractions: *Lamia* and Cinematic Sensation," *Studies in Romanticism* 42:4, (Winter 2003), 461-501.



<sup>27</sup> See *The Look of It: A Theory of Visual Form in English Poetry* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1993) and *Silence and Sound: Theories of Poetic Form from the Eighteenth Century* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992).

<sup>28</sup> See *Fair and varied forms: visual textuality in medieval manuscripts* (New York: Routledge, 2002). On Herbert, Randall McLeod takes a textual-studies perspective in “Where angels fear to read,” Joseph Summer takes a more thematic approach in “The Poem as Hieroglyph,” while Stanley Fish, as will be discussed more below, studies the affective operations of Herbert’s physical poetic forms. See, respectively, “Where angels fear to read,” *Ma(r)king the Text: The presentation of meaning on the literary page*, Joe Bray, et al., eds. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 144-192, and “The Poem as Hieroglyph,” *George Herbert: His Religion and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954).

<sup>29</sup> See *Black Riders: The Visual Languages of Modernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). For treatments of the subject of language poetry, see George Hartley, *Textual Politics and the Language Poets* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) and Linda Reinfield, *Language Poetry: Writing as Rescue* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).

<sup>30</sup> G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Ann C. Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Revolution in the 1790s* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

<sup>31</sup> Jerome McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 33.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>34</sup> See “‘Pre-romanticism’ and the ends of eighteenth-century poetry,” *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 271-72

<sup>35</sup> See *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, Ed. Stuart Curran (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), xix, and *Early Romantics: Perspectives in British Poetry from Pope to Wordsworth*, Ed. Thomas Woodman (London: Macmillan, 1998).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> This notwithstanding Robert Griffin’s book arguing that Pope’s influence upon Wordsworth was more extensive than has been realized. See *Wordsworth’s Pope* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>38</sup> To cite only a few major directions in the critical exploration of Blake’s material exploitations of word and image: W.J.T. Mitchell reads the interrelation of word and image in *Blake’s Composite Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Morris Eaves’s *William Blake’s Theory of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) argues for a coherent set of principles in Blake’s work in text and image and shows how they contest dominant theories of art in Blake’s era, such as that of Sir Joshua Reynolds; Joseph Viscomi studies the larger engagement of Blake’s illuminated work with the idea of the book in *Blake and the Idea of the Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), and offers an array of essays on Blake’s illuminated techniques; Vincent DeLuca argues for a coherent sublime style in Blake’s prophetic works in *Words of Eternity: William Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); and Jerome McGann, though approaching Blake’s work initially from a

bibliographical standpoint, shows how the material conditions and forms of Blake's illuminated texts illustrate and argue a form of truth that is finally non-referential: the "reference-level" of the text is therefore not to some 'world', whether known, 'real', or even imagined. It is not 'to' anything at all. Blake's poetry rather looks 'towards', calls out 'to', reciprocal forms of activity – acts which are 'unexampled' in the previous experience of the authors of those acts, 'Blake's' 'audience.'" See *Towards a Literature of Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 31.

<sup>39</sup> Pope: *Complete Poetical Works*, Ed. Pat Rogers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

<sup>40</sup> Mary C. Olson, *Fair and Varied Forms: Visual Textuality in Medieval Manuscripts* (London: Routledge, 2003), 77-78.

<sup>41</sup> Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 207-15.

<sup>42</sup> William Shakespeare, Sonnet 116, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Volume I, 6<sup>th</sup> Ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), 818.

<sup>43</sup> Vincent Caretta, "Images Reflect from Art to Art": Alexander Pope's Collected Works of 1717," *Poems in Their Place: The Intertextuality and Order of Poetic Collections*, Ed. Neil Fraistat (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 195-233.

<sup>44</sup> William Wordsworth, "The Idiot Boy," *Romanticism: An Anthology*, Ed. Duncan Wu (London: Blackwell, 2000), 246.

<sup>45</sup> *English Romantic Writers*, Ed. David Perkins (Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1995), 474.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 475.

<sup>47</sup> Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan, "The Irish Harp: Fragment I," *Romanticism: An Anthology*, Ed. Duncan Wu (London: Blackwell, 2000), 593-95.

<sup>48</sup> Perkins, 208.

<sup>49</sup> Among poets who experiment with sound or rhythm in service to rather than hindrance of narrative, Robert Southey also deserves mention, particularly for his attempted metrical innovations in such poems as *Thalaba the Destroyer*. Rather than adopt a stanza like the Spenserian, with its set format of rhyme and rhythm, Southey writes the poem in rhymeless, irregular stanzas. As Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch notes, this allows Southey flexibility, such as the free use of parallel syntax like that in Macpherson's Ossianic poems. Southey's comment, however, that in matters of rhythm and rhyme one should take "mere convenience for [a] guide, except when the subject brings with it . . . its own measure," illustrates the extent to which he thought the physical aspects of verse should accord with conceptual sense (the effect opposite of what occurs in Macpherson, even though Southey modeled some of his techniques on Macpherson's). See Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch, *Robert Southey* (Boston: Twayne, 1977), 85-86. Southey also uses lengthy footnotes, as do several other poets of this period whom I will discuss in Chapter One, although Southey's setting for the notes is his epic poems. The narrative mode of the epic makes it an environment less conducive to physically affective language, which occurs in the text proper for several poets I discuss in Chapter One and is interrupted by their regular use of footnotes. Addressing the length and historical detail of Southey's notes, Carol Bolton suggests that epic works such as *Thalaba the Destroyer* seem to be trying to combine the genres of poetry and history into a single text, and make it appear as if Southey is devising "a method of writing his poems to fit his footnotes." See "Thalaba the Destroyer: Southey's National 'Romance,'" *Romanticism on the Net* 32-33 (November 2003-February 2004), 32-33.

<sup>50</sup> Susan Wolfson, *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 2.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

## Chapter One: Explorations in Textual Physicality, 1750-1850

<sup>1</sup> Darwin is taken up in part of a chapter from McGann's *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Macpherson's use of names, which are exploited largely for their sonic effects but sometimes "informationalized" through footnotes telling their conceptual meaning, is one complexity of the poet's physically affective style that McGann does not discuss in his brief reading of Macpherson's sonic networks in *The Poetics of Sensibility*. As to Thomson, see my discussion below of Cohen's and Adams's treatments of the poet's language.

<sup>3</sup> Under the category of physically affective description, John Clare is also a relevant author, but one whose language in this regard has already received strong discussions elsewhere. See especially John Barrell's discussion of Clare's natural descriptions in *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place*, as well as Hugh Houghton's "Progress and Rhyme: 'The Nightingale's Nest' and Romantic Poetry" and Douglas Chambers's "'A love for every simple weed': Clare, botany, and the poetic language of lost Eden," both in *John Clare in Context*, Eds. Hugh Houghton, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 51-86 and 238-58, respectively.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Criticism," l. 318. From *Pope: Complete Poetical Works*, Ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 73.

