“The Feel of Not to Feel It”:
British Romanticism, Melancholic Historiography, and the Degree Zero of Emotion

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For Eve
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Critical Introduction
“The Feel of Not to Feel It”:
British Romanticism, Melancholic Historiography, and the Degree Zero of Emotion

Epigraphs

The zero degree is therefore not a total absence (this is a common mistake), it is a significant absence. We have here a pure differential state; the zero degree testifies to the power held by any system of signs, of creating meaning “out of nothing.”

Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*

This is vital for the creation of a real historical novel, i.e. one which brings the past close to us and allows us to experience its real and true being. Without a felt relationship to the present, a portrayal of history is impossible.

Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*

Introduction

This dissertation argues that a melancholic encounter with the degree zero of emotion shadows the characteristically romantic desire for an affecting evocation of the past. My readings in the poetry, fiction, belles lettres, and philosophy of British and (to a less extent) German Romanticism offer a critical perspective on the emotional tenor of contemporary discursive practices. The project identifies the minimal experience of emotion – what John Keats memorably terms “the feel of not the feel it” – that modern historiography tends to overlook as it oscillates between the polar extremes of mania and mourning, between the euphoria of historical recovery and despondency over the past’s irretrievability. By reading romanticism’s historical sentiments as rhetorical figures that enact their own undoing, the dissertation critically advocates for the joint contribution that deconstruction and New Historicism can make to an emerging turn to affect.

To adapt my first epigraph from Roland Barthes’s *Elements of Semiology*, the project attends to the “zero degree” of romanticism’s affective commitments: not the total absence of emotion, but a significant absence nonetheless. While Barthes variously
applies the notion of a “zero degree” to semantics, logic, ethnology, and rhetoric – to which we might add perspectival art, philosophy, and psychoanalysis – the field of mathematics most readily lends itself to an illustration of his meaning (Barthes 77-8). As J. Hillis Miller observes in a multi-faceted discussion, the mathematical concept of “0” equivocates “between zero as a mark that has meaning, as when it is taken as a number among others, and zero as a mark that indicates the void, absence, no number at all, something wholly outside the chain of number.” In this vein, Brian Rotman comments that zero “serves as the site of an ambiguity between the empty character… and a character for emptiness, a symbol that signifies nothing.”3 If zero serves as the lowest degree in a series of numbers (0, 1, 2, etc.), it also designates the absence of number, a cipher signifying emptiness. The tension is perfectly encapsulated in the phrase “zero degree,” which suggests a step-wise movement entirely beyond the realm of number.

So what does Barthes mean when he terms zero a “significant absence?” Paradoxically, it is the very meaninglessness or nothingness of zero, its status as a non-number, that makes it uniquely generative. While 0 without an adjacent numeral would be the “apotheosis of nothing,” as Miller notes, all it takes to generate an endless array of new meanings is to start combining zeroes and ones – as in 10, 100, or 1000 (374, 384).

To return to Barthes’s formulation, zero has significance insofar as it indicates a “pure differential state.” While zero designates a number without quantity, if you will, it is also meta-number or placeholder – “an indication that some number (any number) is missing… [and] not any one number in particular” (Miller 371). In Barthes’s words, the zero degree “testifies to the power held by any system of signs, of creating meaning ‘out of nothing’” (77). It is, in other words, “a placeholder that has significance without itself
meaning anything in particular” (Miller 376). For a graphical depiction of the thin line dividing something from nothing, consider that zero constitutes the horizon at which the infinitely large and the infinitesimally small approach each other.

True to the subject matter, the notion of a zero degree does not serve as the conceptual capstone or summation for my project so much as its point of departure. Suffice it to say that the term’s equivocations model the features of affective experience that most interest me: namely, a resistance to logical or cognitive mastery; affect as a “pure differential state”; an interaction between identifiable emotions and their affective undercurrents; a “significant absence” of emotion that nevertheless functions as a placeholder for the production of positive and negative sentiments; and the possibility that the polar extremes of emotion approach the zero degree state of fatigue, exhaustion, and apathy as their horizon of possibility. Moreover, this introduction can only gesture at the ambiguities that align the zero degree of mathematics (zero as both a number among others and the absence number), linguistics (according to Miller’s reader of Barthes, “when Saussure says ‘the language can be content with an opposition of something and nothing,’ he… subtly contradicts his entire linguistic theory, since that theory depends on the notion that meaning arises from specific and limited differences” [374]), and historiography (if “discourse about the past has the status of being the discourse of the dead,” as Michel de Certeau observes, it follows that the dead are the degree zero of historical discourse: the vacant placeholder out of which “an infinite series of historical meanings” can be generated⁴), with the zero degree of emotion.

More narrowly, my focus on romanticism’s engagement with what Keats terms “the feel of not to feel it” seeks to bring the emotional tenor of contemporary criticism
into alignment with the practice of melancholic historiography. While critics readily profess the negative knowledge that the writing of history cannot adequately re-present its subject matter, the melancholia of modern historical discourse has generated surprisingly little discussion about the accompanying impoverishment of historical feeling. If anything, the historical turn in literary criticism has led its practitioners to emphasize their affective commitments. Romantic studies has, in other words, largely overlooked a countervailing strain in the history of affect: namely, the attention that romantic writers devote to the withdrawal of feeling.

My second epigraph from Lukács offers a corrective. While Lukács did not think that Walter Scott’s historical novels had much in common with the writing of his romantic contemporaries, Lukács’s assessment nevertheless encapsulates the duality of what critics have since come to understand as romanticism’s desire for an evocative past. On the one hand, Lukács endorses Scott’s commitment to revitalizing the otherness of the past as the basis for experiencing “its real and true being” in the present. Scott informs Lukács’s “thirst for history not as textual representation but as sense-perception, not as a ‘then’ but as ‘now,’” an impulse Kevis Goodman associates with romantic historiography more generally. On the other hand, Lukács formulates the contrasting concern that the past will remain remote and inaccessible. Phrasing his latter point in the negative, Lukács stipulates that historical representation fails in the absence of a “felt relationship to the present.” His implied elation or even mania at the prospect of reanimating a past that is otherwise dead and gone consequently finds its flip side in the mournful recognition that the “portrayal of history is impossible.”
So when Alan Liu observes that “regret and jubilant assay are the two faces of a single meditation on loss and history,” he could have been paraphrasing Lukács. The last three decades of New Historicist criticism – for which Liu is a leading participant – have made the contrarieties of Lukács’s affective response eminently recognizable. On this score, New Historicism’s detractors as well as its proponents tend to agree: the late twentieth-century variant of romantic historical consciousness takes shape as what Thomas Pfau terms a “deeply conflicted intellectual project.” Liu makes much the same remark, but not as a criticism. Speaking on behalf of his fellow New Historicists, Liu readily admits that “we exaggerate the fiction of all-or-nothing, present-versus-absent history as an illusion saving the possibility that there can be absolute losses and absolute gains” (165) Pfau and Liu concur that contemporary historicist thought exhibits a polarized structure of feeling. “It may say a lot,” Pfau elaborates, “not only about the institutions and practices of historicism but also about Western culture’s intuitive sense of history for the past two hundred years or so, that its critical representations designed to render the past comprehensible are continually predicated on an extreme form of affect, be it one of euphoria or despondency” (9, italics in the original). When Liu exaggerates the oscillation between “present-versus-absent history” or Pfau notices that historical representation gravitates towards “an extreme form of affect,” they jointly articulate the divergent vectors of a “desire for history” that twentieth-century critics routinely trace back to the Romantic period.

Debates about romanticism’s relationship to its object of study have only exacerbated the stratification of the field’s affective commitments. Consider Noel Jackson’s recent assessment:
No single issue appears to arrive more quickly at the heart of recent debates about Romantic poetry than that concerning the nature of the romanticist’s attachment to it. For several decades now, literary scholars have considered whether romantic scholarship might be better served by an oppositional relationship to its object of study than by an approach that assumes a standpoint of appreciative familiarity with the forms and pleasures of canonical romantic aesthetics.9

Jackson’s implied metaphor is apt: matters of the “heart” are indeed at the crux of discussions about romanticism. Arguments about the field’s attachment to romantic literature tend to register on an emotional level. To decide between an “oppositional” stance towards this body of writing and a “standpoint of appreciative familiarity,” between antagonism and affinity, foregrounds the binary formation of critical sentiment.

While Lukács’s formulation continues to resonate with a New Historicist sensibility, his remark also complicates the prevailing tendency to frame the critic’s relationship to his or her object of study in emotion-laden terms. Noting that Lukács’s engagement with the past seems to privilege the heights and depths of emotion should not, in other words, obscure his contrasting attention to the waning of feeling. This understated dynamic comes to the fore if we consider Ina Ferris’s reminder that “historical discourse is not simply a representation of something but a representation to someone.”10 The “portrayal of history” entails both a representation of the past as well as a communication between the writer of history and his or her expected readers. So while Lukács initially attests to a retrospective focus that “brings the past close to us and allows us to experience its real and true being,” he shifts to consider the unraveling of a “felt relationship” with the future. For Lukács, the evocative power of Scott’s retrospection falters with the proleptic turn to consider the vagaries of an anticipated reception – a problematic I address in my fourth chapter on John Keats. The present production of historical discourse does not, it seems, share in the vitality ascribed to an affecting past.
The shift plays out as a modulation away from the polar extremes of “euphoria or despondency,” as Pfau has it, and towards the zero degree of emotion.

**The waning of affect**

While critics have had intimations that their desire for history is shadowed by the attenuation of feeling, the dynamic rarely receives sustained attention. Fredric Jameson touches on the retrenchment of historical feeling when he defines historicity “as a perception of the present as history; that is, as a relationship to the present which somehow defamiliarizes it and allows us that distance from immediacy which is at length characterized as a historical perspective.” Even as Jameson critiques the “waning of affect” that blunts postmodern efforts to think historically, he acknowledges that historical consciousness emerges out of a “process of reification whereby we draw back from our immersion in the here and now (not yet identified as a ‘present’) and grasp it as a kind of thing.” To adapt Derrida’s terminology, Jameson regards the subsidence of historical feeling as a *pharmakon*, both cure and illness. If the ability to perceive the “present as history” requires a self-cancelling perspective capable of suspending the affective attachments that are most closely held, Jameson also cites the dissipation of historical feeling as an indication that postmodernity has commodified time itself.

Liu brings the discussion home to the field of romanticism by noting that Wordsworth’s immersion in the distant past evacuates his present experience. By his reading, Wordsworth confronts “the tragic paradox of history” in which “our lived now appears perpetually alienated from the historical now. We seem powerless to act in the very moment in which we live, watching great events unfold instead… We are paralyzed by synchrony with the zeitgeist” (*LT* 13). Alienation, powerlessness, paralysis: all terms
suggesting that the writing of history makes itself felt in the present as a waning of affect.

As I discuss in my second and third chapters, romanticism’s interest in cultivating an evocative past is accompanied by what Peter Fritzsche describes as the countervailing feeling of being estranged from one’s own time and stranded in an empty present.¹³

Generally speaking, the erosion of historical sentiment remains an under-explored element of New Historicism’s commitment to the production of feeling. Mike Goode puts his finger on the issue with an astute observation about Stephen Greenblatt’s remark that “I began with a desire to speak with the dead”¹⁴; namely, that “it was [Greenblatt’s] ideal of speaking with the dead, more than his statement of the presence of first-person desire in historical inquiry, which the New Historicism seized upon as its critical imperative.” Goode’s claim is that Greenblatt’s affective engagements are colored by an underlying restraint or reticence that manifests itself in New Historicism’s tendency to foreclose discussion about the emotional tenor of its own discursive practice. For all the attention given to the history of emotion, Goode pointedly notes that “the New Historicist critics’ desires, and the operations of their feelings more generally, never seemed to matter very much to them when it came to understanding and assessing the historicity of their own critical project.”¹⁵ What’s needed, in other words, is a second-order reflection on the emotional tenor of New Historicism’s discursive practices.

Unlike Goode, however, I do not attribute New Historicism’s tempered emotions to “the continued force of Victorian scientific history’s rejection of its feeling Romantic predecessor” (1). While Goode is surely correct to identify the nineteenth-century emergence of protocols dictating “the ideals of an impersonal, disinterested, and almost anaesthetized scientific impartiality towards the historical record,” I back away from
what he describes as a “chasm” separating the romantic deployment of historical feeling from the objectivity advocated by scientific-minded historians of the Victorian era (8).

Prior to the consolidation of a Victorian emphasis on historical impartiality, romantic writers were already charting the fall-off from the heights and depths of historical feeling into the minimal experience of emotion.¹⁶

**Melancholic historiography**

New Historicism’s encounter with the degree zero of affective experience is, I argue, an often overlooked facet of its melancholic structure of feeling. As a first step toward substantiating this claim, it is worth noting Liu’s assessment that “romantic New Historicism is primarily a form of elegy” (*LT* 163). In its pivot from mania to mourning, euphoria to despondency and back again, New Historicism swings between what Goodman describes more generally as the “compensatory and anti-compensatory poles that have marked elegiac writing at least the Renaissance, between the impulse to ‘find in loss a gain to match’ (Tennyson) and the antithetical movement which… resists turning loss into gain” (109).

New Historicism thus inhabits a problematic that has long defined the writing of history. As Michel de Certeau explains, modern historiography is a particularly “odd procedure that posits death, a breakage everywhere reiterated in discourse, and... yet denies loss by appropriating to the present the privilege of recapitulating the past as a form of knowledge. A labor of death and a labor against death.” On the one hand, historical discourse undertakes a “labor of death” by separating now from then, marking a “rupture between a past this is its object and a present that is the place of its practice,” as de Certeau puts it (5, 36). On the other hand, that breakage provides the occasion for a
compensatory “labor against death” wherein the historian seeks to generate knowledge about a past that is otherwise dead and gone. In effect, the producer of historical discourse practices what Tom Conley describes as the “arcane crafts of resurrection, animation, and even ventriloquism” knowing full well that it is impossible to make the past live again in the present.17 In effect, the writing of history is in conflict with itself. If the past comes back to life as a form of knowledge, de Certeau is quick to add that “history does not resuscitate anything” (47). The historian’s aspiration to assuage the loss of the past by generating compensatory knowledge is held in check by an awareness that the past is necessarily betrayed by its re-presentation (Goodman 109).

In other words, modern historiography is a melancholic writing practice that “yearns for what it cannot possess, and defines itself by its inability to approach its subject” (Fritzsche 65). Liu suggests as much with his comment that “history… is the perpetuation or retention of the process of loss,” implying that New Historicism probes irresolvable loss rather than attempt to work it through. The historical turn in contemporary criticism does not aim to recover past the past so much as dwell in the impossibility of that recovery. To the extent that this ethos relates to the project of a broader materialist historiography, Jameson comments that history “is not a text, for it is fundamentally non-narrative and nonrepresentational; what can be added, however, is the proviso that history is inaccessible to us except in textual form.”18 Jameson arrives at de Certeau’s melancholic conclusion that there is no way to access history except through a distortive textual medium. In short, modern historiography adopts a characteristically romantic melancholia by inquiring after subject matter that necessarily eludes its grasp.
Since there is not space here to chart the history of melancholy’s theorization from Burton to Benjamin, I rely on Thomas Pfau’s survey of that tradition in *Romantic Moods* for an account of what my dissertation terms the degree zero of melancholic emotion. There Pfau explains that “since the sixteenth century, melancholia has been characterized by profound despair over all representation fashioned by discursive understanding.” Melancholia is, in other words, a thoroughly rhetorical condition that relegates its impoverished emotions to the realm of the sign. In this respect, melancholia operates as a reflexive structure of feeling that underscores the derivative status of its emotional life. “Thus it unfolds,” according to Pfau, “as a recurrent, monotonous, indeed, serial reenactment of the *vanitas* or futility… of symbolic signification… [which] points back to its own emptiness as an overdetermined sign” (322). The melancholic signifies on the second-order emotions, has-been sentiments, and recycled feelings that comprise his or her affective experience. This “permanent insufficiency in the order of the signifier,” as Pfau notes, makes itself felt as fatigue, exhaustion, and even apathy (323, 326). These are the after-affects, if you will, of a consciousness that consigns itself to a “fundamentally metalingual stance” in which the emotions behave as rhetorical figures that precipitate their own undoing (325).

**John Keats’s “In drear nighted December”**

Even as Liu and others have sought to characterize New Historicism as “a mourning so existential as to be comparable to melancholia” (*LT* 164), they downplay the extent to which their critical practices are prone to a withdrawal of emotion. In other words, New Historicism’s drift toward the heights and depths of feeling tends to bypass what John Keats’s “In drear nighted December” (1817) memorably terms “the feel of not
to feel it.” There Keats identifies the paradoxical feeling of the failure of feeling that attends romanticism’s production of historical feeling. Coming late to a conversation between Wordsworth and Coleridge about the parameters of a melancholic yearning for an unrecoverable past, Keats does for his predecessors what I propose to do for New Historicist criticism: namely, locate the zero degree of emotion within a structure of feeling that privileges the heights and depths of emotion. By drawing attention to the rhetorical texture of the affectivity he inherits from Wordsworth, Keats’s poem serves as a touchstone for my own effort to bring New Historicism into dialogue with both a deconstructive reading practice as well as an emergent turn to affect.

While “In drear nighted December” is best known for its pronouncement about “the feel of not to feel it,” it is worth reading the line in context. As a whole, Keats’s short lyric admires an inanimate natural world that experiences temporal change without feeling a sense of loss. I quote the poem in full:

In drear nighted December,
   Too happy, happy tree,
Thy branches ne’er remember
   Their green felicity—
The north cannot undo them
With a sleety whistle through them,
Nor frozen thawings glue them
   From budding at the prime.

In drear nighted December,
   Too happy, happy brook,
Thy bubblings ne’er remember
   Apollo’s summer look;
But with a sweet forgetting
They stay their crystal fretting,
Never, never petting
   About the frozen time.

Ah! would ‘twere so with many
   A gentle girl and boy—
But were there ever any
Writh’d not of passed joy?
The feel of not to feel it,
When there is none to heal it,
Nor numbed sense to steel it,
Was never said in rhyme.\textsuperscript{20}

In its suggestion that inanimate nature feels emotion, the poem takes what John Ruskin subsequently termed the pathetic fallacy as its governing conceit.\textsuperscript{21} Specifically, the first two stanzas suggest that the natural world derives pleasure from “ne’er remember[ing]” its former joys. Even when a tree has been iced over with sleet, it remains “happy” to the extent that it cannot recall the “green felicity” once enjoyed when its branches were budding at the prime of spring; the inuring of feeling generates positive emotion. The paradox is encapsulated in the “frozen thawings” that cover the tree branches. Although the tree has its sense-memory “glued” shut by a layer of sleet, it can take comfort from the inability to feel its own suffering. In this regard, the tree’s bleak condition is thawed or softened, metaphorically speaking, by a second-order pleasure. Along similar lines, a brook’s entry into the “frozen time” of winter offers a qualified source of happiness insofar as the cold both literally and figuratively hardens the running water against the recollection of its “babblings” under “Apollo’s summer look.” The December weather would make the brook miserable if it were not for the fact that the freezing temperatures “stay [its] crystal fretting.” Once frozen solid, the brook no longer suffers the agitation or turmoil associated with its summer “babblings” and churnings; the winter makes the brook happy insofar as the weather brings a halt to nature’s former vexations as well as any present regret it might feel about its changed state. Ostensibly, Keats deploys the pathetic fallacy as a mechanism for locating the emotional life of inanimate nature, thereby bringing the natural world into the province of human experience.
Having said that, “In drear nighted December” immediately undercuts its comparison between the emotions that a tree or brook can experience and those sentiments of “passed joy” that afflict “many / A gentle girl and boy” – this despite the fact that Ruskin cites Keats as a notable practitioner of the pathetic fallacy (Ruskin 72).

“If Keats’s figures of speech have the apparent purpose of bridging a gap between the human and natural worlds,” as Jackson astutely observes, “the speaker evinces an equally strong degree of self-consciousness about both the fallaciousness and the pathos of this ‘pathetic fallacy’” (185). In effect, Keats ascribes emotion to inanimate nature only to define its affective state as a non-human disposition. Nature’s insensitivity to its former experiences provides a source of pleasure otherwise unavailable to humankind that is constitutionally unable to renounce its ability to feel.

So when Keats’s third stanza turns to consider the plight of “many / A gentle girl and boy” whose consciousness of temporal change precludes them from experiencing the blissful oblivion of a frozen winter landscape, he does so with a note of melancholic resignation. Sighing “ah! would ‘twere so,” Keats broods over the impossibility of inuring himself against the recollection of happier days. Along these lines, Jackson notes that “unlike the tree and brook, then, which conform without complaint to a natural order, the human memory alone lives to register and lament ‘passed joy’” (185). Keats hereby derives pathos from negating the premise that humankind can access the insentience found in the natural world. The pitch of Keats’s melancholy remains muted, however. Instead of bewailing “passed joy,” Keats wishes it were the case that when children reach the metaphorical “drear nighted December” of their lives, they will “ne’er remember” their former happiness. As I discuss in my fourth chapter, Keats uses prolepsis against
the power of recollection and memory. Taking the perspective of “many / A gentle girl and boy” as his point of departure, Keats looks ahead to the inevitability that their youthful bliss will fade. His fickle hope is that life’s future desolation will be so bleak as to blunt the capacity for sentimental reflection on their now “passed” youth.

To better understand the insentience that could save “many / A gentle girl and boy” from experiencing the loss that comes with the passage of time, Keats surveys what poets have “said in rhyme” about this condition. Jackson cites the poem Wordsworth eventually titled “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood” (first published in 1807) is a likely touchstone for Keats’s reflection on the experience of “passed joy.”²² In this vein, it is no accident that Sharon Cameron’s description of “In drear nighted December” as a “lament for human memory which records temporal loss without being able to reverse it” sounds like a description of a Wordsworth poem.²³ With his conclusion that “the feel of not to feel it… Was never said in rhyme,” Keats signals his interest in modulating the affective tenor of Wordsworth’s melancholic longing for an unrecoverable past towards its degree zero.

Consider the first stanza of the Intimations Ode, composed in 1802, whose melancholic recollection shifts between a compensatory and anti-compensatory posture:

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,  
The earth, and every common sight,  
To me did seem  
Appareled in celestial light,  
The glory and the freshness of a dream.  
It is not now as it hath been of yore;—  
Turn wheresoe’er I may,  
By night or day,  
The things which I have seen I now can see no more. (lines 1-9)²⁴
As Wordsworth keens over the loss of his ability to see with a child’s eyes, his poetry compensates by recalling the euphoria of living in a world “appareled in celestial light.” He yearns for experiences that cannot be re-presented, thereby elevating his youthful powers of receptivity to sublime heights. Conversely, Wordsworth implies that his present experience pales in comparison to the sensuous power of the past (“It is not now as it hath been of yore”). “I once thought this a Melancholist’s dream” is Keats’s 31 May 1819 remark to Sarah Jeffrey after citing later lines from the Intimations Ode, which assert that “nothing can bring back the hour / Of splendor in the grass, and of glory in the flower.”25 As part of his ongoing engagement with Wordsworth, Keats’s “In drear nighted December” zeroes in on the undercurrents of sublime insentience that subtend the melancholic’s regard for the past.

Towards this end, Keats clarifies the second-order status of Wordsworth’s lament for “passed joy.” Wordsworth’s fascination with the afterlife or remnants of former feelings is brought into focus by his 1802 preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, which asserts that poetry “takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.”26 For Keats, Wordsworth’s interest in the emotion evoked by a reflection on prior emotion differs in degree, though not in kind, from the primary or major passions of love or hate, for instance, that have been the canonical concern of philosophical discourse since Aristotle. As Rei Terada points out more generally, there is no end to the economy of pathos given that “emotions arise from others’ subsidence, from reflection on emotions, and from the very absence of any particular thing to feel.” While these minor states surely qualify as emotion, their entrance into what Terada terms the “recirculating infinity of feeling living on” entails a noticeable, albeit understated, waning of affect.27
Coleridge’s “Dejection: An Ode” is one place where Keats might have looked for help identifying the retrenchment of emotion that accompanies Wordsworthian melancholy. The poem was initially composed in response to an early draft of Wordsworth’s Intimations Ode, printed in close to its final form for the 4 October 1802 edition of the *Morning Post*, and slightly expanded for the 1817 publication of *Sibylline Leaves* – a volume that peaked Keats’s interest in Coleridge (Lau 72, 78-80, 105-7).