<sup>5</sup> This association of the sense, or intellectual meaning, of two words through a subtle sonic link shows one of the two chief ways in which Pope utilizes the physical properties of words. Percy Adams, in his book on sonic technique in eighteenth-century poetry, comments on the general technique of using sound to corroborate sense in poetry, and then uses Pope for several of his examples: "rhymes can be used to emphasize serious similarities or dissimilarities, to effect ironies by association, to induce smiles or strengthen impressions, in short to affect the reader's cognition whether consciously or unconsciously." See *Graces of Harmony: Alliteration, Assonance, and Consonance in Eighteenth-Century British Poetry* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977), 28. The second major way in which Pope unites sound and sense is to make the rhythm of the line agree with the subject the line discusses. Pope summarizes this technique in "An Essay on Criticism," after critiquing those poets who explore rhythmic patterns for their own sake and not in aid of conceptual meaning: "[t]he sound must seem an echo to the sense" (365).

<sup>6</sup> Richard Bradford, *A Linguistic History of English Poetry* (London: Routledge, 1993), 71.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The Vanity of Human Wishes, The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse*, Ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 315-16.

<sup>8</sup> Eric Rothstein also makes note of this distinction. See *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Poetry, 1660-1780* (London: Routledge, 1981).

<sup>9</sup> Jerome McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 6.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa or The History of a Young Lady*, Ed. Angus Ross (New York: Penguin, 1985), 67. All quotations from Richardson's novel come from this edition.

<sup>11</sup> We can assume the intentionality of the physically affective features of the novel since Richardson had control over the printing of *Clarissa* – indeed, obsessed over its most minute features and ceaselessly considered how to revise his text.

<sup>12</sup> In this study, where a transcription adequately captures the material features of the text I am discussing, I have provided one. This is the case with Papers I and II from *Clarissa*. In all other cases, I have provided a photocopy of the page(s) of text I am addressing.

<sup>13</sup> *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Heloise*, The Collected Writings of Rousseau, Vol. 6, Trans. and annot. by Philip Stewart and Jean Vache (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997), 77. All quotations from Rousseau's novel come from this edition, which follows the Pleiade text of the novel presented by Henri Coulet in 1961. This standard reference edition of *Julie* preserves Rousseau's punctuation in the first edition of the novel, which was the only one he declared "valid," as well as his sometimes erratic spellings. Thus we can assume the intentionality of the ellipses in the passages I take up.

<sup>14</sup> Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, Ed. Ian Watt (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 168. This edition is based on the first "London" edition of the novel, which is authoritative on the matters of punctuation, italics, and other physical features that I discuss because Sterne seems to have overseen its printing (509).

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Gray, "The Progress of Poesy," *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse*, Ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 358-61. All quotations from Gray's poetry come from this edition.

<sup>16</sup> Eli Mandel, "Theories of Voice in Eighteenth-Century Poetry: Thomas Gray and Christopher Smart," *Fearful Joy: Papers from the Thomas Gray Bicentenary Conference at Carleton University* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974), 112.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* defines a "rhapsode" as someone who, in early Greece, selected and "stitched together" his own poetry or that of others. "Rhapsode," in Greek, literally means "one who stitches songs." See *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, Eds. Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 1045.

<sup>19</sup> John Ellis, "Sarah Hazard's Love Letter," *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse*, Ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 412-14. Lonsdale's edition bases its text upon that published in the *Chester Miscellany* (1750).

<sup>20</sup> Stuart Curran, "Note on the Text," Introduction, *The Poems of Charlotte Smith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), xxviii.

<sup>21</sup> Jennifer Keith acknowledges some of the physical challenges of Chatterton's poetry in her brief treatment of the poet in a larger look at late eighteenth-century poetry. She specifically examines a passage from *Goddwyn*, which was written around the same time as "An Excelente Balade of Charitie." Keith attests that Chatterton's language "reveals itself as matter with an obstructing consistency: language is no longer the dress of thought, as the Augustans saw it, but a quasi-opaque body." Yet Keith is concerned less with closely examining the dynamic between Chatterton's language and the reader, and more with making the larger point that the "isolated and isolating" quality of Chatterton's language unites him with other late eighteenth century poets. These writers, according to Keith, all felt a loss of "social, poetic and metaphysical comforts" and a clear audience community with a shared poetic vocabulary. See "Pre-Romanticism and the ends of eighteenth-century poetry," *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, Ed. John Sitter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 271-90, especially 272 and 279.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Chatterton, “An Excelente Balade of Charitie,” *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse*, Ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 562. In this quotation from the ballad and all others, I have transcribed only the footnotes for the stanzas I am discussing and not the entire group of footnotes at the bottom of each page of the poem. All quotations of Chatterton’s poetry come from Lonsdale’s edition, which follows the standard reference edition of Chatterton’s verse, Donald Taylor’s two-volume Oxford edition published in 1971. Since no lifetime editions of Chatterton exist, Taylor edits Chatterton’s poems from the manuscripts, which for “The Excelente Balade of Charitie” exhibit the footnotes that I discuss in my reading. In all the cases like Chatterton’s ballad that I discuss in this chapter, where a physical feature of the text like footnotes has an effect of interruption or blockage against some form of reading or experience of the text, later editions of the work preserve that physical feature unless I indicate otherwise.

<sup>23</sup> Here I take a different view of the poem’s descriptive passages from that of Donald Taylor, who reads the storm descriptions as “catalyzing” the action of the poem in the other stanzas. While the two descriptions of the coming storm, no doubt, may be seen to initiate different phases of the poem’s plot, they must also be closely examined in terms of their linguistic style and effects on the reader, since Chatterton announces his own interest in these issues with his blanket exploitation of archaic language. See *Thomas Chatterton’s Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 157.

<sup>24</sup> This must remain a conjecture since, as Smith’s modern editor Stuart Curran acknowledges, the volume *Beachy Head and other Poems* was published in 1807, and no manuscript of the poem survives. Most textual questions about the volume, Curran suggests, concern not the words themselves but capitalization and punctuation, which are done according to varying standards – possibly, Curran surmises, those of Smith’s acquaintance Mrs. Dorset or of Joseph Johnson, who published the volume. The work, thus, was “clearly projected by [Smith but] was not left wholly ready for publication,” as Curran explains.

It is logical to assume that the notes were intended as endnotes on analogy to this handling of the copious notes in the multiple editions of Smith’s highly successful volume, *Elegiac Sonnets*, over whose printing Smith maintained control. This control, Curran indicates, existed at least for the 1800 edition of Smith’s *Elegiac Sonnets*, which Curran uses for his edition of Smith’s works according to a general practice of using “the last edition over which the author exercised editorial control,” and, implicitly, for the other editions of the sonnets that led up to this last edition. See Curran’s “Note on the Text,” Introduction, *The Poems of Charlotte Smith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), xxviii. All my quotations from “Beachy Head” come from Curran’s edition of Smith’s poems.