Coleridge’s second stanza opens with lines describing his dejection as

A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,
A stifled, drowsy, unimpassion’d grief,
Which finds no natural outlet, no relief,
In words, or sigh, or tear— (lines 21-24)

As his “genial spirit fails” (line 39), Coleridge finds that his primary expression of grief is shadowed by something akin to the feeling of the absence of feeling – a recycled emotion generated out of an inability to voice his sorrow. On the one hand, Coleridge struggles to convey his “stifled” pain that can “find no natural outlet, no relief, / In word, or sigh, or tear.” On the other hand, he sinks into speechlessness. His “void, dark, and drear” condition unfolds as a “drowsy” feeling that lacks the impetus to express itself. Coleridge’s thwarted desire to communicate mixes with the emptiness of his non-emotion. His ability to feel is thus held under erasure as “grief without a pang” or “unimpassioned grief”: respectively, an emotional state that lacks a telltale physiological or affective indication and an attenuated sorrow that relies on the negative prefix “un” to provide a counter-indication of its passion. Coleridge subsists in a “wan and heartless mood,” as he remarks in the next line (25): pallid, faded, sickly; his heart makes itself felt as the site of a deficient sensibility. While these second-hand emotions are no less emotional than any “word, or sigh, or tear” he might express outright, Coleridge’s
melancholic engagement with these paradoxically negative affects entails the waning of
his sorrow into the liminal space between feeling and non-feeling.

Keats’s “In drear knighted December” therefore had Coleridge’s “Dejection: An
Ode” to draw on as a recent touchstone for his investigation into the lowest threshold of
affectivity that underwrites Wordsworthian melancholy. Akin to Coleridge’s perplexed
grief, Keats’s paradoxical “feel of not to feel it” takes shape as a second-order emotion
that folds in on itself; his receptivity to feeling operates as a recursive structure that
generates emotion out of the waning of emotion. Following this circular logic, Terada
observes that “any apparent ebbing of pathos makes more as well as less pathos: the less
pathetic the end of pathos is, the more pathetic it is that it isn’t pathetic any more” (14).
If the supposed absence of emotion is affecting in its own right, as “In drear nighted
December” suggests, Keats’s emotions recede but never quite disappear altogether.

With his entrance into a world of recycled and re-circulating emotion, Keats turns
his attention to the minimal experience of emotion instead of gravitating toward the highs
and lows of Wordsworthian nostalgia. So unlike Wordsworth, whose melancholic regard
for the past acknowledges but overshadows the failure of feeling, Keats charts a
countervailing waning of affect towards, without ever reaching, the zero degree of
emotion. The dynamic is encapsulated in the equivocal grammar of Keats’s concluding
assertion that “The feel of not to feel it… Was never said in rhyme.” Setting aside the
intervening dependant clauses for a moment, these two lines respectively comprise the
subject and predicate of the poem’s last sentence. The difficulty lies in interpreting the
relationship between the two parts of the compound subject. The “of” can plausibly
function as either a subjective or an objective genitive. Which way does the possessive read? Is “not to feel it” possessed by, or in possession of, “the feel” Keats describes?

Reading the phrase in the objective genitive subsumes “not to feel it” under the category of feeling. The grammar of Keats’s famous line would then enact the recuperation of feeling in the moment of its near disappearance; “not to feel” becomes a kind of feeling. As Terada notes in another context, “feeling nothing is feeling nothing, a feeling like any other, not an anesthetic suppression” (86, original emphasis). The absence of feeling becomes a source of pathos. Conversely, it is possible to read Keats’s genitive in the subjective case. Doing so would subject “the feel” to “not to feel,” bringing feeling under the shadow of non-feeling. This negative spin manifests itself in Jackson’s assessment that Keats’s poem “effect[s] a broad and paradoxical extension of poetic feeling into the domain of its absence” (187). If “the feel of not to feel it” specifies the negativity of a non-emotion – a phenomenon Jackson aptly terms an “aestheticized anaesthetic” (184) – the genitive construction also serves as a mechanism for reviving that residual affective charge, as Terada rightly argues. While Keats’s grammar accommodates both readings, neither one is sufficient. The inconclusiveness of Keats’s formulation does not, however, render it meaningless. To the contrary, by rendering “the feel of not to feel it” as both a non-emotion and a source of pathos, Keats opens up Wordsworthian melancholy to the zero degree of emotion.

**The turn to affect**

I dwell on Keats’s poem as a point of comparison for evaluating the contemporary turn to affect. Within romantic studies, critics have brought various interpretive frameworks to bear on their treatment of affect, including theories of media and
mediation (Kevis Goodman’s *Georgic Modernity*, Mary Favret’s *War at a Distance*),
Heideggerian philosophy (Thomas Pfau’s *Romantic Moods*), deconstruction (Rei
Terada’s *Feeling in Theory*), medical science (Noel Jackson’s *Science and Sensation*),
and ethics (Jacques Khalip’s *Anonymous Life*). For my purposes, the differences between
these approaches are less important than what they share in common.

Although it may be a “problem,” as Brian Massumi observes, “that there is no
cultural-theoretical vocabulary specific to affect,” everyone in this cohort of critics agrees
that affect involves what Favret describes as “modes of response or apprehension that lie
outside of cognition per se.” Pfau takes this view when he characterizes affect as
“quasi-cognitive… it cannot be experience in the same ways as ordinary propositional
object knowledge” (*Romantic Moods* 13). In this respect, the field remains indebted to
Raymond Williams’ influential notion of a structure of feeling. Following Williams’
suggestion “that areas which I would call structures of feeling as often as not initially
form as a certain kind of disturbance, or unease, a particular type of tension,” critics tends
to emphasize the dissonance between feeling and thought, arguing that affective
experience is at odds with the conceptualization of ideas. Among the critics in direct
dialogue with Williams, Goodman examines what “lurks in the excesses that elude that
unit of Lockean currency, the ‘Ideas,’ in the failure of mastery that registers in a poem as
displeasure, discomfort, sensory and affective dissonance” (36). Even for those who do
not make use of Williams, the conclusion remains the same: affective experience is
unspecifiable, properly speaking. As the “substratum of conscious awareness and
representation,” Pfau explains that affect “resist[s] discernment, particularly when
attempts are made to positively, conspicuously fix its representational form” (10).
The elusiveness of affect has not, however, kept critics from discerning the distinctive signature it leaves on the lower reaches of emotion. For romanticists, the meaning of the term “affect” generally alludes to the minimal experience of emotion, which Goodman calls cognitive noise, Pfau theorizes as mood, Jackson designates the power of suggestion, Favret finds in romanticism’s fascination with the weather, Khalip locates in the hollowness of Moneta’s “wan face,” and I term – following Terada – the zero degree of emotion. To adapt Massumi’s discussion, critics find that the affective tenor of romanticism operates at a low “intensity” (26).

In this context, “the feel of not to feel it” is more than just a catchphrase for the contemporary critical fascination with the lowest threshold of affectivity. Rather, Keats’s formulation encapsulates my effort to both participate in and modify an emerging critical investigation into the turning or troping of affective experience that destabilizes the construct of subjectivity. To set the stage, critics have come to rely on a distinction between emotion and affect, in which the former requires a subject while the latter does not. “At the end of the day,” Sianne Ngai explains, critics differentiate the terms in order to “distinguish first-person from third-person feeling, and, by extension, feeling that is contained by an identity from feeling that is not.”32 Insisting on a rigorous distinction between these terms is, however, less important for my purposes than tracing the rhetorical instability of feelings – broadly construed – that cannot sustain the projection of a coherent “self.”

Importantly, the turn to affect in romantic studies is coextensive with a critique of romantic selfhood as a “projection of being that dubiously authorizes itself as it falls apart in the very act of authorization.”33 Jacques Khalip’s *Anonymous Life* is a leading voice
in efforts to discern the affect of impersonality: namely, that “reluctance of positive affirmation, which is not simply a negative revalorization of the unseen, the unspoken, the unheard, but precisely the anonymous as indiscernible” (22). The implication is that romanticism’s impoverished subjectivities undergo what I describe as a waning of affect: a retrenchment of emotion to the point of its near disappearance. In this vein, Khalip attends Keats’s “Fall of Hyperion: A Dream” (1819) and the hollowness of Moneta’s “wan face” (I.256) as an opportunity “to turn away from those humanizing gestures that seek to represent” the self (177). For my part, however, I do not join Khalip in gesturing towards the “profound negativity” of affective experience that resists all attempts at recuperation. If Khalip’s project is “profoundly antihumanistic” (174), mine takes a post-humanist bent in examining the afterlife of character-based and person-based emotions.

Notwithstanding the difference in emphasis, Anonymous Life informs my attention to the impersonality of romanticism’s affective engagements, which in the case of Keats’s “In drear nighted December,” makes itself felt as a “strategic reticence” (Khalip’s apt phrase) about who, exactly, experiences “the feel of not to feel it” (3). Phrased in the passive voice (“Was never said in rhyme”), the poem’s last sentence names a condition without attributing it to anyone in particular. Keats’s formulation reflects the force of his immediately preceding question: “But were there ever any / Writh’d not of passed joy?” The implied answer is no; there was never a poet who did not lament his or her former happiness. If Keats is unable to nominalize the subject who undergoes “the feel of not to feel it,” he likewise suggests that this affective state lacks objective confirmation. Hence his stipulation that the paradoxical feeling of the failure of feeling occurs “when there is none to heal it, / Nor numbed sense to steel it.” In effect,
Keats’s poem enters a liminal space in which there is neither a sentient subject to do the feeling nor external comfort from others. Keats responds to these epistemological uncertainties by claiming “say in rhyme what it says was never said,” as Terada puts it (14). In effect, the poem belies its pronouncement that “the feel of not to feel it… was never said in rhyme” by articulating exactly this sentiment in rhyming stanzas. As Jackson observes, “the very effort to ‘say’ this experience in rhyme would require the poet to eschew or otherwise move beyond the sentience that characterizes the ‘gentle girl and boy’” (186).

What would it mean, then, for Keats to put forward his poem as a piece of writing that “Writh’d not of passed joy?” Akin to what Derrida describes as the “impossible possibility” of uttering the phrase “I am dead” in both the present and past perfect tense, “the feel of not to feel it” qualifies as an impossibly possible sentiment. Common sense dictates that there is no way to comment on one’s own death from the perspective of a surviving spectator. Yet Keats’s poem points in this direction with the suggestion that its speaker shares in the insentient and inanimate condition of the frozen winter landscape. With its subtle pun on the similarity between poetic “rhyme” and the “rime” that covers the tree branches with sleet and encrusts the brook in ice, “In drear nighted December” identifies poetry as a vehicle for writing the degree zero of affective experience. Doing so, however, requires Keats’s speaker to articulate his rhyme from a posthumous perspective that chills the present and inures poetic feeling. So when Keats sighs that “Ah! would ‘twere so with many / A gentle girl and boy,” he yearns for the imminent insentience of the grave rather than the fullness of Wordsworthian recollection. The poem thus enters into a “posthumous existence,” as Keats puts it in a late letter; his
backwards-looking reflection on “passed joy” advances him into the afterlife of emotion: namely, an unstable state that wavers between the recirculation of feeling and its near disappearance (Letters II.359).

So while my reading of Keats’s “In drear nighted December,” and by extension my larger dissertation project, participates in a version of the contemporary turn to affect, I also challenge the consensus view that affective experience takes shape “in solution,” to borrow Raymond Williams’s favorite phrase, as an “embryonic phase” of consciousness that is only subsequently consolidated into a “fully articulate and defined exchange.” Williams’s notion of a “structure of feeling” is a touchstone for the view that the affective elements of consciousness constitute a “pre-emergent” formation “often more recognizable at a later stage, when they have been (as often happens) formalized, classified, and in many cases built into institutions and formations.”

Brian Massumi has updated Williams’s conclusion, albeit in different terms, with his influential characterization of affective experience as an “incipient intensity” that is only retroactively and reductively “dampened” down into words. By contrast, my dissertation examines the rhetorical after-affects, so to speak, of romantic historical consciousness. This is to say that my project locates the melancholic afterlife of historical feeling at the far end of a process of figural (de)construction. Both dissipated and reconstituted by the play of figuration, disfiguration, and refiguration, emotion exhibits the errancy of rhetorical figures.

**New Historicism’s intervallic moment**

Counterintuitive though it may seem, these dynamics are brought to the fore by a body of New Historicist criticism better known for exhibiting what Pfau terms an
“extreme form of affect, be it one of euphoria or despondency” ("Introduction" 9). With the surge of interest in affect studies, New Historicism’s practitioners have become increasingly aware that their critical heyday has begun to recede into the recent past. The movement’s sense of itself as a soon-to-be residual phenomenon is heightened by arguments – albeit contested ones – that position the turn to affect as a departure from prior critical methods. Favret, for one, underscores the “wayward power” of affect that “often eludes the usual models for organizing time such as linearity, punctuality, and periodicity; it eludes as well the usual models for organizing history” (11). Pfau likewise departs from standard chronology when he charts romanticism’s evolving mood from paranoia to trauma to melancholy. His claim is that “mood speaks – if only circumstantially – to the deep-structural situatedness of individuals within history as something never actually intelligible to them in fully coherent, timely, and definitive form” (Romantic Moods 7). For both critics, the turn to affect opens up alternative temporalities within proper historicist chronologies.

The pace of recent critical developments moves Liu to preface Romanticism, History, Historicism: Essays on an Orthodoxy with this melancholic reflection on the inevitability of change:

Facing one’s own physical mortality or that of one’s coevals is a hard thing. Facing the mortality of one’s intellectual moment is gentler, calling less for rage against the dying of the light than for a wry moue of self-assertion mixed with self-effacement. Finding himself the representative of a so-called orthodoxy that has begun to lose its institutional sway, Liu charts the retrenchment of his critical passions into what he subsequently terms an ironic “Cheshire Cat’s grin” (xv). Liu constructs a mask for himself as a way to countenance the inevitable passing of his critical endeavors. By
contorting his face into a “wry moue,” his meditation on the “mortality of one’s intellectual moment” invokes a familiar de Manian trope: “it is the figure of prosopopeia, the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter’s reply and confers upon it the power of speech.” For de Man, apostrophic address finds its complement in a prosopopoetic reply from beyond the grave. But who is the absent or deceased entity that Liu is addressing? Why none other than Liu himself. In effect, Liu’s “wry moue” serves as a death mask, if I may be so dramatic, for the critical “orthodoxy” that he had a hand in creating. In order to memorialize his critical moment, Liu must also gesture towards its absence. His is a gesture of “self-assertion mixed with self-effacement.”

Speaking on behalf of a “generation witnessing its own passing,” Liu’s sense of melancholy belatedness leads him to muse whether “perhaps at last I will rage against the dying of the light and, at least for a moment, free my face of the moue it must wear” (xviii). Tellingly, Liu mobilizes an identifiably emotion (rage) associated with his former critical stance only to anticipate the expiration of this passion. Notice the pivot from “at last” to “at least for a moment.” In the climactic moment when Liu would reanimate the motivating passion that originally inspired his critical endeavors, his emotion slips into a mask-like “moue,” silent and impassive. The facial expression isn’t so much an emotion as the remnants of his formerly sentimental façade. This is to say that his attenuated emotions are the after-affect of the rhetorical maneuvering that he uses to formulate his historical moment. The full extent of Liu’s impoverished emotions becomes apparent when he concludes with a meditation on the “original rage that lit the fuse of Romantic New Historicism.” “Can a similar rage/joy (the extreme antinomy behind my moue) be
communicated today to the new generations,” he asks (xix). In the process of trying to identify the legacy that New Historicism will leave for subsequent generations of critics, Liu encounters the evacuated sentiments that shadow his formerly polarized emotions.

By reading New Historicism’s critical passions as rhetorical figures that enact their self-cancellation, my dissertation routes its turn to affect through a reflection on the tension between New Historicism and deconstruction. In this respect, my dissertation pauses to consider the opportunities brought about by New Historicism’s aging, in the double sense of that term – both its consolidation as a discrete critical moment or age and its senescence. Having reached a new stage in the lifecycle of their defining intellectual moment, New Historicism’s practitioners find that old antipathies fade and previously overlooked registers of feeling open up. These perspectives are shunted aside, however, by the tendency to characterize the turn to affect as an advance beyond prior scholarship – a pattern of thought I critique in my first chapter. Case in point, Michael Hardt prefaces an essay collection on The Affective Turn with the forward-minded assessment that the trend “opens new avenues for study, casts previous work in a fresh light, and indicates novel possibilities.”41 Similar views about the inexorable march of critical innovation inform Liu’s melancholic acknowledgement that “the time has passed since the appearance of the first major New Historicist works and forums” (Preface xiii). Yet given the fascination with the elusive temporality of affective experience, it is surely a fine irony that the “turn to affect,” like the “linguistic turn” and the “cultural turn” before it, has come to designate the front edge of our contemporary critical moment. In other words, the affective turn functions as a period designation that belies ongoing efforts to disavow the logic of periodization. Despite intentions to the contrary, affect studies ends
up reproducing what Peter Osborne describes as the temporality of modernity, which “registers [its] contemporaneity in terms of a qualitatively new, self-transcending temporality which has the simultaneous effect of distancing the present from even that most recent past with which it is thus identified.”42 My objective is to submit critical discourse to the same hetero-chronic theory of time that scholars would identify in their object of study.

Towards this end, the project reflects back on New Historicism’s vexed relation with deconstruction in order to advance historicism’s structure of feeling into its affective afterlife. The tension between New Historicism and deconstruction is, of course, well known. Consider Marjorie Levinson’s early survey of criticism during the 1980s that sought to “position literary works within a historical domain.” In the process of defining New Historicism as an (re)emerging critical trend, Levinson launches a “direct assault” against the “present-mindedness” of what she metonymically labels “Yale” deconstruction.43 It is puzzling, however, that Levinson should insist on New Historicism’s break with the immediately preceding critical moment when her discussion is, in fact, acutely sensitive to the way that past and present mutually constitute one another.

After more than two decades, however, the dispute has worn thin. Critics are increasingly willing to recognize the continuity between deconstruction and New Historicism. The alignment emerges out of the growing awareness that these bodies of criticism share in a melancholic writing practice. Ian Baucom goes the furthest with this argument when he cites Greenblatt’s pronouncement that he “began with the desire to speak with the dead,” Jameson’s fascination with “the essential mystery of the past,
which, like Tiresias drinking the blood, is momentarily returned to life and warmth," and Derrida’s notion of the hauntological as contemporary articulations of “sensibility discourse, Smithian sentiment theory, the historical novel, and the Romantic politics of friendship.” For Baucom, eighteenth-century sentimentalism provides a formative articulation of the elegiac posture that all three critics adopt when they frame their engagement with the past as an encounter with the dead. In this respect, New Historicism and deconstruction converge in their joint articulation of what Baucom elsewhere terms a “theory of lost but nevertheless present knowledge, of imaginary but credible facts, of absent but inescapable, haunting events and scenes.” Theirs is a melancholy romanticism, in other words, which “cannot take it for granted that the loss of the object can be known,” as Liu puts it (LT 164).

While I have already discussed the melancholic tenor of New Historicism’s writing practices, it is worth observing that deconstruction has no less of a stake in the afterlife of sentimental discourse. Baucom rightly cites Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* as a text that draws out the elegiac registers of deconstructive criticism. Among the many places in *Specters of Marx* where this alignment becomes apparent, consider Derrida’s echo of Adam Smith’s sense that “we can never feel too much” sympathy for the dead. In Derrida’s “hauntological” reformulation, he asserts that “the more life there is, the graver the specter of the other becomes, the heavier its imposition. And the more the living have to answer for it. To answer for the dead, to respond to the dead. To correspond and have it out with obsessive haunting… Nothing is more serious and nothing is more true.” It is not just that the past lives on in the present. Rather, Derrida suggests that the present is not contemporary with itself. The dead simply won’t die. To
the extent that the living consequently find themselves answerable or responsible to a past that won’t stay buried, life is overburdened with the negative knowledge that “the time and space you ought to occupy has been usurped or appropriated, that you have no ground on which to stand, no word of your own to speak.” The larger point is the deconstruction and New Historicism find common ground in their shared encounter with the melancholic degree zero of emotion – that affective correlative for what Pfau describes as the “emptiness of an overdetermined sign” (*Romantic Moods* 322). By applying a deconstructive reading practice to New Historicism’s archive of primary and secondary texts, my dissertation contributes to the affective turn that is currently underway in romantic studies and across the discipline of English.

**Chapter summaries**

A word about the organization of the dissertation is here in order. Structurally, my first chapter lays the groundwork for the rest of the project by demonstrating 1) the historiographical stakes of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century imaginative writing, and 2) the complex formation of historical feeling that romanticism inherits from the eighteenth century. The subsequent chapters locate three key sites where the zero degree of emotion makes itself felt: the logic of institution, periodization and periodicity, and the rhetoric of prolepsis. By no means is this a definitive typology of romanticism’s encounter with the minimal experience of emotion. Rather, my discussion locates the topoi that have come in for sustained critical attention.

Even as the dissertation charts the waning of affect in Romantic-era poetry, fiction, *belles lettres*, and philosophy, the first three chapters also pursue a critique of the teleological reasoning that positions romanticism as the culmination of an emerging
desire to “bring the past close to us and allow us to experience its real and true being,” as Lukács puts it. Instead, I emphasize the complexity of romantic historiography for which the separation between past and present no less affecting than their proximity. By stressing the heterogeneity of historical feeling rather than its teleological development, the project would create a space for play within the structure of feeling that defines contemporary critical discourse.

My readings in romantic literature thus offer a critical vantage on the melancholic tenor of contemporary discursive practices. However, it is only my last chapter that uses “melancholia” and “degree zero affect” as key terms. This critical introduction has consequently taken a step beyond the first three chapters of the dissertation by sketching out the larger implications of the project.

Chapter One is titled “Fabulous Confusion”: The Eighteenth-Century Romance Revival and its Pleasures of Historical Distance. There I argue that the eighteenth-century romance revival is uniquely positioned to disrupt what David Hume had come to regard as a settled matter: namely, that the past’s evocative power is contingent on its distance from the present. If the accumulated variations in customs and manners restrict Hume’s ability to sympathize with the past, these limitations nevertheless give him the satisfaction of knowing that the Enlightenment has superseded its classical antecedents. Alternatively, Joseph Addison, Richard Hurd, Thomas Percy, and Thomas Warton depart from Hume’s way of thinking by calling upon romance as a vehicle for exploring their uneven relation to the remote past. As with James Macpherson and Hugh Blair’s rendering of the Celtic savage, Ossian, the contradictory pleasures of romance calibrate the divergence as well as the convergence between
chronologically distant cultures. My readings thus trace the complexity of historical feeling as it emerges from eighteenth-century imaginative writing.

My second chapter on The Ruin of Pathos reconsiders romanticism’s fascination with ruins, fallen monuments, and faded memorials. The conventional view is that romantic writers use these lieux de mémoire, or places of memory, to enliven the past with feeling. The evocating power of such sites does not, however, keep Romantic-era historicists from conceding that their emotions provide an ambiguous, fragile testament to the connection between institutions and the physical structures that house them. In this vein, the chapter examines the crumbling structures that Johann Gottfried von Herder and Edmund Burke use to thinking through the disjunction between acts of instituting or originating something new and the establishment of an institution that endures. These considerations introduce a corresponding shift in the makeup of feeling, as the second half of the chapter will argue. After tracing G.W.F. Hegel’s attention to the affective dimension of symbolic architecture, I turn to William Godwin’s “Essay on Sepulchres” (1809) and William Wordsworth’s “Michael” (1800) for their shared sense that historical feeling both upholds and undermines the task of historical memorialization. The disarticulation of emotion is, in other words, never far removed from attempts to elicit an affective charge from monuments and memorials. In brief, the chapter demonstrates that the ruin of pathos shadows the pathos of ruin.

Chapter Three, titled Walter Scott’s Poetic Prose and the Problem of Periodization, explores the historiographical ramifications of Scott’s experimentation with the genre of the historical novel, showing that Waverley (1814) destabilizes the notion of a literary-historical period as it emerges in Romantic-era writing. At least since
Lukács, critics have observed that Scott’s historical novel seeks to establish a felt connection with the bardic past. Yet no reading of Scott’s narrative can ignore the moment when Waverley declares “that the romance of his life had ended, and that its real history had now commenced,” effectively abandoning his poetic sensibility for a more prosaic existence. My account makes sense of the inconsistency by demonstrating that Scott inhabits the formative moment in Romanticism when the movement from poetry to prose is underway but not wholly operative. Along these lines, the chapter traces the inconclusive acts of aesthetic formalization that unhinge the period designations critics routinely use. As theorized by Schlegel and his respondents – most notably Walter Benjamin, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, and Jean-Luc Nancy – the genre of the romantic novel offers a provisional framework for examining the discursive and affective hybridity of Scott’s approach to the writing of history.

This fourth and final chapter investigates the phenomenon of Hyperion’s Impatience, an emotion that traces the rhetoric of prolepsis in its disfiguration. As I use the term, impatience describes the mix of vexation and exhaustion that comes of Hyperion’s inability to advance to some future point in which he can retrospectively reflect on his present downfall. To underscore the stakes of Keats’s discussion, I measure Hyperion’s distance from Adam Smith’s Theory of Moral Sentiment (1759). Unlike Smith, Keats exhibits a willingness to linger in a negatively capable state of rhetorical uncertainty rather than flee it for the assurances that emotion can provide. In the process, Keats’s aesthetic and affecting practice of history writing modulates toward the degree zero of emotion. Keats thus models a version of the turn to affect that is now ongoing in romantic studies and across the discipline of English. He does so, I argue, by exploring
the turning or troping that un-works the emotions. Yet my reading complicates this trend
by shifting the discussion of away from what Brian Massumi has characterized as the
“incipient intensity” of affective experience and towards an examination of the after-affects, so to speak, of Keats’s rhetoric.