<sup>25</sup> Erasmus Darwin, “Proem,” *The Loves of the Plants*, (London: J. Johnson, 1789), v-vii. This is the text of the poem from which I quote throughout my treatment of Darwin.

<sup>26</sup> Other major editions in Britain of *The Loves of the Plants* in Darwin’s lifetime were published in years ranging from 1790 to 1799, and with only one exception of an edition in Dublin, are published by Joseph Johnson. These editions generally preserve the physical features I discuss in my reading and thus suggest their intentionality. Editions from 1790-1798 present the induction of the reader in the Proem in the same wording and isolation in white space, with some variation in the size or font of the type in the address, “Gentle reader.” Joseph Johnson’s 1794 edition prints “Gentle reader” in considerably smaller type, but a physical hooking of the reader takes place through an enlarged printing of “Lo,” itself a visually-oriented word associated with picturesque discourse, in the opening full paragraph of the Proem. Johnson’s 1799 edition, however, does not include the Proem, although in the respect of poem and footnote layout that I discuss below, this edition preserves the splitting of the page into sections containing either form of text; it even sometimes intensifies the effect of Darwin’s long notes by running them almost all the way up the page, as it does in the example I discuss in my reading. Lifetime editions in Britain published from 1790-1798 also repeat the general layout of poetic material and footnotes on the page, or even print more note text than poetic text on some pages, as in the 1796 edition of J. Moore, published in Dublin. The Dublin text, however, does not include the floral picture that is presented in other lifetime editions printed in London; it thus evades the interruptive effect of the picture amidst text. Major editions after Darwin’s

death in 1802, such as the edition published in 1806 by Joseph Johnson, also reproduce the physical features of the Proem and of the page/illustration example that I discuss in the first edition of 1789. The only manuscripts of Darwin's texts that appear to be extant, based on the indications of Desmond King-Hele, are those of the poet's Commonplace Book. See Desmond King-Hele, *The Essential Writings of Erasmus Darwin* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1968), 211. For *The Loves of the Plants*, then, we have no view of the physical placement of text, notes, and pictures as Darwin drew it up at the manuscript stage.

<sup>27</sup> James Thomson, "Winter," *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse*, Ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 187. All quotations from Thomson's poetry come from this edition.

<sup>28</sup> Ralph Cohen, in *The Unfolding of the Seasons* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), takes note of the poem's pattern of "religious exclamations preceded and followed by empirical description," reading these alternating phases in terms of the poem's overall worldview: "[*The Seasons*] deliberately avoided rational connections. It was composed of diverse fragments, the purpose of which was to establish links and contrasts among nature, animals, man and God. Then Thomson created a world of simultaneous occurrences in space, but these only occasionally led to harmonious blending. The world being perceivable only in fragments, it was inevitable that no view of the whole could exist without an act of belief" (326-27). My interpretation, by contrast, focuses specifically on the stylistic and affective nature of the poem's descriptive and address phases and how they are related.

<sup>29</sup> Adams discusses Thomson's ample sonic techniques in his chapter "Thomson's Luxuriant Language" in *Graces of Harmony*, but tends to point out instances of such techniques without exploring their overall role in the poem and cumulative effect on the reader, or noting Thomson's apparent ambivalence toward them.

<sup>30</sup> James Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian and Related Works*, Ed. Howard Gaskill (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 5. All quotations come from this edition, which bases its text of the *Fragments* on the second edition published in 1761. This edition retains authority because Macpherson oversaw it, taking care to add one fragment and some small emendations between the first edition and the second. Intentionality of the features I discuss can therefore be assumed. See Fiona Stafford, "About this Edition," *The Poems of Ossian and Related Works*, xxii-xxvi.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.

<sup>32</sup> Stafford, xvi.

<sup>33</sup> See Vincent de Luca, "Proper Names in the Structural Design of Blake's Mythmaking," *Essential Articles for the Study of William Blake, 1970-1984*, Ed. Nelson Hilton (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1986), *passim*.

<sup>34</sup> Stafford, vii.

## Chapter Two: "Word, Work, and Wish": Blake's Affective Style in *Jerusalem*

<sup>1</sup> See *Words of Eternity: Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 89.

<sup>2</sup> Foucault has it, of course, that the notion of an author who "speaks" to the reader in a "voice" is a fiction, but this does not take away the phenomena in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century texts in Britain that call out for analysis and explanation: the particular anxieties surrounding the concept of authorial voice in these texts, as well as the complex ways they ruminate upon, define, and present authorial voice. The aspect of the latter subject this study considers is how late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century writers imagine the relationship between the communication of the authorial voice and materially affective style.

<sup>3</sup> That Chatterton is the author of the “medieval” poems he is presenting to the reader, and therefore not merely performing an editorial and compositorial role, only adds greater complexity to the problem of Chatterton’s authorial “presence” – or more accurately, his abscondence – in the Rowley poems. As Donald Taylor has suggested, Chatterton so intensely needed to believe in the possibility of “the great poet” that he created one in the figure of Rowley, along with a plethora of documents, poetic and otherwise, that portrayed the life and activities of Rowley (*Thomas Chatterton’s Art*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976). Chatterton’s choice to assert his voice in the footnotes, even though that voice is editorial, is a complex negotiation of the problem of his literal and figurative place in the poems he has created. He is unwilling to claim the Rowley poems as his own and yet is unable to keep himself out of the poetic texts; therefore, he consigns himself to a liminal space within the poetic field and yet asserts himself so strongly there that it seems he is trying to burst into the poetic text from which he is removed.

<sup>4</sup> Vincent De Luca first argued that Blake assembles “walls of words” for a sublime effect in “A Wall of Words: The Sublime as Text” in *Unnam’d Forms: Blake and Textuality*, Eds. Nelson Hilton and Thomas Vogler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 218-41, and then later incorporated and expanded this idea in his comprehensive study of Blake’s sublime style, *Words of Eternity: Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime*. All citations from Blake’s poetry in this chapter come from *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake*, Ed. David V. Erdman, Newly Revised Edition (New York: Doubleday, 1988) (CPP).

<sup>5</sup>See Wolfson’s “Sketching Verbal Form: Blake’s Poetical Sketches” in *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> De Luca, 56, 59, and 80, respectively.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>8</sup> Jerome McGann, “William Blake Illuminates the Truth,” *Towards a Literature of Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 29,31.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 29. Among critics who attend to the physical dimension of Blake’s language, Nelson Hilton also must be mentioned for his study of Blake’s “literal” uses of the word, or his exploitation of the “sound, etymology, graphic shape, contemporary applications, and varied associations” of certain keywords. Hilton’s study focuses on particular words that evince Blake’s “polysemous” and “multidimensional” play on language, as in an ambiguity in *Jerusalem’s* Plate 21 as to whether Blake wrote “worshipped” or “warshipped.” The distinction between Hilton’s work and mine is that I focus on instances where the physical use of language pushes away from, rather than toward, ideational meaning, serving mainly to generate a body of sensory effects. These instances do not cohere materiality and meaning but rather explore separating them, although not without Blake’s metacritique of the technique coming alongside. See Nelson Hilton, *Literal Imagination: Blake’s Vision of Words* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 7 and 17.

<sup>10</sup> Easson, “William Blake and His Reader in *Jerusalem*,” *Blake’s Sublime Allegory*, Eds. Stuart Curran and Joseph Wittreich (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), 309 and 316-17, respectively.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.

<sup>12</sup> *Milton* 24:50.

<sup>13</sup> The latter point is suggested by De Luca in a piece that was published over a decade before his larger study of Blake’s style, *Words in Eternity*, and that focuses specifically on proper names in Blake’s work. Arguing that neither a completely ordered and controlled method nor absolute spontaneity and experimentation is the likely *raison d’être* of Blake’s naming style, but rather a combination of both, De Luca writes: “Blake’s [clustered name] formations suggest that [his] creative methods conjoin a high

degree of spontaneous invention with an equally high degree of ordered patterning.” See “Proper Names in the Structural Design of Blake’s Mythmaking,” *Essential Articles for the Study of William Blake, 1970-1984*, Ed. Nelson Hilton (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1986), 128. This theory of Blakean style, however, is contradicted by the argument in *Words of Eternity* that the poet’s sublime poetics is more intentional and controlled, as I discuss below.

<sup>14</sup> This means suggesting, along with Easson, that Los serves in the poem as a Blake figure. Others have also asserted the intimate connection between Los and Blake. To take only one example, S. Foster Damon contends, “In *Jerusalem* . . . Los may be taken as Blake himself, the poet developing his own philosophy and warring against the spiritual evils that afflict his nation.” See *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* (Boulder: Shambhala, 1979), 251.

<sup>15</sup> “Ode to a Nightingale,” l. 57. See *John Keats: Complete Poems*, Ed. Jack Stillinger (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1982).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>17</sup> De Luca, 94.

<sup>18</sup> Morris Eaves, *William Blake’s Theory of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), *passim*.

<sup>19</sup> De Luca, 88.

<sup>20</sup> Critical definitions of the former type are exemplified in Damon’s concordance-like collection of Blake’s uses of the term “Golgonooza” in *A Blake Dictionary*, which takes a technical, translation-oriented approach to characterizing the city, or Stuart Curran’s general and thematic characterization, which calls Golgonooza the “city of art” or “the imaginative organization of human reality” (following Blake’s lead from *Milton*, in which Golgonooza is defined as Los’s city of Art & Manufacture, 24:50). See “The Structures of Jerusalem,” *Blake’s Sublime Allegory*, Eds. Stuart Curran and Joseph Wittreich (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), *passim*. Definitions such as Curran’s are obviously not incorrect (this chapter, in fact, will regularly use the shorthand “city of art” to refer to Golgonooza); they simply are not rich enough given all the labor that the city description and its flanking passages expend to contemplate the possible meanings of a “city of art” and to suggest that it makes all the difference which one is true.

Critics who focus more on what the Golgonooza passage does – its effects upon the individual reader or its role in the larger drama of Blake’s poem – tend to suggest it is largely ornamental or digressive in relation to the rest of *Jerusalem*. Easson’s treatment of the passage describes it as a “rhetorical barricade” that Blake puts down to force the reader to go back to poetic passages before the city description, which will illuminate the poem’s narrative better and help the reader to move beyond the Golgonooza passage (317, 320). Easson also responds critically to the passage as an impenetrable mass of “opacity” or as a “barrier,” backing away from it to suggest, under the premise of an information-based notion of plot, that the Golgonooza passage has no important events of its own. Though Curran’s reading of *Jerusalem*’s structure is detail-oriented, trying to resist the tendency among critics “to play for the big stakes. . . [ignoring the poem’s] specific details for the sake of clarity,” he characterizes the Golgonooza passage only in passing and in the context of a general argument that the first structural phase of Blake’s poem is part of the “outlin[ing] [of] the basic themes, tensions, and perspectives” that, in Curran’s view, occurs in Plates 1-17 (331, 335). But a significant portion of the poem’s “themes, tensions, and perspectives” – its “drama” – centers on the issue of affective style, and in this regard reading the Golgonooza passage carefully is crucial for gauging the poem’s meaning.

<sup>21</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell, *Blake’s Composite Art: A Study of the Illuminated Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 181.



<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 22. Of course, as I suggest in Chapter One, Mitchell's categorization of Thomson as a poet whose descriptions allow clear visibility must be qualified. While it is generally true that Thomson's poetry focuses on various scenes, of which he aims to "paint" a picture with words, the actual event pattern is that Thomson's speaker regularly indulges in highly sonic descriptive language, thus obscuring a clear visualization of his object, and then recants this indulgence, attempting to recommit himself to the more "proper" poetic agenda of *ut pictura poesis*.

<sup>23</sup> De Luca, 92.

<sup>24</sup> James Bogan, "City of Golgonooza in *Jerusalem*: Metaphor and Mandala," *Colby Library Quarterly* 17:2 (June 1981), 89.

<sup>25</sup> Carl Jung, *Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), 10, 360, 389-90; *Psychology and Alchemy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1953), 137; and *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, commentary, trans. Richard Wilhelm (New York: Harcourt, 1962), 103. All qtd. in Bogan, 91-92.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>29</sup> Though he sees the Spectre, in general, as a part of Los's character, Easson suggests that the Spectre at times functions as a reader-figure who is faced with the choice, at various points in the poem, of whether to heed Los-Blake's "commands," such as "Listen!/Be attentive! be obedient!" (8:8-9), or rebel against them (321).

<sup>30</sup> There is also a deleted colophon, "End of the 1<sup>st</sup> Chap," at 14:34 (although in which copy/ies Erdman does not say), which indicates that Blake at some moment had thought of ending the first chapter at this point. But none of the complete copies of *Jerusalem* end the first chapter at Plate 14; they all present Chapter One as 25 plates in length. What is more, Copy B of the poem only consists of Chapter One, or the first 25 plates, as if Blake broke off work on this copy at what he considered to be the end of an established numerical unit. All of these factors indicate that 25 is the plate number for Blake's chapters that should be considered structurally authoritative.

As to Plate 10, it apparently remains inserted in all the copies of the poem (we must assume this since Erdman does not indicate that it is missing in any copy), suggesting that Blake considered it crucial to the development of his poem at that particular juncture. While the bevy of critical literature trying to assess the structural logic of *Jerusalem* obviously offers various theories on the importance of Plate 10 as well as all the other plates, my purpose in this chapter is to illuminate the importance of Plate 10, as well as 11-16, to what I call the poem's "stylistic plot."