A brief postscript, titled “Pompeii the Exhibit” at Discovery Times Square, argues that the evocative power of artifacts created by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE is predicated on a significant absence of emotion.

**Future directions**

Concerning the future directions of the project, my revision of the dissertation into a book manuscript will need to reshape the first chapter into a more targeted pre-history of what Keats comes to describe as “the feel of not to feel it.” As part of a book-length examination of the unsentimental strains of romantic historiography, the first chapter will reconsider the presumed opposition between eighteenth-century sentimentalism and the tenets of a neo-stoicism, which hold that universal benevolence requires the extirpation of the passions. Of particular interest is the eighteenth-century reception of a stoic philosophy that champions the attenuation of feeling as the basis for overcoming a narrowly self-interested historical perspective. Building on Ian Baucom’s contention that the neo-stoicism of Smith’s impartial spectator cannot help but encounter the melancholia of an impossible witness, I plan to investigate the exhaustion of sympathetic feeling that attends the emergence of romantic historical consciousness.

The project also needs to address the gendered status of romantic historiography. Concerning Kant’s high regard for the absence of affect as the most sublime affect of them all, for instance, de Man observe that “the interpretation [of this state] as a principle
of masculine virility, as pure macho of the German variety (whatever the word may be),
seems inevitable.” Conversely, critics interpret romanticism’s desire for an evocative
past as evidence that women writers were exerting greater influence over the field of
historiography. There is more to say, however, about the gender crossings that constitute
the production of historical discourse. Case in point, I would consider Anna Letitia
Barbauld’s “Eighteen Hundred and Eleven,” a poem whose entrance into the male-
dominated sphere of history writing generates significant controversy. In particular, my
discussion would focus on the stasis or stillness that accompanies the personified figure
of Fancy as she “wanders… down the lapse of years.” Identifying the motionless
“movement” of Barbauld’s queer figuration would be a first step toward assessing the
formation of gender at the zero degree of emotion.

Lastly, my discussion of Hyperion’s impatience leads me to reconsider a broader
constellation of minor emotions: among then, Shelley’s hope, Coleridge’s anxiety, and
Keats’s embarrassment. All these sites could offer opportunities to refine my account of
the intersection between and among the mathematical, linguistic, rhetorical, and
historiographical dimensions of degree zero affect.

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NOTES
All citations are given parenthetically after an initial footnote.

(Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 77, italics in the original.

1983), 53.


Jameson 284, ix. Peter Osborne’s picks up on this thread in *The Politics of Time* (London: Verso, 1995). There he observes that the temporality of modernity is defined, at least in part, by “a tendential elimination of the historical present itself, as the vanishing point of a perpetual transition between a constantly changing past and an as yet indeterminate future… that ‘now’ which is not so much a gap ‘in’ time as a gap ‘of’ time” (14). For Osborne, modernity’s historical present exists as an intervallic moment that dwindles to almost nothing, a gap of time whose near disappearance accommodates the ever-changing relation between past and future.


I would go so far as to suggest that the Victorian evacuation of historical feeling broadens the attention that the romantics gave to the unraveling of their emotional engagements.


22 Jackson 186; For a catalogue of Keats’s references to the Intimations Ode, see Beth Lau, Keats’s Reading of the Romantic Poets (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1991), 38-9, 44.

23 Sharon Cameron, Lyric Time (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1979), 216.


29 Cf. de Man’s comparable assessment of the genitive title Keats gives to “The Fall of Hyperion”: namely, that “there are elements in all texts that are by no means ungrammatical, but whose semantic function is not grammatically definable, neither in themselves nor in context.” For de Man, perplexity derives from an underlying figural instability that no amount of grammatical decoding can resolve. The Resistance to Theory (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986), 15-16.


35 Jackson makes this observation, citing Arden Reed’s “The Rimming Mariner and the Mariner Rimed,” Romantic Weather (Hanover, NH: UP of New England, 1983), 147-81, as a discussion of the best-known instance of this pun (186).


37 Massumi 25, 30; Favret picks up on this thread with her observation that “affect is identifiable only as it enters (is ‘dampened’ down into) what [Massumi] calls linearization, causal explanation, or accounts of before and after: the chronology of clock time” (80).

38 Liu identifies a new generation of “post-New Historicists” who are “profoundly in common with the New Historicism they criticize” (162). Prominent among these, Kevin Goodman argues that romanticism’s engagement with the “noise” of history eludes “positivist or history-of-ideas analysis while at the same time cannot exactly be defined as a simple absence (elision, denial, or other term of negation used powerfully by the “new historicist” method)” (36).


42 Osborne 14; Cf. Favret, who would undermine the temporality of modernity by letting “in such strangers from another time, hazarding a confusion of proper historical placement, introducing anachronism. [My writing] does so not – or not simply – to shake off the constraints of historicism, with its emphasis on periodizing, nor to generate topical relevance… Instead, this study participates in anachronism in order to be true to its topic” (30).


Chapter One
“Fabulous Confusion”: The Eighteenth-Century Romance Revival and its Pleasures of Historical Distance

“There is no necessity, that a generous action, barely mentioned in an old history or remote gazette, should communicate any strong feelings of applause and admiration. Virtue, placed at such a distance, is like a fixed star, which, though to the eye of reason it may appear as luminous as the sun in his meridian, is so infinitely removed as to affect the senses, neither with light nor heat. Bring this virtue nearer, by our acquaintance or connexion with the persons, or even by an eloquent recital of the case; our hearts are immediately caught, our sympathy enlivened, and our cool approbation converted into the warmest sentiments of friendship and regard.”

- David Hume, An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals (1751)

“History, when it treats of remote and dark ages, is seldom very instructive. The beginnings of society, in every country, are involved in fabulous confusion; and though they were not, they would furnish few events worth recording. But, in every period of society, human manners are a curious spectacle; and the most natural pictures of ancient manners are exhibited in the ancient poems of nations.”


If historical distance dulls the moral sentiments, as Hume asserts, what accounts for Hugh Blair’s fascination with the “fabulous confusion” and “curious spectacle” of poems by a third-century Celtic bard? Of the two positions, Hume’s remark is critically recognizable while Blair’s is less so. Mark Salber Phillips and Mike Goode cite Hume’s observation as evidence of an Enlightenment distinction between sentimental and historical instruction. To borrow Goode’s succinct encapsulation, Hume insists that “ethics follows epistemology.” Virtues “barely mentioned in an old history or remote gazette” cannot evoke the “applause and admiration” they deserve because his lack of knowledge impedes an appropriately sentimental response. History’s evocative power depends on the distance between past and present. Phillips’s reading of the same passage underscores this point: “Virtue ‘placed at such a distance’ is like a star; rationally (‘to the eye of reason’) we may know that the start is a sun like our own, but it ‘is so infinitely removed’ that our senses feel neither its light nor its heat.”

Hume’s remedy for the cool

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indifference of philosophical rationality is to “bring this virtue nearer” as a way to enliven his sympathies and warm his sentiment for past actions. The premise is that proximity breeds affective immediacy while distance brings detachment.

The Scottish Enlightenment rhetorician, Hugh Blair, recommends James Macpherson’s disputed translation of the poems of Ossian for altogether different reasons. Where the vagaries of the remote past deter Hume’s sympathies, Blair suggests that historical uncertainty may have its own distinctive allure. As knowledge about the “remote and dark ages” dwindles, the past recedes into fable or myth; it becomes fabulous in the etymological sense of the term: a narrative (from the Latin, *fabula*) whose mythic or legendary qualities are unverifiable. At the dawn of recorded time, the historical record is so spotty that it is impossible to confirm that the events even took place. Yet for all this, Blair’s “fabulous confusion” implies that the “beginnings of society” strike him as marvelous and astonishing. So while the ancient customs and manners exhibited in Ossian’s poetry makes for a “curious spectacle” that leaves Blair wanting to know more, he is also “curious” in the other sense of the term: namely, excited, interested, or surprised by novelty or peculiarity (*OED*). Although Blair readily admits that “history, when it treats of remote and dark ages, is seldom very instructive,” he nevertheless points beyond the task of inculcating moral feeling toward what I can only describe as an aesthetic register of historical understanding.

Blair’s remarks consequently reorient the vector of Hume’s sentimental regard for the past. Whereas historical distance dissipates Hume’s moral feeling, those same distance-effects provoke an affective response from Blair. Likewise, Blair does not share Hume’s need to cultivate a sense of immediacy or intimacy with the past. While Hume
concludes that cold rationality cannot make him feel for the virtues of the far-distant past, Blair points out that the treatment of “remote and dark ages” nevertheless has its pleasures. Blair finds that cognitive distantiation – to use Phillips’s term for the effect of “putting things at a distance” – is affecting in its own right. If anything, Hume’s preference for immediacy downplays the allure of an uncertain past.

Blair’s observation unsettles critical characterizations about the parameters and trajectory of Enlightenment historiography in two key ways. First, Blair complicates our understanding of the Enlightenment view that historical distance impedes an affective response. For one, Goode cites “thinkers like Hume, Blair, Ferguson, and Smith” to support his claim that “history’s power to offer sentimental instruction… remains contingent on knowing history in other ways” (840). Goode’s focus on the epistemology of Enlightenment morality risks overlooking the affectivity of Blair’s response to the unreliability of pre-historic times.

Second, Blair’s statement indicates that there is room to reconsider Phillips’s conclusion that Enlightenment historiography prepares the way for romanticism’s effort to bring the past close. As Phillips puts it, “the sentimentalism of Hume and his contemporaries contributed a great deal to the growing taste for immediacy in historical writing, but in encouraging this tendency, these writers unintentionally fostered a new climate of taste by which their own works would come to be judged as excessively cold and detached.” Phillips is right to take issue with longstanding characterizations that emphasize the speculative and abstract qualities of Enlightenment thought at the expense of acknowledging that “the historiography of the eighteenth century was deeply interested in engaging the reader’s emotions to promote sympathy with the events and
experiences of other times” (“Relocating Inwardness” 444, 437). Yet in his eagerness to demonstrate the “pre-romantic” dimension of Enlightenment historiography, Phillips imports romantic assumptions about the desirability of affective immediacy into an earlier moment. Just because romantic writers “cultivated a view of historical understanding that stressed the need for empathetic absorption in the materials of the past” does not mean that eighteenth-century writing practices were inclined towards the production of a “historical vocabulary that was soaked in metaphors of presence and proximity.” To the contrary, Blair’s attention to the “fabulous confusion” and “curious spectacle” of Ossian’s poetry opens up the formative moment when the formation of historical feeling had not yet aligned along what Phillips describes as a continuum that runs from proximity/ affective immediacy, at one end, to distance/ detachment, on the other (“Distance” 132, 126). Instead, I explore the complexity of eighteenth-century historiography that deems the separation between past and present no less affecting than their proximity. In short, my account emphasizes multiplicity of historical feeling rather than its teleological development.

Blair’s interest in the “fabulous” and “curious,” along with terms like “chimerical,” “fantastic,” “extravagant,” and “unnatural,” are keywords in discussions surrounding the eighteenth-century romance revival and I turn there to investigate the multiformity of historical feeling. This intellectual and cultural movement explored the equivocal pleasures of reading poetry, ballads, and chronicles from what might be described as the long Middle Ages. As Julie Carlson notes, the eighteenth-century romance revival sought to “place the origins of history in romance and initially sees romance as equal to history in its depiction of the manners of the past.” The genres of
romance and history writing emerge out of a shared investigation of the most distant and least known epochs of cultural history. Walter Scott’s 1824 “Essay on Romance” effectively summarizes this line of thinking with the assertion that “romance and real history have the same common origin.”

The eighteenth-century romance revival is uniquely positioned to disrupt a premise that David Hume considered a settled matter: namely, that the past’s evocative power is contingent on its distance from the present. The accumulated variations in customs and manners restrict Hume’s historiographical commitments. By extension, the inability to feel for history gives Hume the satisfaction of knowing that the Enlightenment has superseded its antecedents. Following Joseph Addison’s lead, antiquarians such as Richard Hurd, Thomas Percy, and Thomas Warton depart from Hume’s way of thinking by using romance as a vehicle for exploring their uneven relation to the remote past. As with James Macpherson and Hugh Blair’s rendering of the Celtic savage, Ossian, the contradictory pleasures of romance explore the divergence as well as the convergence between chronologically disparate cultures. Reading romance thus provides an opportunity to reconsider the affective parameters that define eighteenth-century conceptualizations of manners and society.

As a whole, the chapter establishes two foundational points that inform the rest of the dissertation. The first is the claim that imaginative writing of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has a stake in the writing of history. If “eighteenth-century readers distinguished history as a genre – or, more precisely, a group of overlapping and related genres,” as Phillips rightly notes, it follows that history of historiography is negotiated between and among poetry, prose fiction, and belles lettres. I put my focus there instead
of examining explicitly “historical” forms such Hume’s *History of England* (1754-62) or Carlyle’s *The French Revolution* (1837). While there is no shortage of critical discussion about the historiographical implications of eighteenth-century novel writing, biography, news, and literary history, I go a step further in examining the historical significance that writers attribute to romance, a genre that disavows any claim to historical verifiability and epistemological legitimacy.

The chapter’s second objective is to establish the heterogeneity of historical feeling that New Historicist criticism has since reorganized into an elegiac formation. Before my next three chapters go on to examine the retrenchment of emotion that New Historicist criticism tends to overlook, it is worth identifying the variable sentiments that define the Enlightenment’s regard for the past. This is to say that New Historicist criticism has unnecessarily foreclosed the diversity of affective experience that romantic historiography inherits from the eighteenth century. Observing the complexity of historical pleasure prepares the way for my focus on the minimal experience of emotion that New Historicism overlooks with its emphasis on the heights and depths of emotion.

“*History informs us of nothing new or strange*”

The opening sentence of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* is one of the more memorable responses to an assertion that Hume makes in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748): “It is universally acknowledged that there is a great uniformity among the actions of men, in all nations and ages, and that human nature remains still the same, in its principles and operations” (83). For all the incredulity expressed by Austen and countless critics since about the apparently anti-historical bent of the premise that
human nature is invariable, Hume had his own misgivings about the parameters of a universal history.\textsuperscript{11}

Hume’s concerns come to the fore with his delineation of “history” as a genre. As Phillips points out, eighteenth-century “history was a kind of middle terms against which a whole range of genres positioned themselves. Reciprocally, this positioning meant that for eighteenth-century historians the challenge of new tasks was likely to be registered as a problem of genre.”\textsuperscript{12} In just this way, Hume’s comments about the invariability of human nature are bound up with an effort to define the genre of history: “Mankind are so much the same, in all times and places, that history informs us of nothing new or strange in this particular,” he adds a moment later (83). Hume’s negative formulation positions “history” in opposition to the “new or strange,” with the unstated implication that historical subject matter should more properly concern the ordinary and familiar.

Hume’s rejection of the new and the strange offers an initial indication that these are loaded terms. Their critical lineage derives at least in part from Joseph Addison’s “Pleasures of the Imagination” (1712), which as Ronald Paulson remarks, took the “new” and the “strange” as its central categories.\textsuperscript{13} In particular, Addison associates these qualities with the genre of romance. For Addison, the romancer “amuse[s] his Imagination with the Strangeness and Novelty of the Persons who are represented in them.”\textsuperscript{14} Romance becomes an explicit issue as Hume continues:

Should a traveler, returning from a far country, bring us an account of men, wholly different from any with whom we were ever acquainted… we should immediately, from these circumstances, detect the falsehood, and prove him a liar, with the same certainty as if he had stuffed his narration with stories of centaurs and dragons, miracles and prodigies. (84)
Hume’s explanation works by analogy. The idea that human character should differ significantly in far away places or long ago times is just as false to nature as the fantastic creatures that populate romance. Hume makes a generic intervention by distinguishing romance from history as contrary bodies of writing. Yet his insistence on the opposition between romance and history – “history informs us of nothing new or strange” – raises the untoward possibility that the genres may also reside in uncomfortable proximity. The first step towards evaluating this possibility is to examine the bearing that romance has on eighteenth-century historiography.

**An unbefitting comparison**

As unlikely as the pairing may now seem, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century readers recognized the resemblance between romance and historical writing. It has been well documented that booksellers of this period frequently included romance under the category of “true history.” This is not to say that grouping romance together with novels, biographies, travel narratives, and historical tracts was unobjectionable. As Michael McKeon notes, the overlap raised questions about “how to tell the truth in narrative.”\(^\text{15}\) In these discussions, “romance” often functioned as a pejorative term. The principal charge against the genre was that it eschews any foundation in the existing world, an assessment codified by the mid-seventeenth-century coinage of the adjective “romantic.”\(^\text{16}\)

Thomas Hobbes’s 1650 letter to the romancer, William Davenant, encapsulates the objections against the genre of romance:

There are some that are not pleased with fiction, unless it be bold, not only to exceed the work, but also the possibility of nature: they would have impenetrable Armors, inchanted Castes, invulnerable bodies, Iron Men, flying Horses, and a thousand other such things, which are easily feigned by them that dare.\(^\text{17}\)
Romance turns the imagination towards subject matter that “exceed[s]… the possibilities of nature.” The genre’s imaginative freedom is limited only by the “feigned” appearances that a writer dares to invent. At issue is Aristotle’s endorsement of writing that exceeds nature yet remains believable: “a convincing impossibility is preferable to an unconvincing possibility.”18 Hobbes response to Davenant reigns in such tendencies: “Beyond the actual works of nature a Poet may now go; but beyond the conceived possibility of nature, never” (62). As Paulson remarks in another context, romance clouds the difference between “credulity and curiosity, between delusion and the exposure of delusion” (68), a confusion that Hobbes strives to avoid.

Samuel Johnson’s *Rambler* No. 4 (1750) expands this line of criticism with his well-known objections to “the comedy of romance,” as he terms it:

> Why this wild strain of imagination found reception so long, in polite and learned ages, it is not easy to conceive; but we cannot wonder that, while readers could be procured, the authors were willing to continue it: for when a man had by practice some fluency of language, he had no further care than to retire to his closet, let loose his invention, and heat his mind with incredibilities; a book was thus produced without fear of criticism, without the toil of study, without knowledge of nature, or acquaintance with life.19

The romancer’s “wild strain of the imagination” only requires isolation as the condition for setting the invention free to generate “incredibilities” that have no basis in experience. The romancer is, in effect, beyond criticism or study because such writing abjures any “knowledge of nature or acquaintance with life.”

While Hobbes, Johnson, and others continue to find fault with romance for its epistemological unreliability, the genre began to take a new shape vis-à-vis the practice of history writing. By and large, critics make the case that the “rise of the novel” realigns the relationship between romance and history. The realist novel does so by promoting
“fiction” as its own kind of writing. In contrast to romance, which was scorned for its improbability, the novel made it possible to value “strangeness” and “newness” apart from their dubious purchase on empirical truth (McKeon 47). In this vein, Catherine Gallagher argues that novel’s “character came into fictional existence most fully only when he or she was developed as nobody in particular, that is, the particularities had to be fully specified in order to ensure the felt fictionality of the character.” In endowing its fiction with the appearance of fact, realism takes up an ambiguous position between history and romance. The novel “could claim historicity and even approach empiricism by opposing poetry and romance,” writes Everett Zimmerman, “and at the same time it could weaken history’s claim to empirical truth by exposing the weaknesses in history’s claims to exceed the truths of literature.” By implication, the realist novel responds to Hume’s interest in “the regular springs of human action and behavior” by clothing these relatively abstract philosophical principles in verisimilitude. On the one hand, the novel then presents itself as more probable and therefore more believable than romance. On the other, the novelist relies on the category of fiction to license a more convincing fiction than the historical record might warrant.

For all discussion about realism’s ability to finesse its historicity, critics tend to regard romance as something of a blunt instrument for historical inquiry. In these discussions, romance is consigned to the far side of the fact/fiction divide and contrary to history. If the eighteenth-century novel shares a border with history, as Zimmerman asserts, romance is displaced to the hinterlands (44). Less thought has been given to the possibility that romance makes a claim on Enlightenment historiography from afar, as it
were. If the novel engages with history writing on the basis of the partial affinity between these genres, romance does so in counterpoint.

“Pleasures of the imagination”

Joseph Addison’s “Pleasures of the Imagination,” which was published in *The Spectator* (No. 411-421), marks a turning point in the reconsideration of romance. His innovation is to commend the genre’s anti-mimetic tendencies that readers otherwise disparage. Addison hereby sets the stage for an approach to literary criticism that positions romance as a historiographical form – albeit an unlikely one.

In contrast to Hobbes and later Johnson, who marginalize romance for its waywardness, Addison’s theorization of the imagination makes a place for the genre. Following John Locke’s influential assertion that ideas derive from two sources, external sensation and internal reflection, Addison distinguishes between the primary and secondary imagination. The former “entirely proceed[s] from such Objects as are before our Eyes” while the latter concerns the “Visions of Things that are either Absent or Fictitious” (No. 411, 3: 537). Within this framework, romance stretches an increasingly tenuous connection between the ideas of the secondary imagination and the world of sense: “There is a kind of Writing, wherein the Poet quite loses sight of Nature, and entertains his Reader's Imagination with the Characters and Actions of such Persons as have many of them no Existence... This Mr. Dryden calls the Fairy Way of Writing.” Romance is a genre that makes a point of “los[ing] sight of Nature,” and in doing so entertains the reader with ideas that exist only in the imagination. In this regard, romance is particularly difficult “because [the romancer] has no Pattern to follow in it, and must work altogether out of his own Invention” (No. 419, 3: 570).
Addison’s innovation is to re-characterize the flaws of romance’s wayward mimesis as a source of pleasure for the writer, if not always for the reader. To do so, he recommends romance on the basis of the very categories – the new and the strange – that Hume would keep separate from his delineation of historical writing:

> Every thing that is new or uncommon raises a Pleasure in the Imagination, because it fills the Soul with an agreeable Surprise, gratifies its Curiosity, and gives it an Idea of which it was not before possest. We are, indeed, so often conversant with one Set of Objects, and tired out with so many repeated Shows of the same Things, that whatever is new or uncommon contributes a little to vary Human Life, and to divert our Minds, for a while, with the Strangeness of its Appearance. (No. 412, 3: 541)

Addison recommends the novel and strange as imaginative effects that diverts the mind from its familiar conception of things and ideas. Addison’s classical exemplar is Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, in which “we are walking on enchanted Ground, and see nothing but Scenes of Magick lying round us.” But rather than diminish the appeal of his writing, Ovid’s refusal to imitate the natural world makes novelty and strangeness their own reward. “He every where entertains us,” Addison writes, “with something we never saw before, and shows Monster after Monster” (No. 417, 3: 564, 566).

However, the romancer’s anti-mimeticism raises a thorny question: how, exactly, does a writer come up with ideas that are beyond the realm of possibility? Addison responds with a cultural analysis of the romancer’s thought process:

> There is a very odd Turn of Thought required for this sort of Writing, and it is impossible for a Poet to succeed in it, who has not a particular Cast of Fancy, and an Imagination naturally fruitful and superstitious. Besides this, he ought to be very well versed in Legends and Fables, antiquated Romances, and the Traditions of Nurses and old Women, that he may fall in with our natural Prejudices, and humour those Notions which we have imbibed in our Infancy. (No. 419, 3: 570)

Addison’s analysis performs a version of the romancer’s “very odd Turn of Thought.” Consider, for instance, the paradoxical requirement that the romance writer must have a
“particular cast of Fancy” in order to write without any preconceived pattern of thought. Furthermore, in “quite los[ing] sight of nature,” the romancer’s Fancy seems particularly unsuited to adopt any “particular cast” that constrains his ideas in a rigid form. To add that the romance writer must have a “naturally fruitful” imagination is a similarly incongruous gesture. His metaphorical claim that the romancer’s imagination can bear fruit in the material and concrete world of “natural” objects reads as an empty promise. After all, Addison designates romance as a vehicle for the secondary pleasures of the imagination, whose representations pointedly conflict with the world as it exists.

The discrepancies in Addison’s description raise a series of questions: if the romancer possesses “a particular Cast of Fancy” that is implicitly innate and intuitive, why must such a person be “well versed” in the conventions of “Legends and Fables, antiquated Romances, and the Traditions of Nurses and Old Women?” Similarly, how can the materials of romance be both idiosyncratic and inculcated, simultaneously “work[ing] altogether out of his own Invention” and “fall[ing] in with our natural Prejudices?” In what way does the romancer take those naïve preconceptions “imbibed in our Infancy” and “humor” them, in the sense of “comply with” but also “condescend to?” Collectively, Addison brings the inconsistency of romance to a head: the romancer’s tendency to “quite lose sight of Nature” reveals its acculturation in the moment of achieving imaginative free reign.

Addison’s account of romance and its pleasures of the imagination thus find unlooked for cultural significance in the genre’s anti-mimetic tendencies. Under Addison’s auspices, literary historians such as Richard Hurd, Thomas Percy, and Thomas Warton answer back to the critique that romance is false to the possibilities of nature and
reason. Not only did they co-opt this charge as an endorsement for the genre’s historical insightfulness, but they also demonstrated that its chronicle of customs and manners facilitates an affective engagement with a vaguely known past.

**Historical and poetic truth**

Richard Hurd’s *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762) aim to demystify romance by substantiating the genre’s historical *bona fides*: “Nothing in human nature, my dear friend, is without its reasons. The modes and fashions of different times may appear, at first sight, fantastic and unaccountable. But they, who look nearly into them, discover some latent cause of their production.”

Using Addison as his guide, Hurd suggests that the “fantastic and unaccountable” aspects of romance are best explained in light of the “modes and fashions of different times.” The gesture effectively repurposes Addison’s cultural reading of romance for the task of historical explanation.

Yet as Hurd is quick to note, it is not immediately clear that historical analysis makes romance any more agreeable. If romance is indeed the product of a barbarous age, a “fastidious modern” reader might be inclined to “resolve [it] at once into the usual caprice and absurdity of barbarians” and have done with such writing (2). Historical distance, in other words, serves as an excuse for dismissing romance. Hurd hesitates over such an attitude: “Shall we then condemn [the romancers] unheard, or will it not be fair to let them have the telling of their own story?” Rather than dismiss romance as nothing more than childish nonsense, Hurd takes the genre seriously for the story it has to tell about the past. “The time of its birth, the situation of the barbarians, amongst whom it arose, must be considered: their wants, designs and policies must be explored: We must enquire when, and where, and how it came to pass that the western world became
familiarized to this *Prodigy* [i.e. romance], which we now start at” (3). The implication is that romance becomes comprehensible through its historical institutions.

Hurd’s reading begins by identifying chivalry as the guiding historical framework for his interpretation. Specifically, the military ethos of eleventh-century feudalism serves as the basis for establishing a “remarkable correspondency between the manners of the old heroic times… and those which are represented to us in the books of modern knight-errantry” (26). For Hurd, romance provides an unparalleled level of insight into chivalric culture if the modern reader is willing to interpret the figurative correspondence between text and its context. Case in point, Hurd casts the romantic portrayal of giants and savages as metaphors for “oppressive feudal Lords” and their dependants: “These Giants were oppressive feudal Lords, and every Lord was to be met with, like the Giant, in his stronghold, or castle. Their dependants of a lower form… were the Savages of Romance. The greater Lord was called a Giant, for his power; the less, a Savage for his brutality” (28). Attending to the figurative logic that makes a feudal Lord into a giant leads Hurd to suggest that romance is not so far-fetched. His aim is a vindication of the genre: “The romancers, we see, took no great liberty with these respectable personages, when they called the one a Giant, and the other a Savage” (30). Hurd avails himself of history in order to decipher the seemingly inexplicable ideas found in romance.

Hurd is not of one mind, however, about the historically-minded reading practice that enables him to naturalize the subject matter of romance. Returning to the commonplace objection “that the poets, who are liars by professions, expect to have their lies believed,” Hurd shifts his argument in the concluding letters (89). Whereas he previously sought a historical explanation of romance, he reverses himself with an appeal
to the pleasures of romance. Contrary to his prior thrust, Hurd concludes that the “Faery way of writing,” as Dryden and Addison describe it, affords “little account” of “philosophical or historical truth.” Instead “all [romance] allows us to look for, is poetical truth… To speak the philosophic language of Mr. Hobbes, It is something much beyond the actual bounds, and only within the conceived possibility of nature” (91-2).

Instead of continuing to reconcile romance with its historical moment, Hurd shifts towards Addison’s view the genre’s departure from the existing world is its greatest merit. In effect, Hurd turns Hobbes’s censure of romance into an endorsement.

But how does Hurd reconcile his dual approach? On the one hand, he gives a historically specific account of the romancer’s imagination. On the other hand, Hurd detaches poetic from historical truth in order to give romance the prerogative to stretch, if not break, its mimetic responsibilities. Hurd twines these strands together as follows:

The Gothic manners of Chivalry, as springing out of the feudal system, were as singular, as that system itself: So that, when that political constitution vanished out of Europe, the manners that belonged to it were no longer seen or understood. There was no example of any such manners remaining on the face of the Earth: And as they never did subsist but once, and are never likely to subsist again, people would be led of course to think and speak of them, as romantic and unnatural. The consequence of which was a total contempt and rejection of them. (109-10)

Despite Hurd’s dubious claim that chivalry is historically unique, the impulse behind his premise is telling. Hurd supplies a historical rationale for why the romantic imagination seems so inexplicable to modern readers. To wit, feudal manners represent a “singular” instance in history, “never likely to subsist again.” Because no example of chivalry “remains on the face of the Earth,” contemporary readers cannot trace their way from the romancer’s imagination to the “known and experienced course of affairs in the world,” as Hurd describes it in an earlier letter (93). The implication is that only readers living
within feudal culture could properly understand romance. The romantic thus becomes synonymous with the unnatural because the idiosyncrasies of history have obscured the cultural ground upon which the romancer’s imagination once stood.

Nevertheless, in acknowledging that romance’s cultural inscription is unavailable to contemporary readers, Hurd reestablishes the imagination’s serviceability for a past age. The historical variation in customs and manners that makes romance into an object of “total contempt and rejection” also supplies a counter-indication that the romancer’s imagination was once felicitous. The contemporary disregard for romance has its corollary in a historical formation (i.e. chivalry) which found the romantic imagination entirely legible. While the passage of time may erase the cultural subtext of romance, Hurd holds out the possibility that the genre was fully intelligible in its native culture. Addison’s pleasures of the imagination thus reappear from within Hurd’s account as a postulation about the past.

This is not to say that the “poetical truth” of romance, like the institution of chivalry, is a thing of the past. Rather, Hurd identifies a distinctively modern response that parallels the delight an eleventh-century reader might take:

A legend, a tale, a tradition, a rumor, a superstition; in short, any thing is enough to be the basis of [the romancer’s] air-form’d visions. Does any capable reader trouble himself about the truth, or even the credibility of their fancies? Alas, no; he is best pleased when he is made to conceive (he minds not by which magic) the existence of such things as his reason tells him did not, and were never likely to, exist. (89)

The contemporary reader has a blatant disregard for the cultural materials that comprise the “air-form’d visions” of romance. Though Hurd finds this lack of historical awareness lamentable (“Alas, no”), such a narrow view has its advantages. Foremost among these is the ability to take pleasure in things that “did not, and were never likely to, exist.” Yet
the recuperative gesture only goes so far. The “poetical truth” of historical and contemporary readings may be comparable, but they are by no means compatible.

Historical distance creates a rift that makes past and present into wholly foreign cultures. On finding that he cannot hear romance’s “poetical truth” from across the centuries, Hurd resigns himself to appreciating its modern equivalent. Though he strives to comprehend “historical truth” in its own terms, the genre’s historical pleasures remain inscrutable.

The history of romantic historiography

Thomas Percy’s Reliques of Ancient English Poetry (1765) directs its attention to the divergence between the present (mis)understanding of romance and its meaning for prior epochs. His innovation is to account for romance as a type of historical writing that marks the passage of time as well as romancer’s place in it. The genre thus enables him to trace contours of history that otherwise go unobserved.

Percy’s “Essay on the Ancient Metrical Romances” focuses on the poetry and song of “barbarous nations” as the “first rudiments of history.” These materials perform a historical task “whose business it was to record the victories of their warriors, and the genealogies of their Princes, in a kind of popular songs, which were committed to memory, and delivered down from one Reciter to another.” 25 According to Percy, bardic poetry was composed for the purpose of disseminating knowledge about the past.

Taking the genre’s historical function as his starting place, Percy charts the dissolution of romance’s historiographical function:

After letters began to prevail, and history assumed a more stable form, by being committed to plain simple prose; these songs of the Scalds [or bards] began to be more amusing than useful. And in proportion, as it became their business chiefly to entertain and delight, they gave more and more into embellishment, and set off their recitals with such marvelous fictions as were calculated to captivate gross and ignorant minds. Thus began stories of adventures with giants and dragons,
and witches and enchanters, and all the monstrous extravagances of wild imagination unguided by judgment, and uncorrected by art. (III: ii-iii)

In offering “a more stable form” for recording events, writing displaces the ancient bards from their role as oral historians. With the spread of literacy or “letters,” the relative reliability of writing left the romancer’s oral performance free to “be more amusing than useful,” with the result that romance gradually “gave more and more into embellishment.” The implication is that Percy reads the bard’s emerging interest in “monstrous extravagances of wild imagination” – and his implicit lapse as a historian – as a phenomenon that takes place over a broad swath of time. Romance is therefore historical not because it refers to precisely dated events, but because the evolution of the genre indicates an unfolding historical process.

Even as romance became increasingly fantastic, the genre retained a vestige of historical truth, to say nothing of its historiographical significance:

It was a long time before [the bards] thought of delivering a set of personages and adventures wholly feigned. Of the great multitude of romantic tales still preserved in the libraries of the North, most of them are supposed to have had some foundation in truth; and the more ancient they are, the more they are believed to be connected with true history. (III: v)

Following Addison’s and Hurd’s defenses, Percy would dispel the association of romance with falsity. He advances this position by suggesting that there was never a clean break between the romancer and the historian – notwithstanding Hume’s insistence to the contrary. Rather, the legacy of romance’s historiographical bent colored its increasingly fanciful characterizations. Percy’s consequent insight is that romance’s “connection with true history” varies with the passage of time. The resulting narrative sketches the gradual transformation of romance across time.
In conceptualizing romance as both the object and agent of his inquiries, Percy plots a historical narrative:

It was not probably till after the historian and the bard had been long disunited, that the latter ventured at pure fiction. At length, when their business was no longer to instruct or inform, but merely to amuse, it was no longer needful for them to adhere to truth… Yet… the minstrels still retain so much of their original institution, as frequently to make true events the subject of their songs. (III: v)

The preponderance of temporal indications – till after, long, at length, no longer, yet, still, original, frequently – underscores Percy’s interest in the changing function of romance. Where the bard had previously sought to “instruct or inform,” his subsequent amusements were not rigidly adherent to the standards of historical truth. Along these lines, Percy emphasizes the genre’s loosening grasp of historical truth as its salient historical feature. By arguing that the historical significance of romance inheres in its modulation toward “pure fiction,” Percy extends Hurd’s interest in reading the genre as a historiographical form.

“Yet the reader is transported”

Thomas Warton’s Observations on the Fairy Queen of Spenser, initially published in 1754 and expanded for a 1762 edition, works in tandem with Hurd’s and Percy’s analyses to make the pleasures of romance historically meaningful. As Hurd conceives of it, romance facilitates inquiry into past customs and manner. Yet he also finds it difficult to appreciate the genre as its earliest readers did. According to Percy’s diagnosis, the genre’s historical evolution changes the way readers respond to it. Warton expands on this insight by proposing that the affective dimension of romance not only fosters an awareness of historical distance, but also enacts a historical transport.
Warton shares Percy’s interest in substantiating the genre of romance by putting it on a historical footing. As Warton remarks, romances “preserve many curious historical facts, and throw considerable light on the nature of the feudal system. They are the pictures of ancient usages and customs; and represent the manners, genius, and character of our ancestors.” Reading Spenserian romance makes Warton “curious” about “feudal system” and its seemingly foreign customs and manners. His interpretive task is to make romance understandable as a historical artifact created by and for a culture that does not share his modern sensibilities.26

On the face of things, Warton’s preferred strategy for reading romance entails abridging the distance between past and present. Along these lines, he asserts that the genre’s pleasures are transportable across time: “Much of the pleasure that Spenser experienced in composing the *Faery Queen*, must, in some measure, be shared by his commentator; and the critic, on this occasion may speak in the words, and with the rapture, of the poet” (II: 269). In contrast to Hurd, who accepts the irreconcilable differences between past and present versions of the “poetical truth” found in romance, Warton claims that he can share in the pleasures of the past. As Warton notes at the outset of his *Observations*, there is “something which more powerfully attracts us” to romance: namely, an affective power that “engages the affections of the heart, rather than the cold approbations of the head.” In Warton’s concise formulation, “if the critic is not satisfied, yet the reader is transported” (I: 16). While he acknowledges that romance does not conform to the dictates of contemporary critical standards, he nevertheless maintains that he is transported back in time by the affections that he shares with the romancer. The
critical dissatisfaction that comes of finding past works unsuitable for present tastes is offset by the commensurate pleasure of making a historical leap into the past.

Communing with Spenser is not, however, Warton’s sole focus. His interest in facilitating the modern reader’s affective engagement with chivalric romance is balanced against a countervailing attention to the pleasures of contemplating a remote past. Consider Warton’s description of his historical approach to literary criticism: “In reading the works of a poet who lived in a remote age, it is necessary that we should look upon the customs and manners which prevailed in that age. We should endeavor to place ourselves in the writer’s situation and circumstances” (II: 87). While Warton’s directive to “place ourselves in the writer’s situation” may sound like a tactic for accentuating the reader’s closeness with the romancer, the remark moves him to underscore the distance between past and present, not their proximity. For Warton, establishing a felt relation to the past counteracts the tendency to judge a “remote age” by present standards. The aim is to consider the past on its own terms, separate and apart from present perspectives:

Hence we shall become better enabled to discover, how [the romancer’s] turn of thinking, and manner of composing, were influenced by familiar appearances and established objects, which are utterly different from those with which we are presently surrounded. For want of this caution, too many readers view the knights and damsels, the tournaments and enchantments, of Spenser, with modern eyes; never considering that the encounters of chivalry subsisted in our author’s age. (II: 87-8)

Interpreting romance requires an acknowledgement that past writers do not see the world with “modern eyes.” The implication is that the reader must disassociate from the “familiar appearances and established objects… with which we are presently surrounded.” Failing that, the modern interpreter risks imposing the present onto the past. To avoid an anachronistic reading practice Warton stresses the fundamental
differences separating past from present. For all Warton’s interest in drawing the past closer, he makes a point of insisting on what Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero describe more generally as an alteritist “belief in the absoluteness of cultural and/or historical difference.”

Combined, Warton makes the point that temporal proximity is no less affecting than separation. The latter view comes through in his positive assessment that the discontinuity between past and present enhances, rather than detracts from, the appeal that Spenserian romance has for its latter-day readers:

> Above all, such are their Terrible Graces of magic and enchantment, so magnificently marvelous are their fictions and fablings, that they contribute, in a wonderful degree, to rouse and invigorate all the powers of the imagination: to store the fancy with those sublime and alarming images, which true poetry delights to display. (II: 268)

As with Hurd and Percy, Warton finds romance affecting exactly because the subject matter is historically remote. Romance has the ability “to rouse and invigorate all the powers of the imagination” in the modern readers who finds that their interaction with a foreign time burnishes the fictitious or fabulous nature of the genre. In effect, he argues that romance can be both historically remote and imaginatively interesting.

In total, Warton develops two very different strategies for exploring the historiographical dimension of romance. On the one hand, he seeks to collapse the distance between past and present; on the other, he emphasizes their separation. These conflicting approaches inform Warton’s complex claim that a properly historical reading should “transport” the pleasures of romance across time. If Warton’s interest in the abridgement of historical distance moves towards a characteristically romantic effort to make the past evocative, as Phillips and others have argues, his discussion also suggests
that the pleasure of reading romance derives from cognitive distanitation, or the effect of putting things at a distance. His heterogeneous approach indicates a formative moment when the formation of historical feeling had not yet aligned along what Phillips describes as a continuum that runs from proximity/affective immediacy, at one end, to distance/detachment, on the other.

“Must we throw aside the pictures of our ancestors because of their ruffs and farthingales?”

The eighteenth-century romance revival takes its point of departure from David Hume’s premise that feeling varies by distance. Hurd, Percy, and Warton find that bringing the romantic past close is just as gratifying as emphasizing their remoteness from the historical subject matter of pre-modern poetry, ballads, and chronicles. By contrast, Hume argues that the past’s evocating power is contingent on its degree of separation from the present. The greater the distance between past and present, the more difficult it is to sustain a felt connection between them.

In a discussion “Of contiguity, and distance in space and time,” Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40) takes it as self-evident that “every thing contiguous to us, either in space or time, should be conceived with a peculiar force and vivacity, and excel every other object, in its influence on the imagination.” As a corollary, Hume explains that objects “become still fainter and more obscure” as they are removed in either space or time. Comprehending distance is a problem for Hume insofar as “the imagination can never totally forget the points of space and time, in which we are existent; but receives such frequent advertisements of them from the passions and senses, that however it may turn its attention to foreign and remote objects, it is necessitated every moment to reflect
on the present.” 29 An engagement with “foreign and remote objects” is difficult given that the self is continually reminded of its location in the here and now.

The effort to consider “objects distant from ourselves” – as the genre of romance sets out to do – undertakes a precarious gambit. As Hume’s *Treatise* goes on to explain, “we are oblig’d not only to reach [a distant object] at first by passing thro’ all the intermediate space betwixt ourselves and the object, but also to renew our progress every moment; being every moment recall’d to the consideration of ourselves and our present situation” (428). The task of establishing a chain of connection between now and then, here and there is constantly interrupted by a forced reflection on “our present situation.” The more distant an object either in space or time, the greater the likelihood that the intervening chain of causal inferences will break. In contemplating distant objects, the imagination runs the risk that more immediate sensations will expose its ideas as experientially unfounded.

Temporal distance poses a particularly acute challenge. Unlike space, which “consists of a number of co-existent parts, dispos’d in a certain order, and capable of being at once present to the sight or feeling… time or succession… never presents to us more than one at once; nor is it possible for any two of them [i.e. points in time] ever to be co-existent.” While space is understood to coexist such that “a West-Indian merchant will tell you that he is not without concern about what passes in Jamaica,” time is experienced successively and does not repeat (429). The difference is crucial. Whereas it is possible to have a concern for distant places, historical inquiry struggles to conceptualize a temporally disjunct series of events.
In describing the apparent inaccessibility of the past, Hume’s “Of the Standard of Taste” (1757) articulates the prevailing historiographical quandary that Hurd, Percy, and Warton strive to negotiate in their readings of romance. The essay’s objective is to find “a rule by which the various sentiments of men may be reconciled.” Standing in the way are “two sources of variation” that resist his “endeavor to fix a standard of taste”: “The one is the different humors of particular men; the other, the particular manners and opinions of our age and country” (149). Just as it is difficult for someone to separate themselves from their distinctive predilections, the “manners and opinions of our age and country” similarly prejudice judgments of taste. The latter obstacle suggests that historical difference makes romance less accessible to some eighteenth-century readers.

Romance revivalists rework Hume’s reasoning that an attachment to present cultural norms inhibits an appreciation for historical texts: “We are more pleased, in the course of our readings, with pictures and characters that resemble objects which are found in our own age and country, than with those which describe a different set of customs” (150-1). Rather than dwelling on a remote and unfamiliar past with Hurd, Percy, and Warton, Hume gravitates towards those moments from history that resemble present “pictures and characters.” Conversely, his gratification gives way to dissatisfaction with unfamiliar customs and manners that do not correspond to those “found in our own age and country.”

If Hume acknowledges his tendency to treat past cultures as confirmation of his own perspective, Hume also recognizes the need to account for historical difference:

The poet’s monuments more durable than brass, must fall to the ground like common brick or clay, were men to make no allowance for the continual revolutions of manners and customs, and would admit nothing but what was
suitable to the prevailing fashion. Must we throw aside the pictures of our ancestors, because of their ruffs and farthingales? (151)

Hume finds it necessary to allow for cultural variation over time. Failure to do so would nullify Horace’s claim to a poetic immortality “more durable than brass.” In the face of eroding respect for classical precedents, Hume recommends understanding if not acceptance. While Hume readily admits that a taste for “ruffs and farthingales” may not have currency in his own moment, he hesitates to censure particular works without first examining the cultural norms under which they were valued. As Hurd, Percy, and Warton seek to do for the readers of romance, Hume tempers his views with the awareness that his judgments are skewed toward those works that suit the present.

Hume’s analysis helps explain why his contemporaries might have had difficulty with romance. The issue is that judgments of taste are dependent on a person’s point of view: “Every work of art, in order to produce its due effect on the mind, must be surveyed in a certain point of view, and cannot be fully relished by persons whose situation, real or imaginary, is not conformable to that which is required by the performance” (145). A work internalizes historical norms that subsequent viewers may be unwilling or unable to embrace. The romance revivalist of the mid eighteenth century confront the similarly daunting task of making romance accessible for readers, who are reluctant to disassociate themselves from contemporary customs and manners.

Hume’s Treatise pays special attention to the affective ramifications of just this kind of present-mindedness:

Now ‘tis evident, that those sentiments, whence-ever they are deriv’d, must vary according to the distance or contiguity of the objects; nor can I feel the same lively pleasure from the virtues of a person, who liv’d in Greece two thousand years ago, that I feel from the virtues of a familiar friend and acquaintance. (581)
Feeling varies by distance. Greek morality cannot evoke the same “lively pleasure” that a virtuous contemporary might elicit. Hume’s engagement with the ancients cannot match the affective involvement he can have with a friend, because historical distance inhibits the production of moral sentiments.

Hume’s conclusion is that he can never wholly correct for the way that distance shapes his affective response to the past: “Our servant, if diligent and faithful, may excite stronger sentiments of love and kindness than Marcus Brutus, as represented in history; but we say not upon that account, that the former character is more laudable than the latter.” While Hume knows that Marcus Brutus’s moral character is superior to that of his servant, this recognition does not make Hume to feel any more strongly about the historical figure. His affective response resists the dictates of morality.

The redefinition of pleasure

As quoted above, Hume’s key observation is that “we are more pleased, in the course of our reading, with pictures and characters that resemble objects which are found in our own age and country” (“Of the Standard of Taste” 150-1). The past is pleasing to the extent that it resembles the present, just as historical difference is dissatisfying in its failure to affirm prevailing customs and manners. The implication is that texts from the past become historical when they no longer suit present-day sensibilities. But why is pleasure germane for Hume’s historiographical thinking?

Answering this question requires a broader account of the ongoing efforts to refine the appetites. A point of departure for this civilizing process is Hobbes’ Leviathan (1651), which argues that the passions have their foundation in pleasure and pain. In a discussion “Of the Interior of Voluntary Motions; commonly called the Passions,”
Hobbes states that “Pleasure therefore, (or Delight,) is the appearance, or sense of Good; and Molestation or Displeasure, the appearance, or sense of Evil. And consequently, all Appetite, Desire, and Love, is accompanied with some Delight more or less; and all Hatred, and Aversion, with more or less Displeasure or Offense.”³⁴ In a war-torn state of nature, in which it is “every man against every man,” the balance between pleasure and pain is negatively skewed (88). As Roy Porter explains, the “dread of death was the main motivation for the creation of society, morality, law and all other human institutions. [Hobbes’] was a bleak hedonism, concerned less with fulfillment than with the avoidance of pain.”³⁵ Living in “continual fear, and danger of violent death,” as Hobbes famously points out, “the life of man [is] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (89). The rudiments of society emerge as a way to protect against the dangers of continual warfare.

The doggerel verses of Bernard Mandeville’s *The Grumbling Hive: or, Knaves Turn’d Honest* (1705) along with his accompanying prose commentary, *The Fable of the Bees: or Private Vices, Public Benefits* (1714), follow Hobbes in arguing that the vicious appetites constitute the basis for society. Mandeville critiques the moralists who recommend virtue and morality as a social good. By Porter’s reading, Mandeville’s contrasting argument is that “all supposedly disinterested morality was veiled self-seeking, all trumpeted altruism [was] disguised hedonism. Behind every action and institution lay unremitting selfishness, an insatiable itch for gratification” (4). Whether in the form of greed or vanity, excessive luxury or debauchery, Mandeville claims that vice makes it possible to achieve social cohesion, cultural refinement, and national greatness:

Thus Vice nursed Ingenuity,
Which join’d with Time and Industry,
Had carry’d Life’s Conveniences,
Its real Pleasures, Comforts, Ease,
Mandeville’s views were contentious for their attack on established Christian morality as well as for his assertion that the bold-face pursuit of vice, rather than the inculcation of nobler aspirations, was responsible for creating prosperity.  

While there was widespread resistance to Hobbes’s and Mandeville’s arguments about the hedonistic underpinnings of society, the eighteenth-century discourse of taste largely incorporated their premises in an attempt to socialize pleasure. The usage of the word “taste” is indicative of this shift. Whereas the so-called lower senses of taste and smell were associated with bodily appetites, signifying what Hobbes described as the “Desire of Food, namely Hunger and Thirst,” taste also began to take on metaphorical connotations (38). Denise Gigante remarks that “by the eighteenth-century, physicality provided access to cognitive dimensions of human experience, such as epistemology, morality, aesthetic pleasures and pains; the umbrella term for this new mode of embodied cognition was taste.” The bodily appetites were increasingly linked to norms of civility and refinement, such that Addison famously recommends “serving up” his urbane Spectator papers with the morning tea as the hallmark of a “well regulated family” (No. 10, 1: 44-5). By bringing physical pleasure under the guidance of emerging codes of refinement, “taste became,” as Gigante points out, “the most vivid strand of a complex civilizing process in which individuals were taught to regulate themselves, and their motivating appetites, from within.”  