<sup>31</sup> All illuminated plates that are presented in Figures in this chapter come from Copy E of the poem and from the Blake Trust facsimile edition of this copy. Copy E is the only copy of *Jerusalem* that Blake colored throughout and that is "finished on every page in Blake's most careful and fully considered manner." See Introductory Note for *Jerusalem, William Blake: The Complete Illuminated Books*, Intro. by David Bindman (New York: Thames & Hudson, in association with the William Blake Trust, 2000), 297.

<sup>32</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>33</sup> De Luca, 88.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. One must consider De Luca's comments here in the general context of his study's thesis: that physically affective techniques in Blake's prophetic books are always part of a sublime poetics, intended first to shock and stymie the reader's "corporeal intelligence" but then to raise the understanding to a higher plane where can operate a version of the Eternal perspective, which sees the infinitude in all things, and in which Blake presumably partakes.

<sup>35</sup> This view is similar to that taken by De Luca in his article about Blake's proper names, which I cite above and which finds a balance between complete ordered control and spontaneity or experimentation in Blake's style.

<sup>36</sup> Note, for instance, Bogan's lapse into abstract language when he argues the intended effects of Blake's city description: "[to lead the reader] to a state beyond the senses . . . to a realm where energy and vision are interfused . . . [and where, as suggested by Jose Arguelles] 'the mind . . . may pass beyond its usual fetters' . . . Blake constructs an engine for the bursting of 'mind-forg'd manacles' in the reader and thereby for Albion himself" (93). Also, though De Luca's *Words of Eternity* intentionally concentrates more on the "blockage" effect of Blake's sublime style than on the "recovery," it still tells us more about what the Golgonooza description transcends than that to which it leads us: "[the words] form an order of freestanding autonomy, transcending mere descriptiveness . . . [and take] the reader out of the continuities of cause-and-effect action, linear narrative, and consecutive moral argument by concentrating the mind on the stasis of form while dissociating it from the expectations of the reason" (89, 140).

<sup>37</sup> *CPP*, 932.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Line 1, "Introduction," *Songs of Experience*.

<sup>40</sup> De Luca, *Words of Eternity*, 89.

<sup>41</sup> De Luca, "Proper Names," 121-22.

<sup>42</sup> Respectively: Mitchell, 22 and De Luca, *Words of Eternity*, 88.

<sup>43</sup> *Songs of Experience*, "Introduction," 1-2.

<sup>44</sup> We have seen before a testament to the affective power of certain words in Blake's poem. The words "And they builded Golgonooza" spark the speaker's first distinct translational moment at 12:25 ("What are those golden builders doing?"), and the single word "Golgonooza" seems to generate the highly self-conscious and even self-described act of glossing Golgonooza that begins, "Los walks round the walls night and day" (13:55). Before the close of the series of Golgonooza-related plates, this catalytic, spell-like power of keywords emerges again, when a mention of "Albion's slumbers" inspires Blake's last major stylistic exploration of how strongly physical technique, this time word-walls, could affect (or, more urgently, awaken) readerly consciousness and perception.

<sup>45</sup> Damon, 401 and 321.

<sup>46</sup> De Luca, 90.

<sup>47</sup> Morton Paley, for example, declares that "*Jerusalem* is a work virtually all middle. It begins as if it were an epic, with an invocation and a statement of theme, and then moves rapidly to the agon of Los and his Spectre beginning on plate 6. Instead of [creating a conventional action plot with a climax, however] . . . Blake allows the poem to develop [as Hazard Adams describes] with 'One fable grow[ing] into another, one set of images beget[ting] another' . . . until the Covering Cherub is revealed in 89, after which

[e]vents . . . lead rapidly to an ending . . . ." See *The Continuing City: William Blake's Jerusalem* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 289.

<sup>48</sup> Curran, 337.

### Chapter Three: "Perplex'd with a thousand things": Keats and the Charm of Words

<sup>1</sup> *John Keats: Complete Poems*, Ed. Jack Stillinger (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), xv-xvi. The parabola model of forms of reality in Keats's poetry is presented in Stillinger's "The Hoodwinking of Madeline" in *"The Hoodwinking of Madeline" and Other Essays on Keats's Poems* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> Stuart Sperry, *Keats the Poet* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 3-71.

<sup>3</sup> John Barnard, *John Keats* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 7 and *passim*.

<sup>4</sup> Neil Fraistat, "Lamia Progressing: Keats's 1820 Volume" in *The Poem and the Book: Interpreting Collections of Romantic Poetry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 95-140.

<sup>5</sup> In his general treatment of the subject of charms and riddles, Northrop Frye makes a passing suggestion that "charm poetry [is] shown at its subtlest in Keats and Tennyson and at its clearest in Poe and Swinburne," but the larger focus of his essay prevents him from beginning to illustrate that claim. See Northrop Frye, "Charms and Riddles," *Spiritus Mundi* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 142. Andrew Welsh provides the definition for "charm" that I have just given. The word itself derives from the Latin "carmen," which means "song" or "lyric poetry," and is synonymous with "magic formula for 'incantation.'" See Andrew Welsh, "Charm," *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 183.

<sup>6</sup> *Keats: The Critical Heritage*, Ed. G.M. Matthews (London: Routledge, 1971), 64.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 68, 110.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 139, 142.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 380.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 237, 283. Here Hunt uses a mimetic standard to evaluate Keats's description. He concludes that Keats's rendition of the window is accurate, or "true," and, because it does not contain "superfluous" words, that it is implicitly undistracted by any agenda other than *ut pictura poesis*. While reviewers of some of Keats's other verse, especially the early poems, regularly suggest that his descriptions are in some degree unmimetic, they tend to read the descriptions in *The Eve of St. Agnes* as purely mimetic and pictorial, as Hunt's comments show. I hope to demonstrate, to the contrary, that Keats's descriptions in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, as well as in other poems, have a powerful effect on readers precisely because they fail in the *ut pictura poesis* agenda: the reader's clear visual imagination of the scene or object being described is eclipsed by the sonic and tactile force of Keats's language.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 203-04.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>16</sup> Stanzas 28-30 are quoted on page 255 of my text.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> "Introduction," *John Keats: Complete Poems*, xxv.

<sup>19</sup> 198-220 *passim*.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>21</sup> Marian Hollingsworth Cusac, "Keats as Enchanter: An Organizing Principle of *The Eve of St. Agnes*," *Keats-Shelley Journal* 17 (1968), 114.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>23</sup> Garrett Stewart, "Keats and language," *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*, Ed. Susan J. Wolfson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 135.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Bennett, *Keats, Narrative and Audience: The Posthumous Life of Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 97, 102, 103.

<sup>26</sup> "Wordsworth, Keats, and 'the language of the sense,'" *Ariel* 11: 2 (April 1980), 32-3.