As the discourse of taste redefines the appetites, pleasure gained newfound standing as a rationale for commercial exchange. By Porter’s analysis, Adam Smith’s
*Wealth of Nations* (1776) sets out the assertion “that the selfish behavior of individual producers and consumers, if pursued in accordance with the competitive laws of the free market, would result in the common good – thanks to the invisible hand” (15). In the face of persistent questions about whether self-interested individuals will work towards civic-minded ends, the pursuit of pleasure offered the sanguine possibility that “the affluence of individuals would enhance the wealth of nations, and that such prosperity automatically wove webs of interpersonal connections that strengthened, rather than divided, society” (17).

Commercial self-interest took on positive connotations whereas it had previously been grouped among the selfish vices. The shift is attributable, in part, to the way that commerce rebalances the passions. As Albert Hirschman notes, “one set of passions, hitherto known variously as greed, avarice, or love of lucre, could be usefully employed to oppose and bridle such other passions as ambitions, lust for power, or sexual lust.”39 In other words, the countervailing structure of the passions – by which love opposes hate, benevolence opposes covetousness, etc. – were redistributed in order to facilitate the pursuit of commercial gain. As Hirschman observes, “once money-making [i.e. avarice] wore the label of ‘interests’ and reentered in this disguise the competition with the other passions, it was suddenly acclaimed and even given the task of holding back those passions that had long been thought to be much less reprehensible” (41-2). In the convergence of the passions and the interests, Smith and other eighteenth-century thinkers reclaim the virtue of pursuing commercial self-interest from Mandeville’s characterization of these activities as a vice.
As a result, commerce and the passions entered into a mutually defining relationship: commercial interest opened up new avenues for tasteful and refined pleasures, just as good taste fostered the sociability on which commercial exchange relied. As Montesquieu writes in *The Spirit of the Laws*, “it is an almost a general rule that everywhere there are gentle mores, there is commerce and that everywhere there is commerce, there are gentle mores.” As Montesquieu suggests with the phrase, *doux commerce*, commerce and manners have a moderating influence on each other. On the one hand, polite and urbane pursuits (reading, theater, connoisseurship, etc.) produced the shared social norms necessary to facilitate the commercial exchange between self-interested individuals. On the other hand, commercial activity produced the wealth and the leisure necessary for the pursuit of more temperate pleasures.

More broadly, the twinning of the commercial interests with emerging norms of politeness served as the mark of cultural advancement. The flourishing of the arts not only signaled that commerce was thriving, but also confirmed that commerce was having a salutary influence on the cultivation of good taste. Out of this dynamic came a growing awareness that customs and manners were undergoing changes that made eighteenth-century Britain historically distinct. The ability to draw demarcations between past and present had strategic value for Hume and his contemporaries given their growing conviction that classical Greek and Roman writers had diminishing relevance for a so-called enlightened age. While eighteenth-century humanists “elevated the classics to a universal timeless status and made them modern,” as Joseph Levine comments, “some of them began to chip away insidiously at the props that underlay that view of the ancient
 They began to perceive anomalies in the old authors, and something of their strangeness – and so set them at a distance” (*Battle of the Books* 2).

One way that the erosion of classical authority took place was through the redeployment of pleasure. As noted above, Hume remarks that “I [cannot] feel the same lively pleasure from the virtues of a person, who liv’d in Greece two thousand years ago, that I feel from the virtues of a familiar friend and acquaintance” (*Treatise* 581). Hume’s feeling for the ancient Greeks pales in comparison to the pleasure he takes in the conduct of a “familiar friend and acquaintance.” In contrast to the present, which is more readily available as an object of pleasure, the accumulated variations in customs and manners make the past into a foreign culture.

Nevertheless, pleasure is a highly unstable means of separating modern commercial society from its precursors. As Porter explains, “the eighteenth century gave its blessing to the pursuits of pleasure, but it was able to do this precisely because it redefined the nature of the pleasures it was desirable to pursue… promot[ing] civilized hedonism within the values of rational self-interest in a capitalist system” (18). While the eighteenth-century reconfiguration of pleasure helped inculcate new standards of taste and refinement, its “civilized hedonism” always contained the risk of over-refinement, excess, and degeneracy. “Though in theory the pleasures of the imagination provoked by the arts were supposed to be different from the pleasures derived from sexual desire, economic acquisition or social distinction, in practice it was extremely difficult to disassociate them from cupidity, greed, and vanity, the giddy pleasures associated with fashionable life in every European city,” as John Brewer observes.41
Hume’s “Of Refinement in the Arts” (1752), initially published under the title “Of Luxury,” addresses the persistent concern that *doux commerce*, or the softening and polishing of tastes, may degenerate into excessive over-refinement. Hume confronts the unstable connotation of pleasure in his discussion of luxury: “Luxury is a word of uncertain signification, and may be taken in a good as well as in a bad sense. In general it means great refinement in the gratification of the senses.”42 The *OED* corroborates Hume’s assessment by noting that while “luxury” tends to signify “vicious indulgence” in the Romance languages, eighteenth-century writers began to supplement this connotation with a notion of luxury as “refined and intense enjoyment.” Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger have this to say about the eighteenth-century meaning of luxury:

> On the one hand, Enlightenment culture adapted itself to luxury as a positive social force, viewing it with confidence as an instrument (and indication) of the progress of civilization. On the other hand, it feared luxury as a debilitating and corrosive social evil, clinging to classical critiques of excessive indulgence and wanton profligacy, urban chaos and plebian idleness.43

While the cultivation of a taste for luxury goods corroborated Enlightenment claims to cultural progress, there were persistent questions about what kind of objects should be produced and consumed, how, and by whom. As Hume makes clear, good taste hinges on, and comes unhinged by, the gratification of the senses. Luxury is ambiguous because its pleasures connote new heights of cultivation as well as the sensuousness and carnal vices that were never wholly abjured. In essence, pleasure troubles the way that commercial interests (greed, avarice, etc.) have redirected the passions.

Hume’s “Of Refinement in the Arts” thus reads as an extended attempt to distinguish polite enjoyment from the more compromising indulgences of luxury. Setting out to prove “that the ages of refinement are both the happiest and the most virtuous,”
Hume describes a positive cycle: “In times when industry and the arts flourish, men are kept in perpetual occupation, and enjoy, as their reward, the occupation itself, as well as those pleasures which are the fruit of their labor” (168). Not only is labor its own reward, but its “perpetual occupation” makes pleasure all the more enjoyable. The concern, however, is that the symbiotic relationship between commerce and the arts has a limit: “The more men refine upon pleasure, the less will they indulge in excesses of any kind; because nothing is more destructive to true pleasure than such excesses” (170). Hume’s statement verges on tautology. In order to justify why the refinement of pleasure is contrary to excessive indulgence, Hume simply reiterates the claim that he sets out to prove: namely, “true pleasure” is anathema to immoderation. Hume’s circular logic shows just how hard it is to say decisively whether pleasure will remain constructive as so-called good taste comes to prefer increasingly fine luxuries.

Rehashing his claims that “refinement on the pleasures and conveniences of life has no natural tendency to beget veniality and corruption,” Hume emphasizes that the man of commerce is – by definition – loathe to waste money on profligacy. “Riches are valuable at all times, and to all men; because they always purchase pleasures, such as men are accustomed to and desire” (173). Individuals cannot afford to indulge in pleasure lest they deplete their riches. Conversely, pleasure becomes indispensable because its refined gratification has become the measure of wealth accumulation. In the final analysis, nothing could be finer than living to work and working to live.

Hume’s elaboration of the counter-example – “what we call vicious luxury” – clarifies pleasure’s commercial dimension: “No gratification, however sensual, can of itself be esteemed vicious. A gratification is only vicious when it engrosses all a man’s
expense, and leaves no ability for such acts of duty and generosity as are required by his situation and fortune” (176). The sensuous delights of luxury are morally deficient only when their enjoyment comes at the expense of an individual’s existing responsibilities. Luxury remains well-mannered in balancing enjoyment against social obligation.

Nevertheless, the specter of “vicious luxury” raises the persistent concern that the virtuous relationship between commerce and the arts may be equally vicious and virtuous. Hume is willing to tolerate this possibility, even going so far as to accept Mandeville’s contention that “vice is advantageous to the public,” so long as it holds true that “two opposite vices in a state may be more advantageous than either of them alone” (177). Yet for all Hume’s assurances that the passions counteract each other, their countervailing structure only holds for so long. Hume’s logic comes undone as the love of gain stimulates commerce to pursue increasingly refined tastes. Refinement ultimately reaches a tipping point when cultural advancement becomes recidivistic.

Hume looks to the study of history, in particular, as an opportunity to chart the progress of society as well as its dissolution. “What [is] more agreeable entertainment to the mind,” Hume asks in “Of the Study of History” (1741), “than to be transported into the remotest ages of the world, and to observe human society, in its infancy, making the first faint essays towards the arts and sciences?” In keeping with Hume’s desire to abbreviate historical distance, he conceptualizes history writing as a vehicle for transporting him back in time. Hume’ historical window onto the advent of society provides him with a starting point for his progressive narrative: “To see the policy of government, and the civility of conversation refining by degrees, and everything which is ornamental to human life advancing towards its perfection.” 44 Hume’s interest in the
gradual improvement of government and the arts derives from his ideology of progress that identifies Europe as a modern ideal.

Yet it is noteworthy that the “agreeable entertainment” of history also derives from Hume’s examination of civilization’s decline. In studying the past, Hume “remark[s] the rise, progress, declension, and final extinction of the most flourishing empires: The virtues, which contributed to their greatness, and the vices, which drew on their ruin.” History takes an uneven course as the regression of society follows from its advancement. Such oscillation presents a “spectacle” unlike any other, in which ages “pass, as it were, in review before us” (566). As it turns out, Hume’s prospect on the vacillating pattern of history is a feature of his cultural sophistication. If so, the unexpected implication is that – by his own admission – the cultural “declension” of his age is imminent.

Hume achieves this Janus-faced perspective by interacting with the past at an intermediate distance. On the one hand, Hume differentiates himself from the man of commerce, who is so narrow-minded that “he is more apt to consider the character of men [from history], as they have relation to his interests, than as they stand in themselves” (567-8). On the other hand, Hume distinguishes his perspective from that of the philosopher, whose “general abstract view… leaves the mind so cold and unmoved, that the sentiments of nature have no room to play” (568). Both viewpoints have their limitations. While the man of commerce makes the past unduly present by requiring that it intersect with his own immediate concerns, the philosopher relates to history at an exaggerated distance, as if it had little bearing on him.
Hume’s “Of the Study of History” finesses the issue of historical distance by attempting to split the difference between overweening interest and unfeeling indifference: “The writers of history, as well as the readers, are sufficiently interested in the characters and events, to have a lively sentiment of blame or praise; and, at the same time, have no particular interest or concern to pervert their judgment.” Hume recommends approaching history with “sufficient interest” but “no particular interest.” His complex perspective derives from his attempt to hold history in the middle ground. So rather than bring the past close or put it at a distance, Hume suggests that the historian explores the space “betwixt these extremes,” as he puts it (568). So Mark Phillips is right to recognize that the Hume and others were actively reworking the norms of historical distance to achieve a balance between the “desire to figure the past as close or present and (in the more normal sense of distance) the opposing impulse to seek detachment and removal” (Society and Sentiment 27). Yet Phillips goes a step too far in suggesting that Enlightenment historiography points towards a growing taste for immediacy in historical writing. Rather, my reading identifies a formative moment in the formation of historical feeling when mid eighteenth-century writers sought the pleasures of historical distances in equal measure with the allure of affective immediacy.

**Macpherson’s Ossian**

To balance out Phillips’s claim that eighteenth-century historiography was deeply invested in bringing the past close as a strategy for making it affectively engaging, my analysis identifies the genre of romance as a key site where writers explore the pleasures of their distance from a remote past. With the critical endorsement of Hugh Blair and others, James Macpherson found just such an occasion in the poems of Ossian, whom he
represents as a third-century Highland bard. Amid the “fabulous confusion” and “curious spectacle” of the Celtic past, Ossian’s “primaeval dignity of sentiment” spurs Macpherson and Blair to make a striking conclusion: for all the sophistication of modern refinement, commercial society has only recently achieved the nobility of sentiment that came naturally to the savage. Along these lines, Macpherson’s poems offer Scottish intellectuals an opportunity to gauge their place within the uneven progress of historical change. Where Hume’s inability to feel for the past confirmed his sense that the Enlightenment has superseded its classical precedents, Macpherson and Blair suggest that modern refinement facilitates a new appreciation for the beauty of primitive sentiments. The allure of historical distance brings the affinities between past and present to light.

Both Macpherson’s earliest readers and recent critics generally agree that the Ossian poems exhibit a strong association with the genre of epic and disaffiliation with romance. Nevertheless, romance comes into play as a framework for critiquing the historiographical premises of Macpherson’s project. On the face of it, Macpherson identifies Ossian’s text as epic material and titles them accordingly: *Fingal, an Ancient Epic Poem, in Six Books* (1761), *Temora, an Ancient Epic Poem, in Eight Books* (1763), etc. Macpherson and Blair’s critical commentaries included with *The Works of Ossian* (1765) repeatedly compare Ossian to none other than Homer. Designating Ossian as a Celtic Homer entails that his work is decidedly not a romance. As a rule, Blair notes, the epic writer strives to hold the extraordinary elements of his narrative in check in order to avoid “transport[ing] his readers from this world, into a phantastic, visionary region; and lose that weight and dignity which should reign in epic poetry” (365). While Ossian’s representation of ancient Scottish valor may bear a passing resemblance to the military
ethos of chivalric romance, yet “Ossian’s heroes have all the gallantry and generosity of those fabulous knights, without their extravagant” (376). The works of Ossian could not have been a romance, in any event, because the poetry antedates feudalism by more than a thousand years, or so Macpherson and Blair claim.

Recent criticism concurs with Macpherson and Blair’s assessment. As Dafydd Moore observes, “almost every scholarly position taken up on Ossian in recent years is epic-centric, that is to say, is committed to the idea of epic as a primary point of reference for the poems.” In neglecting to consider whether Macpherson’s Ossian poems are something other than an epic – although critics routinely recognize its modification of the form – the field forecloses generic considerations that were very much in question for Macpherson’s original readers.47

As it turns out, the characteristics of romance frequently come into play when readers sought to impugn the credibility of Ossian’s poems. Samuel Johnson’s Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland (1775) gestures in this direction by suggesting that “the Scots have something to plead for their easy reception of an improbable fiction: they are seduced by their fondness for their supposed ancestors.”48 In the same year, Hume recants his prior endorsement of Macpherson’s translation by suggesting that the material is romantic in all but its outward trappings: “Where manners are represented in them, probability, or even possibility, are totally disregarded: but in all other respects, the events are within the course of nature; no giants, no monsters, no magic, no incredible feats of strength or activity.”49 In all of these discussions, romance provides a framework for registering doubts about Ossian’s historical authenticity.50
These critiques are telling insofar as they indicate the controversial nature of Macpherson’s historiographical premises. In going beyond the limits of recorded history, Macpherson’s Ossian becomes susceptible to the critique that it had wandered onto what Addison termed the “enchanted ground” of romance. The opening passage from Macpherson’s “Dissertation concerning the Antiquity of the Poems of Ossian” (1765) poses the problem this way: “The ingenious may form systems of history on probabilities and few facts: but at a great distance of time, their accounts must be vague and uncertain” (43). Historical knowledge only extends so far because the passage of time makes “facts” increasingly uncertain. The intelligibility of Ossian’s poetry is further limited by the early phase of cultural development in which he composed:

The infancy of states and kingdoms is as destitute of great events, as of the means of transmitting them to posterity. The arts of polished life, by which alone facts can be preserved with certainty, are the production of a well-formed community. It is then historians begin to write, and public transactions to be worthy remembrance. The actions of former times are left in obscurity, or magnified by uncertain traditions. (43)

At its beginnings society lacks both historically significant events as well as the means to record them. These deficiencies compound each other such that little information reaches later ages. Historiographical certainty is achieved only subsequently under “the arts of polished life,” or dox commerce more generally.

Caveats aside about what the obscurity of former times, Macpherson suggests that historiographical uncertainty may have a distinctive allure: “Inquiries into the antiquities of nations afford more pleasure than any real advantage to mankind” (43). As if revising Hume’s assertion that “the love of gain prevail[s] over the love of pleasure,” Macpherson intimates that the antiquarian’s pleasures are not limited by modern commercial interests (“Of Interest” 183). Rather, the pleasures of historical inquiry are stubbornly resistant to
the priorities of modern life. Neither reducible to the carnal appetites nor fully acculturated under the rubric of taste, the formation of pleasure recalls the earlier stages of man’s cultural development while revamping sociability in accordance with emergent paradigms of refinement.

The irregularity of pleasure gives an affective cast to the historical patterns that Macpherson and Blair seek to explore. Toward this end, Scottish intellectuals conceptualized history as a series of stages that led from “Rudeness” to “Civilization.” As Macpherson explains, these categories are further parsed into a three-part division.51

There are three stages in human society. The first is the result of consanguinity, and the natural affection of the members of a family to one another. The second begins when property is established and men enter into associations for mutual defense, against the invasion and injustice of neighbors. Mankind submit, in the third, to certain laws and subordinations of government, to which they trust the safety of their persons and property. As the first is formed on nature, so, of course, it is the most disinterested and noble. Men, in the last, have leisure to cultivate the mind, and to restore it, with reflection, to a primaeval dignity of sentiment. The middle stage is the region of complete barbarism and ignorance. (211)

Macpherson describes a succession from savagery, in which social relations are governed by mankind’s “natural affection,” to the barbarism of continual “invasion and injustice,” to a commercial stage of development, which is ruled by law and regulated by taste. The distinctive feature of this socio-historical progression is its non-linearity. Barbarism notably regresses from the peaceable nature of the “disinterested and noble” savage. Macpherson’s striking claim is that commercial society has only recently “restored” the “primaeval dignity of sentiment” that came naturally to the ancient savage. Commerce does so by promoting leisurely cultivation. With studied “reflection,” modern commerce counteracts the barbarian’s uncouth manners and reacquires the savage’s primitive dignity.
The implication is that the savage is superior to the man of commerce who emerges after him. Macpherson’s argument casts a favorable light on Ossian by suggesting that he possesses both the civic virtue of the ancients as well as the polished manners of the moderns. Ossian’s example consequently repositions the sophistication of eighteenth-century commerce. As Dwyer notes, “if the sociable sentiments came naturally to those ‘disinterested and noble’ heroes and heroines who were formed by primitive nature, a complex civilization needed to provide the leisure and culture which could generate their modern equivalents – ‘men and woman of feeling.’” The sociability that eighteenth-century commerce achieves by cultural means takes after the affections that the savage exhibits by nature. To borrow a phrase from Lyotard, the civilizing process of commerce makes an “advance backwards” by recreating the nobility that the savage had attained long ago.

Given Macpherson’s attempt to re-envision the relationship between the savage and the man of commerce, it seems unlikely that pleasure might serve as a key term. If anything, contemporary readers agree that Ossian’s poems are not pleasant tales. Hugh Blair’s “Critical Dissertation” states the issue most clearly: “The two great characteristics of Ossian’s poetry are tenderness and sublimity. It breathes nothing of the gay and cheerful kind; an air of solemnity and seriousness is diffused over the whole. Ossian is perhaps the only poet who never relaxes, or lets himself down into the light and amusing strain.” Ossian neither “dresses out gay trifles to please the fancy” nor writes “like modern poets, to please readers and critics.” Accordingly, Blair deems pleasure anathema to the “high region of the grand and the pathetic” in which Ossian moves (356).
The fifth book from Macpherson’s *Fingal, an Ancient Epic Poem* is characteristic of the “air of solemnity and seriousness” that Blair finds “diffused over the whole” (356). Leading up to this point, the bard, Ossian, recounts the exploits of Fingal, the Highland chief, who aids the Irish against invasion from the Scandinavian warriors of Swaran. A remarkable litany of sentimental scenes comprise the book: Fingal is moved nearly to tears by a Scandinavian chief, Orla, who fights on in futility even though it means that he will never see his family again. Subsequently, Fingal weeps over the death of his own son, Ryno, killed while pursuing Swaran’s fleeing warriors. To console himself, Fingal asks his bard, Ullin, to sing “the songs of other times” (93).55 Ullin responds with the tale of an abducted maiden, Gelchossa, who dies of grief when her lover, Lamderg, is killed in an attempt to rescue her.

In all these incidents, Fingal’s sentimentality derives from his sense of familial affection. “Why dost thou awaken my tears,” Fingal asks, on hearing that Orla would have his sword returned to his soon-to-be bereaved wife. The breaking of bonds between husband and wife, father and son, brings pathos to Fingal’s subsequent eulogy: “Here let the dark-haired hero rest far from the spouse of his love… The sons of the feeble will find his bow at home, but will not be able to bend it. His faithful dogs howl on his hills, and his boars, which he used to pursue, rejoice” (93). Similarly, Ullin’s tale of tragic love leads Fingal to grieve for Orla and his son alike: “Weep, ye daughters of Morven; and ye maids of the streamy Loda. Like a tree they grew on the hills; and they have fallen like oak of the desert; when it lies across a stream, and withers in the wind of the mountain” (95). To liken the young warriors to fallen oaks has the effect of naturalizing Fingal’s sorrow as a part of the cycle of growth and decay. Fingal’s tears are internalized
within the imagery as a stream that receives the fallen trees. Cumulatively, Fingal’s pathos affirms Macpherson’s estimation that the savage stage of society is defined by “consanguinity and the natural affection of the members of a family to one another” (211). Ossian’s tale of sentiment is, in other words, historically specific.

Blair’s specifically historical perspective on this material leads him to reintroduce pleasure as a key term for describing his response to Ossian’s poetry: “Admiration is a cold feeling, in comparison of that deep interest, which the heart takes in tender and pathetic scenes; where, by a mysterious attachment to the objects of compassion, we are pleased and delighted, even whilst we mourn” (396). What is the “mysterious attachment” that turns Ossian’s “tender and pathetic scenes” into a source of pleasure and delight? As Macpherson’s Ossian explains the phenomenon, there is a “joy of grief” that comes of achieving distance from one’s own suffering. On the death of his son, Ossian remarks that “there is a joy in grief when peace dwells in the breast of the sad” and the bard is able to sing of loved ones who have departed (187). In essence, the passage of time converts pathos into pleasure. Following this trope, Blair transforms Ossian’s tales of suffering into a historical object of delight. “To give the joy of grief generally signifies to raise the strain of soft and grave music; and finely characterizes the taste of Ossian’s age and country” (382). Blair’s high regard for Ossian’s sentimentality doubles as the basis for his assertion that Ossian’s poems are specific to their stage in history. The “mystery” of such a claim is that Blair’s felt “attachment” relies on his detachment from the Celtic past – that is, his recognition that Ossian’s time is separate from his own. Ossian’s passions, no matter how melancholy, become pleasurable for the modern reader insofar as they are framed as a historically distant phenomenon. In contrast to Hume,
who struggles to sustain his affections to the past, Blair fashions a positive account of the pleasure that only time can bring.

Here I disagree with Phillips’s assessment that the philosophical detachment professed by Hume and his contemporaries was displaced by their own emerging desire for historical immediacy. Alternatively, I argue that the urge to bring the past close derives from, rather than works against, an engagement with the pleasures of historical distance. As Blair notes, “it is not from the age of the world, but from the state of society, that we are to judge of resembling times” (357). Blair looks for resemblances by dint of his sophisticated historical perspective, concluding that savagery and commerce may be more similar than different – despite the chronological gap between them. To this end, the “curious spectacle” of ancient manners prompts Blair to consider “what is more valuable than the history of such transactions as a rude age can afford, the history of the human imagination and passion” (345). Affect serves an object of knowledge that enables Blair to establish the likeness between remote periods:

[Ancient manners] make us acquainted with the notions and feelings of our fellow-creatures in the most artless ages; discovering what objects they admired, and what pleasures they pursued, before those refinements of society has taken place which enlarge indeed, and diversify the transactions, but disguise the manners of mankind. (345)

Ossian’s poems are valuable because they uncover the imagination and passion of the primitive that have been “disguised” by subsequent cultivation. Yet in acknowledging his historical and cultural remoteness from the ancient Celts, Blair gains familiarity with their notions and feelings, values and pleasure. Once he gets “acquainted,” in other words, the seemingly foreign or outlandish savages of history become “fellow-creatures.” Historical distance makes it possible to bring past and present closer together.
Under the auspices of romance, mid eighteenth-century writers wandered the “enchanted ground” of a vague and uncertain past. There they discern an opportunity to remake their affective commitments. Where Hume found it difficult to broaden his sentiments beyond his immediate historical moment, Macpherson, Blair, and their contemporaries argue that historical distance is no less affecting then proximity. Their heterogeneous pleasures move historical understanding onto new, though uncertain, footing. Identifying the historiographical stakes of romance, as I do here, opens the way for my reading of imaginative writing as a key site in the formation of romantic historical consciousness. More specifically, the chapter establishes the varied structure of historical feeling as an entailment that Romanticism receives from the Enlightenment. Exploring the diversity of historical feeling sets up a baseline for gauging the selective rendering the contemporary criticism has given to the affective tenor of romantic historiography.

NOTES
All citations are given parenthetically after an initial footnote.


33 For an alternative reading of this passage, see Mark Phillips’s “Relocating Inwardness” 442.


46 All citations of Macpherson and Blair’s critical writings as well as the text of Ossian’s poems refer to *The Poems of Ossian and related writings*, ed. Howard Gaskill (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1996).


50 Critics have thoroughly documented the national antipathies that polarized the reception of Macpherson’s Ossian poems. The “cabal” of Macpherson’s supporters were identifiably Scottish while their detractors hailed from English literary circles. English and Scottish antiquarians were also at odds about whether oral culture could serve as a reliable basis for their inquiries. Acknowledging the cultural antagonisms that divide eighteenth-century antiquarianism should not, however, come at the expense of recognizing the shared effort to position romance as a historiographical form. See Nick Groom, “Macpherson and Percy,” *The Making of Percy’s Reliques* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 61-105; Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997); Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Ian Haywood, *The Making of History* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1986).


55 For an analysis of this phrase as the conceptual foundation of Macpherson’s historicism, see Ted Underwood, “Romantic Historicism and the Afterlife,” *PMLA* 117.2: 237-51.
Chapter Two
The Ruin of Pathos

It has become a critical commonplace to say that late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writers sought to cultivate an affective engagement with the past. Yet for all the consideration that critics have given to Romanticism’s much debated sense of history, romantic studies has largely overlooked a countervailing strain in the history of affect: namely, the attention that writers devote to the withdrawal of feeling. With this in mind, my second chapter reconsiders Romanticism’s fascination with ruins, fallen monuments, and faded memorials. The conventional view is that Romanticism invokes these lieux de mémoire, or places of memory, to enliven the past with feeling. The evocating power of such sites does not, however, keep writers from conceding that their emotions provide an ambiguous, fragile testament to the past. In brief, the ruin of pathos shadows the pathos of ruin. The disarticulation of emotion is, in other words, never far removed from attempts to elicit the affective charge of monuments and memorials.

Even as romantic philosophers, essayists, and poets sought to develop the sentimental dimension of history writing, they confront the double-edged nature of their pursuits. On the one hand, the emotions provide a mechanism for internalizing the past; history is gathered together, preserved, and recollected through the production of feeling in the present. On the other hand, those same emotional bonds subject history to the vagaries of indifference, apathy, and disconnection. To adapt Forest Pyle’s terminology, the desire for an emotive past both “enshrines” history for present and future restoration and “entombs” it as a site of permanent loss. If sentimental historiography would make it seem as if history could come alive, those same practices remain susceptible to a countervailing retrenchment of emotion, a second death.
The tension emerges in conjunction with the consolidation of romantic historicism as a literary, philosophical, and historical movement. Following Paul Hamilton’s definition, late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century historicism foregrounds the need to choose among different interpretations of the past based on contemporary preoccupations. Acknowledging the variability of historical meaning led romantic historicists to cast doubt on the permanence of institutions they inhabit as well as the authority of the interpretations they advance. To make matters concrete, my discussion focuses on the frequent association between institutions and the buildings that house them. In contemplating ruins and other decaying edifices, romantic historicists put pressure on the disjunction between acts of instituting or originating something new and the establishment of an institution that endures. In this vein, the chapter examines Johann Gottfried von Herder’s and Edmund Burke’s attention to ruins, monuments, and memorials as sites for thinking through the fragmentation of historical understanding. These considerations introduce a corresponding shift in the makeup of feeling, as the second half of the chapter will argue. After tracing G.W.F. Hegel’s attention to the affective dimension of symbolic architecture, I turn to William Godwin’s “Essay on Sepulchres” (1809) and William Wordsworth’s “Michael” (1800) for their shared sense that historical feeling both upholds and undermines the task of historical memorialization.

By identifying the inuring of emotion that attends late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century historicist efforts to promote an affecting evocation of the past, I re-evaluate the terms by which a New Historicism articulates its “desire for history.” Stephen Greenblatt famously “began with the desire to speak with the dead;” Jerome McGann stipulates that “we shall reach for the unconsumed heart of the poem only if we
are prepared to suffer a genuine change through its possession;” and Alan Liu identifies
the salient moment “when the critic of the loss of history suddenly sympathizes with the
poet of the loss of history.” These scholars variously insist on their ability to mobilize
the emotive dimension of their historiographical practices without acknowledging the ebb
and flow of historical feeling. On this point, contemporary criticism has more to learn
from romantic efforts to navigate the precarious balance between the production of
historical sentiment and its subsidence. In order to give this lesson its due, the chapter
pursues two key objectives: 1. reassess the sites of institution through which historicist
writers, old and new, contemplate their ephemeral place in history; and 2. reevaluate the
extent to which modern historical consciousness undergoes a hardening of the heart.

The rise of a new historical outlook

While critical movements have come and gone, the institution of historicism
remained a topic of discussion throughout the twentieth century. Although definitions
vary depending on the context used to describe its emergence, studies as varied as Georg
Lukacs’ The Historical Novel (1937), R.G. Collingwood’s Idea of History (1946),
Friedrich Meinecke’s Historism (1959), Michel Foucault’s The Order of Things (1966),
Reinhart Koselleck’s Futures Past (1979), Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities
(1983), J.G.A. Pocock’s Virtue, Commerce, and History (1985), and most recently, James
Chandler’s England in 1819 (1998) all concur that historical sensibilities undergo a
fundamental shift during the romantic period. Their methodological and philosophical
differences notwithstanding, these scholars make a shared attempt to explain how late
eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century historiography departs from the practices of
Enlightenment historical writing.
Meinecke’s influential study on *Historism; The Rise of a New Historical Outlook* consolidates this trend by using metaphors of growth and development to tell its story about the genesis of a historical outlook. Set against the greater or lesser deficiencies of Enlightenment historiography, so the account goes, historicism rises, emerges, progresses, or more figuratively, flourishes, blossoms, or matures. Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Hume, among others, are labeled as the proponents of a universal history, which makes – in the eyes of its historicist critics – a misguided attempt to understand the unchanging principles of human nature. The Enlightenment therefore marks stepping off point for Meinecke’s narrative about the origins of historicism: “The choice of material was centered round the three great German thinkers [Moser, Herder, and Goethe] in whom the earlier historical approach of the eighteenth century blossomed into full flower, and who then prepared the ground for its further growth.” “The rise of a new historical outlook” then describes the origin, rise, and efflorescence of modern historical consciousness.

Embedded in Meinecke’s language of growth and development is his supposition that the origin of historicism always already corresponds to an established paradigm of thought. The “rise” implies a subsequent consolidation; origin and telos go hand in hand. At issue is what I describe as the logic of institution, which conflates the act of instituting something new, inaugurating it for the first time, with the recognition, acknowledgement, and legitimation implied by a settled state of affairs, an institution. The nominative and verbal functions of “institution” become entangled. Demarcating something as new or novel – that is, instituting it – has the effect of incorporating that origin into a consolidated form. Although we might think that beginnings chronologically precede
their consequences, it turns out that origin and establishment are the joint products of retrospection. Following this tactic, institutions identify their origin for the purpose of legitimating what the formation has become.

The problematic of institution then extends beyond the more readily identifiable organizations or associations created to promote some public good or general cause. Instead of focusing on the modern university or the kind of institutionalization that an insane asylum will perform, I use the term “institution” to indicate a regime of interpretation as well as the criticism that maintains it. Rather than approach the problem of institution from the outside, so to speak, and examine the social functions and professional mandates that circumscribe the academy’s conception of literature – to take one prominent topic of discussion – I trace the knotted logic governing the internal workings of our critical endeavors. Recognizing the cultural logic that points from “the university teacher’s autonomous ‘professional activities’ [to] the technobureaucratic organization of intellectual labor,” as John Guillory encourages us to do, should not preclude an attention to the inner workings of our own critical performances. To the contrary, such analysis remains incomplete without considering what Derrida describes as “the politico-institutional structures that constitute and regulate our practice, our competencies, and our performances.”

To narrow the discussion, I focus on the apparatus supporting the institution of historicism. Properly defined, historicism specifies the need to choose among different interpretations of the past based on contemporary preoccupations (Hamilton 16). As my readings of Herder and Burke will demonstrate, romantic historicism is acutely aware that the writing of history requires reflection, selection, and even outright invention. The
implication is that the meaning of history is relative, changing from one epoch to the next; there is no fixed historical truth. The consequences are twofold: while every history is a history of the present, as Michel de Certeau points out, the historicist does away with the supposition that the contemporary understanding of the past has the final word. On the one hand, writers attend to the residues that their present perspectives leave on the past. On the other, they cannot help but see the traces of the past in their own articulations. To counterbalance the realization that prevailing beliefs and values exert a decisive influence over the meaning of history, the historicist cultivates what Ted Underwood describes as the “dizzying prospect of a perspective that would render their own assumptions dated.” The implication is that historicism unravels the logic of institution. Without a stable origin or definitive consolidation, the meaning of history takes shape through the dynamic interaction between a heterogeneous past and a multiply determined present. Unable to suppose that the institutions they inhabit exist in perpetuity, these writers situate their activities within a series of varying attempts to coalesce a multifarious past.

It is the larger claim of this chapter that romantic historicism is at odds with its contemporary institutionalization. Polemically speaking, the late twentieth-century institution of historicism operates at cross-purposes with its romantic antecedents. Attempts to demarcate the “rise” of historicism assume a correspondence between origin and end that writers of the romantic period otherwise sought to denaturalize.

**Housing the institution**

In order to make the discussion tangible, I note that institutions are frequently instantiated as physical buildings. “Church, school, and bank are all names of common
“institutions,” Homer Brown explains, “but also names of the material buildings in which they are housed and with which they are often confused” (3-4). An institution’s diverse activities and practices are metonymically associated with the structures that house them. In this respect, the words institution (instituere) and statue (statuere) derive from a shared Latin root: stare, to stand. An institution stands up as its architectural embodiment just as that structure stands for the institution. The result is that an otherwise multifarious entity consolidates around the site where its activities take place.

What maintains the relationship between an institution and its edifice? The various Latin cognates of the word “institution” are suggestive in this regard: instituere (to set up, found, make, build, establish), institutio (arrangement, instruction, education), and institutum (plan, habit, custom, mode of life). These linked terms imply that a building provides a source of instruction about the institution it domiciles. Or to put it differently, institutions are constituted through the act of creating a structure to house them. According to Pierre Bourdieu, “one has only to assemble the different senses [of institution] … to form an idea of an inaugural act of constitution, of foundation, indeed of the invention which, through education, leads to durable dispositions, habits, and usages.” Institutions are permanently installed through a process of instruction or education. This didactic function is operative in the etymological link between an edifice and edification; both derive from aedificare, which conjoins aedes (a temple or building) with facere (to make or build). But whereas the proponents of an institution frequently use architecture to impart a message about the apparent wholeness and integrity of the establishment, Romantic-era historicists are captivated by a countervailing tendency: the fragmentation and decay to which all historical structures and, by extension, all historical
interpretations are heir to. In this vein, ruins, monuments, and memorials circulate across Romanticism and romantic historicism as figures to think with.\textsuperscript{19}

How, then, do these sites inform historicist efforts to gauge the ever-changing relationship between past and present? To begin formulating an answer, I look to Johann Gottfried von Herder. Recognized by both Meinecke as well as recent historicist criticism, Herder’s \textit{Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind} (1784-91) has this to say about the edifice of history:

Thus every thing in history is transient: the inscription on her temple is, evanescence and decay. We tread on the ashes of our forefathers, and stalk over the entombed ruins of human institutions and kingdoms. Egypt, Persia, Greece, Rome, flit before us like shadows: like ghosts they rise from their graves, and appear to us in the field of history.\textsuperscript{20}

In a departure from earlier eighteenth-century maxims of “progress and enlightenment,” Herder’s temple to history has “evanescence and decay” inscribed on its doorway. The structure attests to the ephemeral status of “human institutions and kingdoms” rather than their permanence. For the historicist, history is an “entombed ruin” that we “tread” or “stalk over.” This is not to say that past ages are inaccessible to the present. Rather, the perambulations of historicist inquiry disturb “the ashes of our forefathers” and thereby animate their ghosts who “flit before us.” According to the implied metaphor, the “field of history” is the dust turned up by the activity of subsequent interpretations. Stalking the ruins, Herder characterizes his interpretive endeavors as the medium through which the past comes back to life. In effect, historical knowledge becomes a matter of perspective.

While Herder admits that prevailing beliefs and values shape the meaning of history, he is just as quick to acknowledge that present perspectives do not offer a stable vantage point. The latter observation contributes to Herder’s broader polemic against
Enlightenment historiography, as put forward in his satirically titled *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity* (1774). *This Too* targets the project of stadial history, which classifies all cultures according to a uniform scheme of historical development from rudeness to civilization, or in economic terms, from hunting and gathering, to shepherding, agriculture, and eventually commerce. Montesquieu’s *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748) comes in for particular criticism as “a Gothic structure in the philosophical taste of his century… a reeling of all ages, nations, and languages as around the tower of confusion [i.e. the tower of Babel].” At issue is the tendency to conflate various ages, nations, and languages into a single interpretive paradigm. Montesquieu, Voltaire, Hume, Robertson, and others are at fault, argues Herder, for their misguided attempt to “model all centuries after the one form of their time – and often it is very small and weak!” To impose contemporary values and perspectives on the past constitutes a willful misreading of history, especially when Herder sees no reason why eighteenth-century manners should be held in high esteem. A corresponding passage from his manuscripts expands on this assessment: “Almost every [historian] from Herodotus to Hume has his favorite time, his favorite people, his favorite ethics in accordance with which he models everything else” (296). The inclination to play favorites, so to speak, encourages a teleological view of historical development, such that the modern commercial age becomes the culmination of prior epochs. By contrast, Herder figures Enlightenment historiography as a gothic edifice, or a Tower of Babel. The image suggests that the project of stadial history devolves into chaos and confusion as it becomes increasingly clear that the Enlightenment’s investment in a single historical
viewpoint has been overwhelmed by the proliferation of various historical perspectives. In other words, historical difference undermines the authority of present-day values.

Herder would mitigate the sway of contemporary perspectives by emphasizing the mutability of history. According to de Certeau’s more general description, this line of thinking runs as follows: “If, therefore, we face a historical function specifying the ceaseless confrontation between a past and a present – that is, between what had organized life or thought and what allows it to be thought nowadays – there exists an infinite series of ‘historical meanings’” (34). While de Certeau recognizes that the present necessarily mediates the meaning of the past, he also observes that the interplay between past and present never achieves closure. Herder uses the figure of ruins to makes a similar point: “No human monument on earth can endure intact and eternal, for it was formed in the stream of generations only by the hands of a certain time for that time.”23 His claim is that the turnings of history favor change over constancy. Instead of supposing that monuments testify to a permanent state of affairs, Herder asserts that such structures cannot outlast the era of their creation without suffering decay. “This is more than an empirical observation that reputations fade and monuments crumble,” Ted Underwood explains. “The point is rather that no monument or ideal can hope to be as fundamental, as absolute, as change itself.”24 As Herder puts it, “the chain of human development alone forms the ruins into a whole structure in which human figures do indeed vanish, but where the human spirit lives on in immortality” (Against 54). Rather than privilege values and beliefs of the present moment, the historicist traces the process whereby one system of manners, or cultural-historical period, displaces another. History becomes a chain of events that heaps ruins upon ruins.25 Herder’s resulting philosophy
of history “leaves consciousness of historical difference and change as the only unchanging absolute,” an ethos Underwood associates with romantic historicism more generally (“Parallel Lives” 8).

The historicist premises of Herder’s discussion hereby imply a significant alteration in the logic of institution. Doing away with an insistence on fixed beginnings and definitive establishment, the historicist draws attention to the evolving connection between past and present. Like its associated monuments, institutions do not remain “intact and eternal” as they pass through the “stream of generations.” Instead, an institution’s efforts to legitimate “a certain time for that time” testify – paradoxically – to the inevitability of change. No monument can last forever, or so the thinking goes.

Herder’s implicit qualms about the dynamics of institution serve to clarify the strategies by which a New Historicism has sought to legitimate its institutional standing. When scholars as different as Lukacs, Collingwood, Meinecke, Foucault, as well as more recent New Historicists, all agree that historical sensibilities undergo a shift during the romantic period, it should give us pause – if only to speculate about what twentieth- and twenty-first-century criticism stands to gain from demarcating the “rise of a new historical outlook,” as Meinecke puts it. For one, Isaiah Berlin’s seminal treatment of modern historiography is helpfully forthright about his appropriation of Herder’s legacy:

It is not, however, my purpose to evaluate the work of Herder as a whole, but only to consider certain authentically *sui generis* doctrines which he originated; to discuss them not only for the sake of historical justice, but also as views that are peculiarly relevant and interesting in our own time... For his vast influence has sometimes, paradoxically, served to overshadow that which he, virtually alone, launched upon the world.26

Herder is the progenitor of doctrines to which Berlin remains committed. Berlin deems Herder “peculiarly relevant” insofar as his uniqueness corresponds to the patterns of
thought that remain pervasive in “our own time.” Following Derrida, we might say that Herder’s inventiveness “begins by being susceptible to repetition, exploitation, and re-inscription.”27 This uncanny mirroring effect is a byproduct of the institutional thinking that Berlin uses to formulate Herder’s significance. Berlin’s focus on what Herder originated or launched is meaningful to the extent that these innovations form the basis for a subsequently recognized body of criticism. By this circular logic, Berlin produces what he sought to designate; he self-reflexively legitimates his own patterns of thought by marking their origins in Herder. To the extent that Romantic-era historicists are wary about the logic of institution, their perspective raises questions about the methods contemporary critics use to validate their practices.

In this light, it is worth noting the role that Berlin’s treatment of Herder has in play in Catherine Gallagher’s account of the 1983 “launch” of Representations as a journal for New Historicist scholarship. Gallagher recalls that when the journal’s editorial board was unable to settle on a single theoretical position as the basis for its mission statement, they instead began “to extol the methodological eclecticism of our intellectual climate as salutary in itself.”28 Herder provides an exemplar for these efforts:

The issues could all be traced in some sense back to the explosive mix of nationalism, anthropology, poetry, theology, and hermeneutics that found originary expression in Giambattista Vico and was recombined by the German historicists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. (4-5)

With a nod to Berlin’s influential pairing of Vico and Herder, Gallagher turns to focus on Herder, in particular. Importantly, Herder’s varied pursuits do not keep Gallagher from identifying the “originary” status of his expression. Although she hedges, the gesture is one of “tracing… back” present concerns to their origins in the eighteenth century. On the basis of Herder’s polemic against the “Enlightenment project of finding a universal
norm for the realization of human potential,” Gallagher stakes out an affinity, as she subsequently explains, “between Herder’s time and our own” (5, 8). To assert that “much of [Herder’s thought] resonates in powerful ways with the impulses and perceptions that lay behind the journal Representations” entails a double move: designating a point of origin for her efforts allows Gallagher to tacitly legitimate her critical practices (6). Installing Herder’s writings as a new beginning for historical thought helps Gallagher solidify the foundations of a New Historicism. While the maneuver may have a certain expedience, its implementation leads critics to disregard the problematics of institution that Herder so readily identifies.

“Our state, our hearths, our sepulchers, and our altars”

In keeping with Herder’s efforts, romantic historicism hones in on its institutional predicament. None more so than Edmund Burke, whose Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790) confronts the tension between what an institution is and what institution does as a full blown crisis. Both Herder and Burke participate in a characteristically historicist effort to situate themselves and their cultural moment amidst historical flux. According to recent criticism, Burke locates his reverence for the institutions of English monarchy in the person of the French Queen, Marie Antoinette. Along these lines, Mike Goode concludes that “when Burke urges men to engage affectively with the immaterial and metaphorical body of inherited laws, those engagements are, by his own admission, equally affective engagements with material bodies” (848-9). Burke is troubled by an eroding attachment to the monarchy. The consequence of the growing disenchantment is that “our institutions can never be embodied, if I may use the expression, in persons; so as to create in us love, veneration, admiration, or attachment.” The account of Burke’s
figurative investment in metaphors of embodiment and instantiation is incomplete, however, without examining his corresponding engagement with the metonymic association between institutions and the structures that house them. “If persons represent institutions by embodying them,” as Esther Schor observes, “then by a corollary process, institutions represent persons by disembodying them” (83). While the language of the body persists in institutional rhetoric (i.e. “be it resolved that this legislative body hereby…”), Schor’s point is that institutions transcend the corporeality of the human body. Insofar as Burke aspires to embody institutions in persons and thereby animate the affections, he also treats institutions are disembodied structures that disassociate from viscera of human experience.

Viewed through the latter register, the French Revolution presents Burke with a distinctive set of concerns about the historical coherence of English institutions:

With [the revolutionaries in France] it is a sufficient motive to destroy an old scheme of things, because it is an old one. As to the new, they are in no sort of fear with regard to the duration of a building run up in haste; because duration is no object to those who think little or nothing has been done before their time, and who place all their hopes in discovery. They conceive, very systematically, that all things which give perpetuity are mischievous, and therefore they are at inexpiable war with all establishments. (R 87-8)

The damage done by tearing down the “old scheme of things” is exacerbated by the revolution’s near total lack of attention to the durability of newly founded institutions. The resulting “buildings run up in haste” are temporary structures abandoned shortly after their completion. In this sense, the building is stripped of its ability to house multiple generations; the structure no longer transcends its immediate purposes or the people who inhabit it at any given moment. The relationship between an institution and the site where its activities take place becomes a matter of convenience. The only thing
systematic about such an approach, Burke remarks with a note of irony, is its never-ending war against the inherited system and its “old scheme of things.”

Burke therefore formulates a tension between two competing functions of institution: an act of origination, or instituting, and the consolidated product of that act. In one sense, he describes the events in France as a politically charged act of institution, which promises a radical change for society. Burke’s response is to delegitimize the desire for new beginnings in favor of understanding the English constitution in its other sense: as a recognized state of affairs. With the latter aim in mind, Burke famously defines society as a partnership linking backward to its ancestry and forward to posterity: “As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born” (R 96). By arguing that England’s political and social structures have no clear origin, or for that matter, end, Burke asserts that institutions may evolve but never wholly change.

The persistent concern, however, is that the revolution has jeopardized the integrity of France’s (and England’s) civic structures. Regarding the lapse of France’s États-Généraux from 1614 until 1789, Burke observes that “your constitution, it is true, whilst you were out of possession, suffered waste and dilapidation; but you possessed in some parts the walls, and in all the foundations of a noble and venerable castle. You might have repaired those walls; you might have built on those old foundations” (R 35). Wolfram Schmidgen argues convincingly that Burke’s image draws on William Blackstone’s Commentaries on the Laws of England (1765-1769), which describes English common law as “an old Gothic castle, erected in the days of chivalry, but fitted
up for a modern inhabitant.” The “waste and dilapidation” brought on by France’s longstanding neglect of its political institutions are repairable, says Burke, because the structure remains fundamentally sound, although crumbling in places. However, the events of 1789 force Burke to confront the realization that the French “might” have taken steps to rebuild their inheritance, but decided not to.

The implication is that France’s apparent indifference toward the preservation of its cultural and political traditions may not be wholly anathema to the sentimental attachments that make it possible for the English to affirm their “choice of inheritance,” as Burke describes it. Here my reading follows David Bromwich’s assertion that “the rebels whom Burke deplores are, in his own eyes, candidates for success as plausible as himself.” As Burke considers the structures that both site and situate the process of historical transmission, it is not altogether clear that the English are better able to cultivate a feeling for their heritage. Take, for instance, his insistence that “in this choice of inheritance we have given to our frame of polity the image of a relation in blood” (R 34). Strictly speaking, Burke chooses his heritage insofar as he “gives” or bestows upon it a metaphor; he exercises his choice through the figure of speech. Burke’s larger claim is that the “image” animates England’s relationship to the past by

binding up the constitution of our country with our dearest domestic ties; adopting our fundamental laws into the bosom of our family affections; keeping inseparable, and cherishing with the warmth of all their combined and mutually reflected charities, our state, our hearths, our sepulchers, and our altars. (R 34)

“Domestic ties” and “family affections” serve as the vehicle for the formative action of Burke’s metaphor: binding, adopting, keeping, and cherishing the English constitution as if its laws were bound by blood. Conversely, the tenor of Burke’s metaphor – “our state, our hearths, our sepulchers, and our altars” – is not bodies at all, but rather the
apprtenances of a vast, disembodied formation. In this figurative vein, Burke suggests that familial affection clothes an otherwise naked set of structures in “the warmth of all their combined and mutually reflected charities.” Yet in making this claim, Burke discloses that English institutions are emotionally impoverished. That is to say, a hearth supplies external, rather than internal or spiritual, warmth; a sepulcher memorializes a life that has ended; an altar creates a venue for religious rituals without enacting them. The very possibility of creating a sentimental attachment to his inheritance depends on Burke’s implicit sense that England’s most cherished institutions are deficient in their receptivity to feeling. On this note, the chapter examines the withdrawal of feeling that attends historicism’s inquiries into its ephemeral place in history.