<sup>27</sup> Marjorie Levinson, *Keats's Life of Allegory: The Origins of a Style* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 101, 113, 115, and 116, respectively.

<sup>28</sup> A linkage between Keats's poems and consumerism has also been made by Elizabeth Jones with respect to the poetic content of the odes. Jones argues that the poems were written with economic motivations. She focuses on the "mainstream, picturesque, and marketable aspects of Keats's odes," whose subjects, she contends, were chosen based on Keats's attempt to transform his landscapes [in earlier verse] from vast spaces of 'vulgar desire' into commercially viable art-products." See "Writing for the Market: Keats's Odes as Commodities," *Studies in Romanticism* 34 (Fall 1995), 347.

<sup>29</sup> "Charms and Riddles," *Spiritus Mundi* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 124.

<sup>30</sup> As Stillinger's note relays, the tale that is the subject of this poem, *The Flower and the Leaf*, was attributed to Chaucer in February 1817, the time of Keats's writing. Keats composed "This pleasant tale is like a little copse" in his friend Clarke's copy of Chaucer. For Stillinger's note see *John Keats: Complete Poems*, 426.

<sup>31</sup> All quotations from Keats's poetry come from Jack Stillinger's *John Keats: Complete Poems* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1982).

<sup>32</sup> Frye, 124.

<sup>33</sup> Charles Brown, a friend and early biographer of Keats, suggests that "Imitation of Spenser" was Keats's earliest attempt at poetry. Jack Stillinger dates it to 1814, when Keats was eighteen. See note on "Imitation of Spenser" in *John Keats: Complete Poems* 417.

<sup>34</sup> Bennett, 1-2.

<sup>35</sup> Helen Vendler, *The Odes of John Keats* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1983), 87.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>38</sup> Garrett Stewart, "Keats and language," *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*, Ed. Susan J. Wolfson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 143.

<sup>39</sup> Frye, 124.

<sup>40</sup> Vendler, 87.

<sup>41</sup> Vendler suggests that "Ode to a Nightingale," in its use of reiteration, can "[be] distinguish[ed] from [a poem] employing the ongoing trope of enumeration, the trope of lists, of numerical plenitude" (the latter being "To Autumn," as Vendler argues in a later chapter) (87). Yet, if one looks at Keats's words less conceptually and more in terms of physical momentum, one sees more clearly just how many lists there are in "Ode to a Nightingale." One discerns the fact that the paratactic beats of these lists provide crucial momentum and energy in stanzas two and three and, significantly, take over as the central syntactical form in the poem's verbal crux at stanza five.

<sup>42</sup> Vendler, 93.

<sup>43</sup> See headnote to *Lamia* in *John Keats Complete Poems*, 474.

<sup>44</sup> Stewart also calls attention to the device-like character of the repetition of "forlorn," describing it as a "textual *deus ex machina*" and a "self-conscious iteration" (143-44).

<sup>45</sup> Many of Keats's major critics give a brief treatment to *The Eve of St. Mark*. In "The Hoodwinking of Madeline," Stillinger briefly likens Bertha to the "hoodwinked" Madeline, a linkage that my argument about *The Eve of St. Mark* also makes. Stuart Sperry devotes a few pages to the poem in *Keats the Poet*, discussing the fragment's "harmony of mood and tone, or, to use [Keats's] own word, of "sensation," rather than of narrative event" (226). Thomas MacFarland's more recent treatment of *The Eve of St. Mark* in *The Masks of Keats* is highly dismissive: "'The Eve of St. Mark,' by its similarity and proximity to 'The Eve of St. Agnes,' highlights the difference between a poem that has something to say and one that does not." MacFarland, however, still acknowledges similarities between the poems: their concern with saintly legend and their "sensuous cataloguing" passages that display "palpably similar structure." See *The Masks of Keats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 139-43. But where MacFarland leaves off of discussing the stylistic links between Keats's two poems with a brief reference to one device, I wish to bring those links fully into the light, thereby showing that *The Eve of St. Mark* is a more important poem than has been previously acknowledged. Furthermore, MacFarland's suggestion that *St. Agnes* "has something to say" where *St. Mark* does not curiously puts its finger right on the importance of *St. Mark*. The fact that the poem does not have much to say at the level of theme or narrative is precisely what it does have to say: it is dedicated to exploring the process of charming, which by definition involves an evasion of language that presses ideational or narrative meaning and an embrace of language as a body of physical effects. In the terms of meaning MacFarland sets, the only conceivable "something to say" that *St. Mark* might be said to possess – the characterization of Bertha – also exists for the purpose of exploring the charm, but at the level of figurative reader who has been enchanted by the appearance of her book.

<sup>46</sup> The poem was written, as Stillinger's notes tell us, in February 1819, but Keats returns to the poem and copies it into the letter to his relatives in September. See *John Keats: Complete Poems*, 456.

<sup>47</sup> Sept. 20, 1819, *The Letters of John Keats*, Ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, Volume Two (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), 201.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 204-05.

<sup>49</sup> For any other poet, the use of “in” rather than “on” in this line would likely be simply a wordy expression of the idea that one walks “in the evening.” But Keats’s use of the word “in,” which portrays evening literally as an enfolding sensory experience, reflects his extraordinary fascination with sensation in general, particularly with distinguishing different levels and varieties. This fascination is most famously expressed in the poet’s lengthy, elaborate description in his letters of the experience of eating a juicy nectarine. In terms of scholarship, Sperry discusses Keats’s sophisticated and elaborate attitude toward sensation particularly through the lens of the poet’s knowledge of chemistry from his medical school days. See Stuart Sperry, *Keats the Poet* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 318-19.

<sup>51</sup> Walter Houghton also suggests that Keats’s “carelessness” comment refers to his poem’s unfinished condition: “[This remark] can hardly refer to the careful choice of diction and imagery, [and therefore] must refer to the [poem’s] form.” See “The Meaning of The Eve of St. Mark,” *ELH: A Journal of English Literary History* 13 (1946), 78.

<sup>52</sup> “And Bertha had not yet half done/A curious volume, patch’d and torn,/That all day long, from earliest morn,/Had taken captive her two eyes” (24-27).

<sup>53</sup> Charles Brown’s transcript of line 33 reads “Moses” for “Aaron’s,” as does the 1848 edition of Keats’s work that was based on Brown’s transcript. Yet although Keats’s original draft of *The Eve of St. Mark*, from which Brown was copying, is somewhat inscrutable at this juncture, Keats writes “Aaron’s” when he copies the poem out fair in his letter to George and Georgiana Keats in September 1819. Woodhouse also reads “Aaron’s,” following Keats’s original manuscript, in the one transcript that is available for examination of the two he made. “Aaron’s,” and the sonic pattern it preserves, thus appears intentional. See Stillinger’s textual notes to *The Eve of St. Mark* (632).

<sup>54</sup> “Perplex,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Second Edition (Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>55</sup> Jack Stillinger, Headnote to *The Eve of St. Agnes*, *John Keats: Complete Poems*, 454.