“A very slight and cheap memorial, a white cross of wood”

In their attention to ruins, monuments, and memorials as sites for thinking through the fragmentation of historical understanding, Herder and Burke introduce a corresponding shift in the makeup of feeling. Amid growing doubts about the permanence of the institutions they inhabit, romantic historicists began to reconsider the efficacy of their desire for an evocative past. Even as writers appeal to the workings of the heart as a vehicle for maintaining their connection with the past, there were also intimations that the emotions provide an ambiguous, fragile testament to the past. Such is the case with William Godwin’s “Essay on Sepulchres” (1809). His desire to interact with the past through the creation of evocative memorials intersects with the inuring of his heart. This is to say that in the course of reflecting that all monuments are ephemeral, no institution lasts forever, Godwin formulates his ambivalence about the staying power of his historical sentiments. Read through the lens of G.W.F Hegel’s lectures on
Aesthetics, Godwin’s essay broaches the possibility that his felt connection to the past may be both enshrined and entombed as an inanimate architectural edifice.

The subtitle of Godwin’s essay describes the piece as a “proposal for erecting some memorial of the illustrious dead in all ages on the spot where their remains have been interred.” He conjectures that once these burial sites are properly identified, it will be possible to “live in intercourse with the Illustrious Dead of All Ages.” Encountering the final resting place of Chaucer or Milton would elicit a sentimental response from spectators who imagines that “some spirit shall escape from his ashes, and whisper to me things unfelt before” (22). In this respect, critics take Godwin’s Essay to indicate an emerging desire for a more inward and affecting interaction with the past – a shift facilitated by the convergence of history and (nec)romance.36 There is disagreement, however, about the textual dimension of Godwin’s engagement. Kevis Goodman takes the view that Godwin “thirst[s] for history not as textual representation but as sense-perception” (107).37 By contrast, Nicola Watson contends that the romantic desire to create a “relationship with the dead author that is essentially physical and anti-textual… is for the most part made possible by the text itself.”38 While I am partial to Watson’s suggestion that texts persuade us to regard dead authors as an extra-textual presence, her rejoinder remains incomplete without addressing the problems of signification that shape sentimental historiography. Along these lines, I draw on deconstructive criticism to trace the inconsistency of Godwin’s affective claims, which both uphold and undermine his plans for an institution commemorating England’s cultural forbears.

Godwin’s sentiments expose the difficulties involved in creating an institution proper; that is, as “an establishment, organization, or association, instituted for the
promotion of some object” (*OED*). From the outset, Godwin is explicit about his organizational aims: “This [proposal] might be effected by an extensive private subscription. A charter should then be obtained for the purpose of giving permanence to the institution; and the funds, if considerable, might be appropriated to other purposes analogous to the original object” (7). Godwin’s plan for erecting public memorials requires the raising and managing of funds as well as the commissioning of a charter designed to maintain the endeavor.

More broadly, Godwin would implement his project via the logic of institution. As I describe it, the task of inaugurating something new is readily conflated with the legitimation implied by a settled state of affairs. In this vein, Godwin frames his plan, on the one hand, as an act of institution, an “experiment” intended to create something “wholly new,” and indeed, “wholly visionary” (5-6). On the other hand, his commemorative landmarks encourage tourists to visit the gravesite of England’s most notable benefactors. Paradoxically, Godwin locates the novelty of his project in its celebration of the forebears who have made an enduring impact on the English society. In order to initiate memorials for England’s “illustrious dead,” Godwin must convince his reader that his seemingly original designs rest on a long settled history.

Yet for all Godwin’s efforts to inaugurate an institution of public commemoration, his historicist perspectives draw his attention in a different direction: toward the necessarily decaying sites that define his relationship to the past. Godwin signals his distinctively historicist sensitivity to mutability with his selection of an edifice to memorialize the dead. He specifies “a very slight and cheap memorial, a white cross of wood” with the intent that it should be “renewed as fast as the materials decayed” (7).
Instead of resisting the ravages of time, the memorial is designed to crumble. At issue for Godwin is the “capriciousness of the muse of monumental fame” (12). At best, if a monument “is to be inclosed within a church, or to be fixed against its wall: it may then last three or four centuries” (15). The implication is that even the most well established memorials are transitory artifacts lasting for a limited time only. Compared to the massive stonework of many sepulchers, Godwin’s “simple memorial of wood” makes a point of embracing this truism (24).

In this respect, Godwin co-opts potential objections from readers who are inclined with agree with Dryden’s “Mac Flecknoe” (1682), which opens with the assertion that “All human things are subject to decay.”39 As Godwin writes,

> it may be objected, that such a proposal is essentially nugatory, since all human things are subject to change. ‘If monumental brass is found ineffectual, if towers and palaces and temples vanish away, if of some of the greatest cities which man ever inhabited no vestige now remains, what virtue can there be in a white cross of wood and a wooden slab, that we should flatter ourselves that they will be of longer life? Incorporations and charters have their date, and there is not one now in existence that has lasted a thousand years.’ (25)

How can a piece of wood endure when towers, palaces, and temples, not to mention entire cities, vanish away? They cannot, Godwin answers. Dryden was right. Just as no edifice can withstand the passage of time, the underlying institutions, with their “incorporation and charters” eventually becomes a thing of the past. Their dissolution indicates the ephemerality of all cultures. On this point, Godwin makes no pretence; his memorials are more, rather than less, vulnerable to the effects of time.

Godwin uses buildings, monuments, and architecture most generally, to organize his thinking about the inevitability of change. The desire to commune with the dead here runs counter to his sense that a physical memorial has a limited capacity to convey the
subjectivity it is supposed to remember. In this respect, architecture has a limited ability
to signify meaning, as Hegel demonstrates in his magisterial lectures on *Aesthetics*.
Hegel’s account gives a philosophical rationale for the flawed memorials that define
Godwin’s historicist sensibility.

**Architecture as the “external art”**

Hegel’s lectures on fine art were originally delivered in the late 1810s, evolved
throughout the 1820s, and received posthumous publication in 1835. In the context of
discussing sculpture, painting, music, and poetry, Hegel identifies architecture as a
rudimentary art form whose task “consists in so manipulating external inorganic nature
that, as an external world conformable to art, it becomes cognate to spirit.”\(^\text{40}\) The
undertaking does not come easily, Hegel notes, given that architecture uses materials that
seem ill-suited for artistic expression. It is in this vein that Hegel terms architecture the
“external art” (I.89). Hegel makes this assessment on the basis of his observation that the
brute physicality of inorganic substances – think of the fast decaying wood that Godwin
intends for his memorials – comprise the stuff of architectural construction. The
“material [of architecture] is matter itself in its immediate externality as a mechanical
heavy mass” (I.84). In a primary sense, then, architecture is concerned with the
mechanics of assembling inert mass into a stable form, and is therefore a comparatively
unresponsive medium for art.\(^\text{41}\)

Moreover, architecture is an external art because the form frequently serves a
non-artistic purpose. The issue comes to the fore in the fraught relationship between
architecture and housing, as Susan Bernstein observes.\(^\text{42}\) Hegel points out that “a hut and
the house of god presuppose inhabitants, men, images of the gods, etc. and have been
constructed for them” (II.631). In these instances, the edifice is quite literally external to
the people, objects, and activities located inside its walls. Satisfying a need for shelter,
however, has nothing to do with the requirements of fine art (II.632). For this reason,
architecture holds the lowest place on Hegel’s hierarchy of the arts because its task
“consists in giving shape to what is objective in itself, i.e. the physical world of nature,
the external environment of the spirit, and so to build in what has no inner life of its own
a meaning and form which remain external to it” (II.631). Taking its raw materials from
the physical world of nature, architecture attempts to fashion a dwelling for an “inner
life,” or subjectivity. Nevertheless, the resulting structure cannot divorce itself entirely
from its function as a shelter, from its service as a means towards external ends. The
implication is that “its meaning this enclosure does not carry in itself but finds in
something else, in man and his needs and aims in family life, the state, or religion, etc.,
and therefore the independence of the building is sacrificed” (II.633). Architecture bears
the imprint of ulterior motives. In turn, these constraints detract from the intrinsic
meaning of the edifice.

Accordingly, architecture does not fully measure up to Hegel’s general assertion
that “the work of art stands in the middle between immediate sensuousness and ideal
thought” (I.38). As comprised of “mechanical heavy mass,” architecture presents an
“immediate sensuousness” that is ill-equipped to convey “ideal thought.” Hegel makes
this point explicit: “In this material and in these forms the Ideal, as concrete spirituality,
cannot be realized. Hence the reality presented in [architectural form] remains opposed
to the Idea, because it is something external not penetrated by the Idea or only in an
abstract relation to it” (I.84). For Hegel, architecture operates within the medium of an unworked materiality that resists the presentation of ideas.43

His name for those art forms that exhibit a fraught relationship with ideas is the symbolic. Not only is architecture the symbolic art form, *par excellence*, but the symbolic is also the most fundamental type of architecture (II.632, 634; I.84).44 “What this architecture produces,” Hegel explains, “is works which can stamp the meaning on their external shape only symbolically” (II.632-3). Architecture displays an external, rather than internal, resemblance to subjectivity; its “external shape” fashions only a diffuse link to interiority. “The meanings taken as content here, as in symbolic art generally, are as it were vague and general ideas, elemental, variously confused and sundered abstractions of the life of nature, intermingled with thoughts of the actual life of spirit” (II.637). Indistinct and imprecise, architecture performs a symbolic function.45

In this respect, Hegel’s discussion broaches a problem of signification that it cannot resolve.46 “The productions of this architecture should stimulate thought by themselves, and arouse general ideas without being purely a cover and environment for meaning already independently shaped in other ways,” he writes. Hegel takes a prescriptive stance in claiming that architecture “should stimulate thought.” His intent is to expand the artistic dimension of architecture beyond its function as housing for unrelated content. Failing this, the symbol becomes a mere sign, a possibility that Hegel strives to avoid: “the [symbolic] form that lets such a content shine through it may not count as merely a sign in the way that, for instance, crosses are erected as signs on graves, or cairns in memory of a battle.” While Godwin would certainly agree that a cross or a cairn may be “suitable for stimulating ideas,” as Hegel goes on to explain, the
risk is that such structures “do not themselves indicate the idea which their erection aimed at arousing, for they can just as easily recall all sorts of other things” (II.636). The risk is that architecture would lapse into an arbitrary relation with content that exists independently of it (II.635). The arbitrariness of the sign then obstructs the artist’s endeavor to create an affinity between the outer world and inner spirit.  

Notwithstanding Hegel’s tendency to oppose sign and symbol, his remarks are by no means definitive when it comes to aligning architecture with the latter and against the former. While the Aesthetics privileges the symbolic status of architecture, Hegel’s Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences – also given as lectures in the late 1810s and early 1820s – makes just to opposite point: “The sign is some immediate intuition, representing a totally different import from what naturally belongs to it; it is the pyramid into which a foreign soul has been conveyed, and where it is conserved.” Unlike the monuments that Godwin hopes will establish a connection between the spirit of the dead and the site where they literally remain, Hegel reads the pyramid as a sign whose external form exhibits a “totally different import” from the soul interred within. That is to say, “the natural attributes of the intuition, and the connotation of which it is a sign, have nothing to do with each other.” The pyramidal structure hereby serves as a figure for the arbitrary relationship between signified and signifier.  

For the symbol, by contrast, “the original characters (in essence and conception) of the visible object are more or less identical with the import which it bears” (Enc. III, par. 458, p. 213). Hegel’s treatment of architecture as the preeminent symbolic art is thus shadowed by misgivings that the art form is inadequate to the task of imbuing physical matter with an inner life.
Hegel’s lectures on *Aesthetics* bear the traces of this ambivalence. There he uses the Egyptian pyramids to underscore the primacy of symbolic architecture while also raising questions about the efficacy of signification – questions that extend to Godwin’s memorials for the dead. Discussing the “Egyptian View and Representation of the Dead: Pyramids,” Hegel ranges from one pole to the other over the course of a single paragraph. His initial assertion is that “the Pyramids put before our eyes the simple prototype of symbolical art itself.” The pyramids are a model for symbolic art insofar as these structures “envelop” the meaning concealed within. The edifice is symbolic, Hegel reasons, because “it is obvious that they are there for this inner meaning separated from pure nature and only in relation to this meaning.” The pyramids exist for the purpose of conveying a meaning that is (literally) internal to the structure. The trouble with this account, as Hegel immediately points out, is that “the shape for such an inner meaning still remains just an external form and veil for the definite content of that meaning.” As a funerary monument, pyramids commemorate or preserve the spirit of a life that is no more. By implication, the structure is chiefly defined by the absence of the interiority it purports to represent; or alternatively, pyramids function as the “external form and veil” for content that is no longer available. In this sense, the structure is “just” a signifier for content that has its own independent existence. While the pyramids are created for the purpose of sustaining the spirit of the dead in their absence, the gesture of memorialization has unintended consequences: “The Pyramids are such an external environment in which an inner meaning rests concealed” (I. 356). Hegel here returns to the view put forward in the *Encyclopedia*: the pyramids function as an arbitrary sign for an inner meaning that is concealed, rather than revealed, by the structure. This is not to
say that Hegel’s account of the symbol is somehow untenable. Rather, the declension of Hegel’s paragraph indicates the way in which discussions of the symbol drift toward concerns about the status of the sign. Given this trajectory, Hegel shows that architecture’s status as the quintessential symbolic art form stages a reflection on its own signifying practices.

**Enshrinement and entombment**

On the face of it, Godwin’s *Essay* wholeheartedly affirms the symbolic status of monuments. Indeed, his proposal begins with the premise that it is entirely possible to imbue a material edifice with spirit. The departed “still have their place,” he explains, “where we may visit them, and where, if we dwell in a composed and quiet spirit, we shall not fail to be conscious of their presence” (23). The grave is the site where the dead remain, literally and figuratively. It is therefore insufficient to “visit the house in Bread-Street where Milton was born, or that in Bunhill-Row where he died. I want to repair to the place where he now dwells” (22). Much as Wordsworth lingers over his recollection of the churchyard spot where the boy of Winander rests in his grave (*Prelude* 1805, V.389-406), Godwin celebrates sepulchers as a corporeal and spiritual repository for the dead, a dwelling place that houses the spirit:

> Let us mark the spot, whenever it can be ascertained, hallowed by the reception of all that was mortal of these glorious beings; let us erect a shrine to their memory; let us visit their tombs; let us indulge all the reality we can now have, of a sort of conference with these men, by repairing to the scene which, as far as they are at all on earth, *they still inhabit!* (12)

Like Wordsworth’s epitaph writer, whose “delineation, we must remember, is performed by the side of the grave; and what is more, the grave of one whom he loves and admires,” Godwin would commune with England’s benefactors by visiting the site where their
remains remain, so to speak. From Godwin’s perspective, doing so brings history back to life insofar as he is able to enshrine the spot where “glorious beings” have been interred. The tomb internalizes the memory of the departed who “still inhabit” the site. Accordingly, the memorial metonymically substitutes for the spirit it would honor.

Yet as Forest Pyle demonstrates, the gesture of “enshrinement” – a gathering and preserving of spirit that Wordsworth famously articulates as an aspiration to “give / Substance and life to what I feel, enshrining, / Such is my hope, the spirit of the Past / For future restoration. – Yet another / Of these memorials” (Prelude 1850, XII.283-87) – is inseparable from acts of “entombment,” which disrupt efforts to conserve the meaning of the past. In this respect, Godwin’s thinking about monuments undercuts his desire to fully capture the interiority of past. To wit, he envisions erecting white wooden crosses and “very slight and cheap” ones at that (7). If we go by Hegel’s assessment, Godwin chooses a memorial that is decidedly unsuited to fulfill the requirements of symbolic architecture. While a wooden cross may serve its purpose as a marker for the grave, its form does not have an intrinsic connection to the inner life it celebrates. The cross is more sign than a symbol, Hegel asserts, and therefore inadequate to the task of investing inert matter with meaning.

The design of Godwin’s memorials are not, however, an aberration. Recounting the incidents that “led me into the train of thinking which gave birth to these papers,” he offers the following “remark of almost universal application wherever tombs are to be found”: namely, that “they are fallen into entire neglect; no care is taken to maintain them in their original condition” (12, 16). While Godwin makes it his goal to counteract the disregard for England illustrious dead and their places of burial, he recognizes the
limitations of architecture. Chief among these shortcomings is the inability to inspire lasting respect. For instance, Godwin is mortified to find “a little pebble placed by some wanton boy on the tip of the [broken off] nose of the recumbent figure of Catherine, wife of George Villiers first duke of Buckingham.” It is bad enough that so many sepulchers are defaced, but worse still that “no one had thought it worth his while to remove” the offending stone. Godwin is convinced that no matter how well wrought the monument, the passage of time will ultimately undermine the edifice’s ability to inspire. Before too long “the marble that covers [the tomb] is no longer any thing but common stone” (17).

Godwin’s preference for a “simple memorial of wood” rather than a more substantial monument indicates his sense that architecture cannot sustain the connection between sign and referent. Indeed, Godwin claims merit for his proposal insofar as it turns this discontinuity into a resource:

I do not require sumptuous of decoration; my plan calls for no accumulation of materials or, exquisiteness of sculpture: the object is to mark the place where the great and excellent of the earth repose, and to leave the rest to the mind of the spectator. It does not seek perpetuity, as ancient Egypt, in the massiness and immoveables of the pyramids; it aims at a better security, in keeping for ever alive the spirit that first puts the project into action. (18)

Godwin takes a minimalist approach. Sumptuous decoration, accumulation of precious materials, and exquisite sculpture bespeak a misplaced faith in architecture’s ability to perpetuate veneration for the dead. It turns out, however, that “as soon as a generation is gone by, and the eyes that witnessed these virtues and graces are closed, [the deceased] is thought of no more, but as a simple link in the ostentatious chain of a pedigree” (17). The lavish materials only heighten Godwin’s conviction that inert matter does not afford any guarantee that a virtuous person will be remembered as something more than a name. In such cases, the edifice serves as a signifier for the dead without conveying their
particularity, let alone spirit. Lacking any intrinsic relationship to its content, the would-be symbol devolves into an arbitrary sign. Like Hegel, Godwin calls upon the “massiness and immovable of the pyramids” to indicate the mistaken view that even if the pyramids were to last forever – which they cannot – such structures are inevitably disassociated from the individuals buried within.

Godwin’s response is to turn the tension between sign and symbol toward the possibility that a simple, unadorned memorial more readily animates the “mind of the spectator.” His striking claim is that “a white cross of wood” will fare better and last longer than monuments that aspire to permanence. Consequently, Godwin calls upon the spectator to acknowledge the inevitability of change without striving to overcome it. The virtue of such an approach is that his memorials demand more, rather than less, vigilance since they must be “renewed as fast as the materials decayed” (7). The decomposing structure makes caretakers out of all the tourists who visit the site, requiring them to keep “for ever alive the spirit that first puts the project into action.” The institution of these memorials is perpetually underway. Godwin duly notes that “while pyramids, and aqueducts, roads of the most substantial structure, and vast cities, shall perish, these simple land-marks, which any child might overthrow, shall be regarded as sacred, and remain undisturbed witness of the most extraordinary revolutions” (26). Instead of aiming to found a permanent institution once and for all, Godwin finds “better security” in the surety of change.

**Internalization and memorization**

Importantly, Godwin’s concerns about history’s mutability shades over from his architectural designs into his corresponding claims about the status of historical feeling.
Under the prevailing critical consensus, however, Godwin’s declared sense that his proposal “trust[s] to the heart of man, and not to the hands of man, for its execution” reads as a confirmation of the view that romantic historiography favors inwardness, interiority, and emotion (25). In this vein, Godwin’s “wish to live in intercourse with the Illustrious Dead of All Ages” is broadly recognizable to scholars of British Romanticism as a trope of internalization or Erinnerung, which Paul de Man glosses as the “inner gather[ing] and preserving of experience.” Succinctly defined as “the recollected emotion of a bygone perception” – again de Man’s words – Erinnerung specifies the interplay between sensory intuition of the (external) world and the recollection of those perceptions from (internal) memory (Al 100-1). These dynamics translate into a diagnosis of Godwin’s efforts: in monumentalizing the graves of his forbears, Godwin would preserve and celebrate their spirit as grounds for consolidating a shared national, political, and cultural history. Without denying the significance of the national imaginings that inform romantic historicism, Godwin’s account takes on a different cast if we focus on the mechanics of Gedächtnis, or memorization, which organize his use of sentiment. As the nineteenth century’s foremost theorists of Erinnerung, Hegel provides an opportunity to reassess the precarious balance between the production of historical feeling and its withdrawal that Godwin struggles to maintain.

Hegel’s Encyclopedia treats recollection (Erinnerung), imagination (Einbildungskraft), and memory (Gedächtnis) as related types of representation (Vorstellung). Some critics take the view that Hegel privileges recollection as the hallmark of re-presentation proper (Enc. III, par. 454, p. 205). Yet it is at Hegel’s invitation that deconstruction challenge this assessment by showing that the tropes of
internalization crucially rely on the function of *Gedächtnis* and its “sign-creating activity,” as Hegel puts it (*Enc. III*, par. 458, p. 213). Following Rei Terada, I take the extra step of arguing that de Man and Derrida understand emotion as a tropic structure. This is to say that the emotions behave as rhetorical figures that enact their own undoing.

In this vein, de Man hones in on Hegel’s remarks about the mechanics of sentimental remembrance. By Hegel’s estimation, “a composition is, as we know, not thoroughly conned by rote, until one attaches no meaning to the words. The recitation of what has been thus got by heart is therefore of course accentless” (*Enc. III*, par. 463, p. 222). In contrast to the generative or creative power of imagination, memory re-produces and re-presents signs. But perhaps we would want to qualify Hegel’s further contention that memorization nullifies understanding. Does memorization prevent actors from knowing the meaning behind the lines they recite? Surely not. De Man takes Hegel to mean that “we can learn by heart only when all meaning is forgotten and words read as if they were a mere list of names” (*AI* 101). Here too, it is hard to accept de Man’s comparison between the work of empty memorization and the recitation of a “mere list of names.” Doesn’t a list of names have meaning? Many are inclined to think so after visiting Maya Lin’s Vietnam War Memorial, for instance. *Caveats* aside, de Man’s amplification of Hegel implies that the mechanics of memory destabilize efforts to gather and preserves experience. To make this point, de Man focuses on Hegel’s sense that learning by rote and learning by heart may be two versions of the same activity. The implication is that emotion navigates the perilous equilibrium between memory and its erosion, retention and permanent loss.
Along these lines, Derrida draws upon the language of feeling to describe Hegel’s account of symbolic architecture and the pyramids, in particular: “At the heart of this monument the soul keeps itself alive, but it needs the monument only to the extent that it is exposed – to death – in its living relation to its own body” (83). Derrida’s counterintuitive premise is that funerary monuments precipitate the death of the subjectivity they wish to preserve. In order to represent a symbolic incarnation of (departed) soul, the edifice must sever the “living relation” between body and soul, external and internal, sign and referent. The (living) symbol tends toward the condition of the (dead) sign. The monument becomes the external façade for an inner meaning concealed within. It is in this context that Derrida uses the heart as a figure for the center or interior of a pyramid, the place where the soul resides; “at the heart” variously signifies the pyramid’s emotional core as well as its innermost point. The integrity of the symbol is hereby upheld by the belief that the pyramid has a heart.

Complications arise, however, in tracing out the extended implications of Derrida’s figure. The heart is at one and the same time a metaphor for interiority as well as a bodily organ. Derrida makes the most of the slippage. Sentiment would dictate that the monument preserves the soul of the departed at its heart. Yet symbolic architecture keeps the soul “alive” only insofar as it exposes that interiority to the condition of signification. Derrida combines these propositions to suggest that the monument commemorates a departed soul only insofar as the structure marks the soul’s death. Under these conditions, the edifice functions as a sign for a referent that is functionally absent. If the departed soul keeps itself alive at the heart of the monument, that interiorized content must rupture the “living relation to its own body.” The symbol
hereby opens a fissure within its signifying practices. Affirming the animating spirit of a memorial – as critics understand Godwin to do – then risks a failure of the heart. As a prototype of symbolic architecture, the pyramid brings about recognition of the unsustainable relation between inner and outer. Emotion has a crucial role to play in facilitating both the attribution and abstention of interiority. In its attempt to signify an inner life, the emotions may harden into an inanimate stone structure.