<sup>56</sup> Cusac writes: “With the ‘Ah,’ the story-teller gathers us, as it were, around his knee to begin his tale. The word not only intensifies the bitter chill but also serves the purpose of the ritualistic ‘Once upon a time’: the narrator signals that he is getting his story under way” (114).

<sup>57</sup> *The Woodhouse Poetry Transcripts at Harvard*, John Keats: Volume VI, Ed. Jack Stillinger (New York: Garland, 1998), 199.

<sup>58</sup> Levinson also notes the outermost frames of Porphyro’s view from the closet and of the entire scene of Madeline’s room (162). From here, stanza 24 establishes the frames of the casement itself and the scutcheon within the casement.

<sup>59</sup> Critics do not acknowledge this rumination upon different poetic models within the text, tending to argue that Keats’s poem chooses either a model of mimesis or non-mimesis without ambivalence. Even readings that see the poem mainly as an offering of sensory pleasure choose to argue mimesis over non-mimesis. For example, the suggestion of Douglas Bush or Robert Gittings that *St. Agnes* is a gorgeous “tapestry” displaying various images stresses mimesis by focusing on the elaborate pictures or scenes that the poem “paints” at moments, but evading the other even more prominent moments in the poem that overturn

verisimilitude or ideational meaning through an indulgence in physically affective language. Marjorie Levinson subverts the readings offered by such critics as Bush and Gittings by arguing that Keats's poem challenges mimetic or discursive interpretations in the first place through its "verbal materialism," which Levinson defines through such devices as Keats's puns on the visual and sonic likenesses between words. Yet Levinson's reading, along with the others, does not acknowledge the poem's continual mulling over rather than pure rejection of mimesis and expressive poetry in stanzas 24 and 25 and at later moments, its exploration of an alternate model of charm poetry, and its metacritical evaluation of all three verse models through the actions of Porphyro and Madeline as poet and reader figures. For all the critiques referred to in those note, see, respectively: Douglas Bush, "Keats and His Ideas," *The Major Romantic Poets*, Ed. Clarence Thorpe, et al. (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1957); Robert Gittings, "Rich Antiquity," *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of The Eve of St. Agnes*, Ed. Allan Danzig (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 86-98; and Marjorie Levinson, *Keats's Life of Allegory: The Origins of a Style* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 101.

<sup>60</sup> Sperry, 215.

<sup>61</sup> Walter Jackson Bate, *John Keats* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), 412.

<sup>62</sup> Bate, 412-414.

#### Chapter Four: "At Once Mild and Animating": Shelley's Spell of Style

<sup>1</sup> *A Defence of Poetry, Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, Eds. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002), 514, 516, and 528 (*SPP*). All quotations from Shelley's poetry and prose come from this edition. The quoted phrase in the title of this chapter comes from Shelley's description of the West Wind's temperature in his note to the "Ode to the West Wind." See *SPP*, 297.

<sup>2</sup> Shelley's drafts for this poem are transcribed in the "Poems in Process" section of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., Gen. Ed. M.H. Abrams (New York: Norton, 1993), 2453-54. They can also be found in *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*, Ed. Donald Reiman (New York: Garland, 1986 - ).

<sup>3</sup> Although the terms "charm" and "spell" are often used interchangeably (the entry for "spell" in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, for example, simply refers the reader to the entry for "charm"), in this chapter I call Shelley's exploitations of the physical effects of words "spells." I use this word on analogy to the poet himself, who among all the enchantment-related words in his oeuvre uses the word "spell" with a particular frequency. Also, the word "spell" suggests an especially radical transfixing effect that, I will show, is intended by Shelley's highly self-conscious, careful, and patterned exploitations of words as affective power. Another word that Shelley's speaker uses to describe his verse in "Ode to the West Wind," "incantation," will figure prominently in my discussion, again because its connotations are stronger than those of "charm" and because its definition – the use of a ritualistic formula to produce a magical effect or charm, or, the chant or spell itself – touches more upon the especially formulaic and chantlike uses of language in Shelley's poems and in parts of poems that have an enchanting agenda. Given these terminological preferences, however, I will occasionally use the term "charm" as a convenience, or when I mean to refer to Shelley's use of words as a physical action in the most general way. For the term definitions referred to in this note, see the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, Ed. Alex Premingen and T.V.F. Brogan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 183, 581, 1205.

<sup>4</sup> "Shelley's Reputation before 1960," *SPP*, 545.

<sup>5</sup> *Shelley: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 254 (*CH*).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 255-56.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 248-49.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>10</sup> *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1933), 80, 87.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 82-83.

<sup>13</sup> Frederick Jones, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), 2: 164.

<sup>14</sup> *CH*, 249.

<sup>15</sup> David Masson writing for *Macmillan's Magazine* (1860). Qtd. in *Keats: The Critical Heritage*, 380.

<sup>16</sup> Eliot, 83.

<sup>17</sup> *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (New York: George W. Stewart, 1947), 206.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 232, 239.

<sup>20</sup> For corrective readings of Shelley's imagery: Harold Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959); Richard Fogle, *The Imagery of Keats and Shelley* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959); and Frederick Pottle, "The Case of Shelley," *PMLA* LXVII: 5 (September 1952), 589-608.

<sup>21</sup> Leavis, 214.

<sup>22</sup> James Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind* (New York: Octagon, 1949) and C.E. Pulos, *The Deep Truth: A Study of Shelley's Skepticism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1954).

<sup>23</sup> *Shelley's Style* (New York: Methuen, 1984), xi.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>27</sup> Tilottama Rajan, "Deconstruction or Reconstruction: Reading Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*," *Romanticism: A Critical Reader*, Ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 198.

<sup>28</sup> Rajan., 199.



<sup>29</sup> Ibid. Other deconstructive approaches to Shelley's verse have stressed not just interpretive fissures at the broadest level of content that Rajan discusses, such as the problem of Demogorgon's identity, but also the complexity of Shelley's work at the more minute level of the poet's figurative language. An example is Paul De Man's landmark reading of *The Triumph of Life*, in which he addresses the text's structure of asking a question and answering it with another question that asks "what and why one asked"; De Man makes such traits of Shelley's poem the basis for his reading of its "disfigurement," or the process by which Shelley's language "performs the erasure of its own positions." See "Shelley Disfigured," *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 98 and 119. Another key example of a critic who addresses Shelley's figurative language with a deconstructive approach is Jerrold Hogle, who argues that a model of "radical transference" best explains Shelley's view of thought and his use of language. Hogle suggests, specifically, that for Shelley "even an instant of mental life is a passing from moments only partially remembered to others that redefine their predecessors from a latter angle only to be redefined themselves at other moments far ahead," and that Shelley's style bears this view out by evincing "trace" metaphors that display "the shifts that wording must always perform in its passage from figure to figure." See *Shelley's Process: Radical Transference in the Development of His Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 10 and 12.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>31</sup> Forest Pyle, "Frail Spells: Shelley and the Ironies of Exile," *SPP*, 665-66.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Marlon Ross, "The Apprehending Reader in *Prometheus Unbound*," *Keats-Shelley Journal* XXXVI (1987), 121, 126, 130; Chris Foss, "Shelley's Revolution in Poetic Language: A Kristevan Reading of Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound*," *European Romantic Review* 9:4 (Fall 1998), 506.

<sup>34</sup> Neil Fraistat, *The Poem and the Book* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 215, n.8.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 150 and *passim*.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> *Prometheus Unbound* II.v.82-84 and IV.102-04, respectively.

<sup>40</sup> *Shelley's Mythmaking* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 37 and 35-45, *passim*.

<sup>41</sup> Pyle, 664-65.

<sup>42</sup> Keach, 120.

<sup>43</sup> Pyle, 668.

<sup>44</sup> Bloom, 37.

<sup>45</sup> Keach, 120.

<sup>46</sup> Michael O'Neill, "Shelley's Lyric Art," *SPP*, 617.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., *passim*.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 617.

<sup>49</sup> Frederick Pottle, "The Case of Shelley," *PMLA* LXVII (September 1952), 5: 595; Harold Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 75.

<sup>50</sup> Martin Buber, *The Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1917), 9. Qtd. in Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking*, 72.

<sup>51</sup> Bloom, 73.

<sup>52</sup> Donald Wesling, *The Chances of Rhyme* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), *passim*.

<sup>53</sup> The biographical valence of the first part of Shelley's third stanza is recorded in Reiman's and Fraistat's note to line 32 in *SPP*.

<sup>54</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry," *SPP*, 530.

<sup>55</sup> Bloom 85 .

<sup>56</sup> James Chandler, "History's Lyre: The 'West Wind' and the Poet's Work," *SPP*.

<sup>57</sup> Chandler, 721.

<sup>58</sup> "Ode to Liberty," l. 81. *SPP*, 312.

<sup>59</sup> *SPP*, 519.

<sup>60</sup> Hogg, *Life of Shelley*, Ed. Edward Dowden (1906). Qtd. in *SPP*, n. 3 to *Prometheus Unbound* III.iii.

<sup>61</sup> *SPP*, 203.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Rajan also recognizes Shelley's figure as a description of his own text, but concentrates less on the affective implications of such a textual self-description than on the dynamics of the interchange between Panthea and Asia in II.i. See "Deconstruction or Reconstruction: Reading Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*," 200-201 and *passim*.

<sup>64</sup> *SPP*, 205.

<sup>65</sup> Neil Fraistat, *The Poem and the Book* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 215, n.8.

<sup>66</sup> In her article "Proteus and Romantic Allegory," Theresa Kelley complicates the picture of *Prometheus Unbound*'s engagement with the Proteus figure by stressing the displacement of Proteus's power onto the shell given to Asia. This illustrates, according to Kelley, how "[poetic] powers may be transferred to natural objects in Romantic poems" and posits "a new image of the poet's voice as that which releases powers trapped in nature and in objects by breathing in (inspiring) voice as the *pneuma* or spirit . . . . As a figure for the Romantic poet, the seashell dramatizes the complex exchange which must occur before poetic speech can exist." See Theresa Kelley, "Proteus and Romantic Allegory," *ELH* 49:3 (Fall 1982), 634 and 636. The part of the "complex exchange" that my argument stresses is that between the spellcasting words of Shelley's drama and the reader, who responds first by being passive to their power but then ideally

“awakens” into new perception and insight out of this enchantment. In my reading of *Prometheus Unbound*, the spells within Shelley’s play, as well as its holistic identity as a spell, convey the poet’s voice by teaching the reader the drama’s supreme value of human love. Yet this teaching occurs as much through the reader’s experience of strongly physical verbiage as through purely intellectual messages: the play performs the dynamics of human love through the operation of its sonically and visually affective languages in key passages.

<sup>67</sup> Stuart Sperry, *Shelley’s Major Verse: The Narrative and Dramatic Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 80.

<sup>68</sup> *SPP*, 528.

<sup>69</sup> Leavis, 232.

<sup>70</sup> As Neil Fraistat has shown the “Down, down” lyric was one of the passages that Shelley added to the poem in a series of revisions in the fall or winter of 1819, while he was writing Act IV. See *Bodleian MS Shelley e.1, e.2, and e.3: Intermediate Fair Copies of Prometheus Unbound . . . : A Facsimile Edition with Full Transcriptions and Notes*, Vol. IX, Ed. Neil Fraistat (New York: Garland, 1991), lxviii. The particular addition of the “Down, down” lyric, among its other purposes, could be another way Shelley’s drama subtly acknowledges that a central meaning may have trouble emerging from amidst the drama’s contradictions. Supplementing the encouragement of the reader that is already present in the “Follow” lyric, the “Down, down” lyric increases the drive of the play toward Act IV, where the play’s contradictions tend to fade amidst the high emotional pitch of the cosmic hymn of rejoicing, and amidst the drama’s last words, which quite self-consciously are deemed “strong words” that “may never pass away” (553).

Scholars have previously argued that the drama’s first three acts, including all the lyrics, were composed between September 1818 and the early Spring of 1819 and apparently completed, with Act IV being written in the Fall of 1819 as a “sublime after-thought” (in the phrase of Edward Dowden). Yet Fraistat’s analysis of the manuscripts reveals that the writing of the first three acts was a more complex and revisionary process, with many lines (particularly lyric passages such as Asia’s response to the “Life of Life” lyric and the “Down, down” song) being added to the drama after Shelley had begun writing Act IV. These passages, Fraistat argues, appear to derive from the style of Act IV rather than vice versa. See *Bodleian MS Shelley e.1*, lxii-lxxv.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, lxviii.

<sup>72</sup> A deleted passage from the fair copy features a short dialogue between Asia and Panthea. Asia asserts that Panthea must be the one who has sung the “Life of Life!” lyric, but Panthea declares it was Prometheus. See *Bodleian MS Shelley e. 3*, 375.

<sup>73</sup> Jerome McGann, in his brief analysis of Shelley’s “Life of Life!” lyric, suggests the point I am making here when he declares Shelley the “master of [the] sort of rhetoric [that is] a rhetorical dance of its own terms” and points out, on a general level, the “energetic translation of . . . terms into and out of each other” in the lyric. See *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 134-35.

<sup>74</sup> *Bodleian MS Shelley e. 3*, 372. Fraistat also makes note of this visually expressive writing.

<sup>75</sup> Susan Wolfson, “Poetic Form and Political Reform: *The Mask of Anarchy* and ‘England in 1819,’” *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, Ed. Donald Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002), 724.

<sup>76</sup> Rajan, 197.

<sup>77</sup> Rajan, 196.

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