Hegel’s treatment of signification, as elaborated by de Man and Derrida, raises the largely unacknowledged possibility that Godwin’s interaction with the dead may depend on an adamant heart – firm and unshakeable, metaphorically speaking, yet also liable to become as unfeeling as a cold, hard stone.60 Consider Godwin’s remarks about the death of a friend:

It is impossible therefore that I should not follow by sense the last remains of my friend; and finding him no where above the surface of the earth, should not feel an attachment to the spot where his body has been deposited. His heart must be ‘made of impenetrable stuff,’ who does not attribute a certain sacredness to the grave of one he loved, and feel peculiar emotions stirring in his soul as he approaches it. (10)

For the sake of argument, let’s accept his characterization that the grave of a loved one or revered personage evokes feeling in the spectator who encounters it. Yet there is cause to hesitate over the nature of this attachment and its “peculiar emotions.” Notice the ambiguity surrounding the issue of whose heart is or is not “made of impenetrable stuff.” While we might suppose that “his heart” refers to the sentiments of the spectator who visits the site, the sentence construction suggests otherwise. Strictly speaking, “his body” – that is, the corpse of Godwin’s friend – is the immediately preceding antecedent for “his heart.” The parallel phrasing reinforces the connection. Hence the lines begin to read very differently. Godwin does not reject the possibility that some may find
themselves unmoved by the “grave of one he loved” so much as point out the kind of person whose heart is, by definition, impenetrable and unfeeling: the dead. After all, the dead feel nothing; they are blissfully insentient. Godwin’s dark implication is that a proper attachment to the grave may entail a hardening of the heart.61

Godwin’s insensibility derives from his historicist perspectives on the inevitability of change. In preparation for the time when England comes to ruin, Godwin proposes an “Atlas of those who Have Lived, for the Use of Men Hereafter to be Born”:

Though cities were demolished, and empires overthrown… the materials would thus be preserved by means of which, at the greatest distance of time, every thing that was most sacred might be restored, and the calamity which had swallowed up whole generations of men, might be obliterated as if it had never been. (29)

Given that no culture endures forever and few artifacts retain their meaning for very long, Godwin’s Essay aims to create materials – in this case, an atlas of landmarks – which the future traveler could use to reconstruct England’s cultural heritage. While Godwin’s memorials of wood will have disappeared long ago, it is never too late to remake these sites, even “at the greatest distance of time.” Yet the prospect of restoring “every thing that was most sacred,” rescuing the memory of the individuals that England held in reverence, entails a crucial shift in perspective. As if to say “death be not proud,” Godwin predicts that the future reinstallation of his memorials will “obliterate” the calamity of England’s downfall. The memorials cultivate a decidedly unfeeling heart. Godwin envisions a future visitant who is entirely unmoved by the misfortunes of ages past. Unresponsive to the demise of England, the spectator is better able to revive that heritage “as if” it had never suffered disintegration. For England to live again, the sentiments of the heart must blot out (ob-literare) the historical decline of the culture that it would ostensibly commemorate. Godwin’s historical sentiments project the restoration
of “every thing that was most sacred” as the meaning that must be done away with in order to accomplish the task of memorization. The heart hereby un-works the logic of the symbol, which encourages the spectator to suppose that a monument not only embodies but also reanimates the spirit of history. To the contrary, historical feeling discloses the precarious foundation upon which England’s heritage is remembered. If Godwin’s sentimental historiography would make it seem as if history could come alive, those same practices remain susceptible to a countervailing retrenchment of emotion.

The inconsistency of Godwin’s historical feelings shapes his rationale for encouraging the reader to support his proposal. “If the plan is simple,” he explains, “if it appeals to the ever-living feelings of the human heart; if it be such, that though suggested late, we wonder that it was not among the first conceptions of civilized society; then, once begun, it has a spirit of propagation in itself that forbids it to perish” (18). He claims that the proposal’s true effectiveness rests on its ability to inculcate an institution of feeling, or so I’d like to describe it. The feelings involved are “ever-living” or timeless, because Godwin cannot help but wonder why someone had not put the proposal into effect long ago. He imputes a connection between latter-day sentiments and their ancient origins; if the idea “was not among the first conceptions of civilized society,” it should have been. The institution of feeling is licensed by an attempt to identify the “first conception” of present sentiments. The diachronic alignment projects a future that is similarly inclined; the affections animate a “spirit of propagation” that cannot cease, once begun. Godwin hereby fortifies his sentiments by retrospectively identifying (or instituting) them as a set of attachments that have long been in effect.
By my reading, however, Godwin’s appeal to the “feelings of the human heart” provides only an ambiguous, fragile testament to the presence and vitality of the institution and their associated memorials. At issue is the nature of the feelings that Godwin believes will live forever. Once more let’s consider his hopes for success:

I trust to the heart of man, and not to the hands of man, for [the proposal’s] execution. If it is perfectly in accord with the universal feelings of our nature, it may be difficult to begin; once begun, and proceeded on for a certain length of time, it may prove impossible to abrogate. (25)

While Godwin puts his faith in the sentiments of the heart rather than the works of the hands, he also implies that heart and hand do joint labor in the work of memorialization. Godwin’s effort to embrace the past with an open heart intersects with his attention to the obstinacy of feeling. The mechanics of institution successfully inaugurate a regard for the illustrious dead only if the heart becomes adamant in the multiple senses of that term—firm and unshakeable, yes, but also as insensible, unfeeling, and stone-like. If Godwin’s obdurate emotions enshrine his connection to the past, his historical sentiments also risk entombing the dead in a second death. So on the one hand, Godwin would sentimentalize England’s illustrious dead. On the other hand, Godwin’s project inures him to the pathos of England’s eventual downfall, as I have shown. In effect, Godwin’s emotions both internalize the past and ob-literate or blot out his connection to it. If feeling serves as a vehicle for the preservation and remembrance of historical subjectivity, Godwin also calls upon the working of the heart to perform the task of rote memorization. For all his efforts to animate the emotions, they may nevertheless harden into an inanimate stone edifice. Historical feeling thus upholds the efficacy of Godwin’s proposed institution and undermines it. Godwin states it best: “Tombs are infected with the perishable quality of their histories” (13). As an object of feeling, memorials become
an artifact formed, as Herder puts it, “by the hand of a certain time, for that time” (Against 54). Because of the heart – and in spite of it – no memorial lasts forever.

“He to that valley took his way, and there / Wrought at the Sheep-fold”

As a proving ground for my argument, I turn to Wordsworth’s “Michael,” which concludes the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. The poem narrates the disappearance of Michael’s agrarian way of life. When the vagaries of capital threaten to dispossess Michael of his ancestral land, he sends away his son, Luke, to help repay the family’s debts. On the occasion of Luke’s departure for the city, Michael asks his help in laying the cornerstone for a sheepfold that will serve as “thy anchor and thy shield; amid all fear / And all temptation, let it be to thee / An emblem of the life thy Fathers liv’d.” The gesture is to no avail. Luke eventually gives himself over to “evil courses” and never returns home (line 454). The link between the generations is broken as the land falls into debtor’s hands. However critics explain the nature of Michael’s misfortune – historical, economic, biblical, linguistic, or some combination of these – everyone seems to agree that the pathos of the poem is evident in abundance. In this vein, Wordsworth draws his reader’s attention to the remnants of Michael’s sheepfold as an occasion to reflect “on man, the heart of man and human life” (line 33). It is my claim, however, that the sentimentality of “Michael” is underwritten by strains of insensitivity. Even as Wordsworth traces the bonds of custom and habit that strengthens Michael’s domestic affections, he also suggests that Michael’s emotion life undergoes a countervailing inuring of feeling. In this respect, Michael’s taciturn response to the news of Luke departure for “a hiding-place beyond the seas” marks both the deepening and the erosion of the ties that bind one generation to the next (line 456).
Wordsworth’s “Michael” is especially apropos for my discussion insofar as the poem dramatizes the tangled relationship between the nominative and verbal functions of “institution.” In order to constitute his agrarian way of life as a settled state of affairs, an institution, Michael inaugurates the construction of a sheepfold that would solidify his heritage into an enduring form. Given that only a “straggling Heap of unhewn stones” remains (line 17), the poem concerns itself with Michael’s failed attempt to construct an edifice whose beginnings always already imply a state of completion: “When thou return’st, thou in this place wilt see / A work which is not here, a covenant / ‘Twill be between us,” Michael says to Luke in an oft-quoted passage (lines 423-5). Michael’s symbolic gesture enacts its own undoing, as David Collings observes:

Already in Michael’s words the sheepfold is reduced from sacred site – a place where tradition is handed down – to an ‘emblem,’… a mute reminder of a vanished tradition… The sheepfold is at once a sign and sacred site or, more precisely, the sign of the covenantal altar, a place that marks the incompletion and deferral of the tradition. (172)

Collings rightly points out that the sheepfold’s designation as an emblem is shadowed by its status as a sign; the sheepfold serves as an epitaph for Michael’s moribund way of life. Nevertheless, critics are quick to note that the ruin of Michael’s sheepfold has its compensatory pleasures. After all, Wordsworth makes the most of the “straggling Heap of unhewn stones” as an opportunity to relate Michael’s story “for the delight of a few natural hearts, / And with yet fonder feeling, for the sake / Of youthful poets” (lines 17, 36-8). Yet is the pathos of “Michael” as evident as Wordsworth makes it out to be? If we go by Wordsworth’s configuration of feeling in the poem, the answer is not as clear-cut as critics generally assume.
On the face of things, Wordsworth’s speaker is quick to assert that Michael is not “indifferent” his natural surroundings. To the contrary, the shepherd’s varied experiences “had impress’d / So many incidents upon his mind / Of hardship, skill or courage, joy or fear; / Which like a book preserv’d the memory” (lines 64, 67-70). Following a familiar Lockean metaphor, the speaker describes Michael’s mind as a book that preserves the impressions of experience in the form of ideas as well as their corresponding emotions. By extension, Wordsworth’s January 1801 letter to Charles James Fox describes Michael’s little tract of land “as a tablet upon which [domestic feelings] are written which makes them objects of memory in a thousand instances when they would otherwise be forgotten.” According to this formulation, the land derives its significance from the affections that are written upon it. Wordsworth goes on to explain that property “serves as a kind of permanent rallying point for [the] domestic feelings” to the extent that it becomes an “object of memory.” Wordsworth thus anticipates both Hegel and de Man in asserting that feelings memorize attachments that “would otherwise be forgotten.” Wordsworth’s view is that small landowners like Michael maintain their felt sense of place precisely by evacuating the meaning of these commitments. Just so, the speaker comments that the surrounding landscape “had laid / Strong hold on [Michael’s] Affections, were to him / A pleasurable feeling of blind love” (lines 76-9). Michael’s sentimental regard for the land is appropriately blind and undiscerning insofar as his love for nature is inculcated by rote.

So where I emphasize the disarticulation of Michael’s emotional life, critics tend to take a different view: namely, that Wordsworth regards the apparent withdrawal of feeling as a testament to the enduring power of his affections. James Chandler prepares
the way for this now canonical reading by noting the alignment between Wordsworthian feeling and Burke’s conception of custom and habit. While “the effect of constant use is to make all things of whatever kind entirely unaflecting,” as Burke notes in his *Philosophical Enquiry* and elaborates in *Reflections*, the attenuation of feeling only reinforces the depth of one’s attachment to the mores, practices, and institutions inherited from the past.67 Wordsworth expands on this seemingly contradictory assessment in the poem that came to be known as “Ode: Intimations of Immortality From Recollections of Early Childhood” (composed in 1802 and 1804, first published in 1807). There Wordsworth’s speaker despairs over a child’s inevitable maturation: “Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight, / And custom lie upon thee with a weight, / Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life” (lines 127-29). While the lines seem to indicate that Wordsworth finds himself burdened by the accumulated weight of social custom and convention, Chandler convincingly demonstrates that it would be a mistake to conclude that Wordsworth saw an opposition between his “natural, native feelings” and those that are culturally inculcated. “Though the speaker [of the Intimations Ode] has not yet realized it,” Chandler explains, “the weight of custom is precisely what fits it to be what Wordsworth calls in ‘Tintern Abbey’ the anchor of his purest thoughts. And the depth to which the weight of custom sinks is what insures that some part of ourselves remains out of reach, beyond our intellectual tampering” (*Second Nature* 75, 80-1). According to this view, Wordsworth privileges the inuring effects of custom and habit as a vehicle for deepening an individual’s connection to both nature and humankind. It is in this light that Wordsworth concludes the Intimations Ode by giving

Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears. (lines 203-6)

In this passage, Wordsworth locates a depth of feeling that underwrites his various
emotions of love or joy or fear. With his gesture towards woes that “lie too deep for
tears,” Wordsworth characterizes the retrenchment of emotion as a coalescence of feeling
– albeit far below the surface of any sentiments he might express outright.

This is all to say that I find Chandler’s account persuasive. The ebb and flow of
Wordsworthian feeling does indeed facilitate the work of internalization, which as
Wordsworth describes it in the Prelude, “gives / Substance and life to what I feel,
enshrining, / Such is my hope, the spirit of the Past / For future restoration” (1850,
XII.283-87). Chandler’s discussion is incomplete, however, without recognizing that
Wordsworth’s deployment of historical feeling functions as an ambiguous, fragile
testament to the past. So if Wordsworth calls upon emotion to perform the “inner
gathering and preserving of experience,” to adapt de Man’s reading of Hegel (AI 100-1), I
content that the workings of the heart intersect uneasily with the mechanics of
Gedächtnis, or memorization, which threaten to entomb the past as a site of permanent
loss. The disarticulation of emotion is, in other words, never far removed from attempts
to enliven the past with an affective charge.

Turning back to “Michael,” my reading examines the precarious balance between
the inuring of feeling and its restoration. Consider the “endless industry” of Michael’s
household, which “left the Couple neither gay perhaps / Nor cheerful, yet with objects
and with hopes / Living a life of eager industry” (lines 122-4). Habitual activity
moderates Michael’s domestic feeling. Case in point, Michael cultivates a “patient mind
enforc’d / To acts of tenderness” through the perfunctory routine of rocking Luke’s
cradle (lines 166-7). In much the same way, shearing sheep affords him a chance to “exercise his heart with looks / Of fond correction and reproof bestow’d / Upon the child” (lines 182-4). For Michael, the shearing of sheep and the workings of the heart are related activities. The various connotations of “exercise” are suggestive in this regard: Michael exercises his heart in rearing Luke, just as he uses his shears in the husbandry of sheep. Both activities have a strong habitual component. The periodic upkeep of his flock offers Michael a chance to develop his parental sensibility. Indeed, the tasks converge. Michael is vexed, or exercised, by Luke’s disruptions. His “fond” remonstrations then double as a training exercise for Luke, who must learn to perform these duties himself. Wordsworth hereby ascribes to the view that feeling is inculcated through repetition and habituation.

In one respect, any loss of feeling due to the inuring effects of custom and habit are offset by a countervailing gain. Accordingly, Wordsworth’s speaker remarks that Michael has an “instinctive tenderness” for the son of his old age, a “Blind Spirit” deepened by the awareness of his own mortality (lines 152-3). At eighty years old, fatherhood seems to re-enliven Michael’s affections. With the daily companionship of his son, Michael finds “that objects which the Shepherd lov’d before / Were dearer now.” Through Luke, Michael experiences his life as if for the first time. Responding to the “feelings and emanations” coming from his son, “The Old Man’s Heart seem’d born again” (lines 209-11, 213).

Yet there are fissures within the speaker’s sentimental assessment that Luke is “the dearest object that [Michael] knew on earth” (line 160). A child “bring[s] hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts,” the speaker conjectures, as well as the “stirrings of
inquietude, when they / By tendency of nature needs must fail” (lines 155-7). On the one hand, Luke inspires Michael to reproduce the domestic affections that make his life meaningful. On the other hand, Michael contemplates the unsettling possibility that Luke may not perpetuate these commitments in his own life. Insofar as Michael’s “forward-looking thoughts” are susceptible to doubt, it has always been conceivable that Luke might go astray. In this sense, the vagaries of Michael’s parental affections complicate Wordsworth’s first “Essay upon Epitaphs” (1810), in which he asserts that “origin and tendency are notions inseparably co-relative” (Prose II: 51). If anything, Michael’s unfinished sheepfold contests the interdependence of beginnings and endings; laying the cornerstone of a sheepfold, as Michael plans, does not guarantee its completion. This breech in the logic of institution hinges on a crisis of feeling.68 Just as surely as Michael partakes in the “pleasurable feeling of blind love” (line 78), his heart also informs him of the “tendency of nature” towards error and dissolution. The stakes are high. Wordsworth reasons in his “Essay upon Epitaphs” that there is “no repose, no joy” without the surety that the beginnings of life entail an ever after. If Wordsworth claims that the correspondence between origins and endings guarantees the possibility of feeling, he is equally convinced that without it, “a frost would chill the spirit, so penetrating and powerful, that there could be no motions of the life of love” (Prose II: 52). By implication, crisis of institution in “Michael” has a chilling effect on the production of feeling.69

In this respect, Wordsworth ascribes to the inuring of sentiment as both the bedrock of Michael’s affections and the source of their instability.70 The equivocal function of Michael’s habituated sentiments comes to the surface as he relates to Luke
“some little part / Of our two histories” (lines 346-7). Speaking “Of things thou canst not know of,” Michael describes the circumstances of Luke’s earliest infancy, marking it as a time when the “blessings from thy Father’s tongue / Then fell upon thee.” As “Day by day pass’d on” and “Month follow’d month,” the close relationship between father and son was a constant (lines 352-3, 359). “Thou / Hadst been brought up upon thy father’s knees,” Michael tells Luke (lines 361-2). In effect, Michael conveys the institution of Luke’s domestic affections, retrospectively connecting the unremembered beginnings of his life to the solidity of their present and future relationship. The sheepfold serves as a testament to the strength of their bond. In keeping with his institutional thinking, Michael envisions building an edifice as the most appropriate way to affirm the permanence of his sentiments.

In the process of affirming continuity between the generations, however, Michael’s feelings undergo a transformation. Michael asks Luke to check his tears in deference to the decidedly unsentimental honors that they both owe their forbears:

I still
Remember them who lov’d me in my youth.
Both of them sleep together: here they liv’d
As all their Forefathers had done, and when
At length their time was come, they were not loth
To give their bodies to the family mold.
I wish’d that thou should’st live that life they liv’d. (lines 375-81)

The most appropriate way to convey love for past generations is through the withdrawal of affect. More significant even than Michael’s wish that Luke should live the life his ancestors lived, is his implicit desire that Luke should die the death they died. Michael suggests that the deadening of affect plays a crucial role in preparing Luke to give his body to “the family mold” and accept his place within an enduring heritage. Like the
“heap of stones” that “lay thrown together” for the purpose of building the sheepfold (lines 337-8), Luke must become sufficiently stone-hearted if he would preserve the memory of those who came before him.

The scene in which Luke lays the corner-stone of the sheepfold and thereby enters into a covenant with his father is undoubtedly a moment of high pathos. Yet the fact that “The Old Man’s grief broke from him, to his heart / He press’d his Son, he kissed him and wept” (lines 431-2) is not an altogether straightforward indication of the poem’s sentimental investments. After all, Michael’s tears precipitate his withdrawal of feeling: “Sometimes when he could find a leisure hour / He to that valley took his way, and there / Wrought at the Sheep-fold” (lines 449-51). Importantly, the sheepfold is “wrought” through the labor of piling up stones and not by an expression of emotion. Conversely, Michael is not over-wrought, wrought-up, or distraught by the task. Even after he learns that Luke has given himself over to the “dissolute city” (line 453), Michael continues his work. Notwithstanding the reported belief that “many and many a day [Michael] thither went, / And never lifted up a single stone” (lines 474-5), the speaker apparently arrives at a different conclusion: “The length of full seven years from time to time / He at the building of this Sheep-fold wrought, / And left the work unfinished when he died” (lines 479-81). An attention to the building the sheepfold displaces more discussion about “the pity which was then in every heart / For the Old Man” (lines 472-3). The speaker thinks it significant that Michael remains steadfast in his commitment to the seemingly interminable task of laying stone after stone. Like Michael’s other exercises of the heart, the monotony has a dulling effect on the affections. So while Michael’s insensibility
provides a basis for cultivating his domestic affections, his withdrawn affect defines his interaction with the broken remnants of his heritage.

More broadly, Michael’s inured heart is constitutive of a historicist disposition which identifies change as the only absolute. Despite Michael’s protest that “I could not lie quiet in my grave” if he should lose his land (line 242), his labors habituate him to the continual turnings of history. Case in point, Michael continues to work at the sheepfold even after learning of Luke’s disappearance. In this sense, Michael remains committed to the reproduction of the domestic affections that fail to hold. It therefore becomes a question whether the inuring of sentiment preserves the attachments that Michael holds dear or precipitates their ruin – a quandary that can’t be decided one way or the other. Michael’s desire to institute his domestic affections in the form of a permanent stone edifice is hereby shadowed by “stirrings of inquietude,” which hint at both the pathos of ruin that is to come as well as the loss of pathos itself, for which this is no compensatory gain (line 156). If Luke sparks a renewal of his father’s affections, Wordsworth suggests that these sentiments are also self-undermining. Perhaps Dorothy Wordsworth had this in mind when she describes the structure that she and her brother encounter on Greenhead Gill. “The sheepfold is falling away,” she comments in a journal entry from October 1800. “It is built nearly in the form of a heart unequally divided.”71 Dorothy invites us to see that the affections found in “Michael” always already resemble a misshapen stone heart.

My reading of “Michael” brings the chapter full circle. I began by considering the sites of institution that Johann Gottfried von Herder and Edmund Burke use to mark their ephemeral place in history. Read through the lens of G.W.F. Hegel’s commentary
on architecture, William Godwin and William Wordsworth extend this line of thinking with the acknowledgement that prevailing customs and manners are similarly mutable. It is only in developing a measure of insensibility toward present-day values and perspectives that these writers begin to understand themselves historically. Ruins, fallen monuments, and faded memorials thus bring attention to the sentiments that do not retain their expressive capacity. The pathos of ruin devolves into the ruin of pathos. By attending to the inuring of emotion that shadows late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century efforts to promote an affecting evocation of the past, my discussion provides a baseline for reevaluating the contemporary critical “desire for history.” For all the apparent ease with which critics invoke the emotive dimension of their historiographical practices, not to mention all the attention that has been given to the history of emotion, the field seems to have lost sight of Romanticism’s distinctive concerns about the whether their affective engagements are even tenable. In response, my readings probe the precarious balance between the production of historical sentiment and its subsidence.

NOTES
All citations are given parenthetically after an initial footnote.


2 For the sake of clarity, I distinguish between the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century formation of “romantic historicism” and the practice of a “New Historicism.” New Historicism is a recognized label and capitalized accordingly. Conversely, romantic historicism is not a term that writers of the period used to describe their historical perspectives and therefore does not receive capitalization.


7 Collingwood’s *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946) differentiates historicism’s reportedly undestanding of human nature from “the historical outlook of the Enlightenment [which] was not genuinely historical; in its main motive it was polemical and anti-historical” (77).


12 Jeffrey J. Williams explains that the Foucauldian bent of the essays collected in *Institutions of Literature* works in the opposite direction. “Instead of ascertaining the core of a thing called literature from which out activities in literature departments derive, [Institutions of Literature] examines what people in contemporary literature departments do – what are our regularized practices, what are the professional mandates that inflect our practices, and what are the institutional locations that mediate our work” (1). My contrasting approach follows on the work of Homer Obed Brown’s *Institutions of the English Novel*; Marc Redfield, Phantom Formations (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1996); Forest Pyle’s *The Ideology of Imagination*; and Samuel Weber’s *Institution and Interpretation* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987).


14 Derrida, “Mochlos” 23; See also Marc Redfield’s “Professing Literature: John Guillory’s Misreading of Paul de Man,” *Legacies of Paul de Man*, ed. Marc Redfield (New York: Fordham UP, 2007), 93-126. Contra Guillory, Redfield concludes that “rhetorical reading implicitly incorporates and reflects on its own institutional conditions of production, not in order to condemn its own institutionalization or celebrate its own professionalism, but because the imperative to read is infinite, and these conditions of production form part of the text to be read” (122).

15 Michel de Certeau theorizes these dynamics in *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia UP, 1988), Part I. Greenblatt puts the issue this way: “If I wanted to hear one, I had to hear the many voices of the dead. And if I wanted to hear the voice of the other, I had to hear my voice” (20).


17 Marc Redfield’s *Phantom Formations* and Susan Bernstein’s *Housing Problems* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2008) identify in the concept of *bildung* and the genre of the *bildungseroman* a comparable process of self-formation. By Bernstein’s reading, “housing provides an inscriptive space that allows subjectivity to inscribe itself and externalize itself in its residence; at the same time, it produces merely empirical sites, hollow containers that cannot be included in the mirroring relation of inside and outside that allows a building to become meaningful” (22).


Mike Goode points out that a longstanding “tradition of twentieth-century intellectual history – one that notably included Raymond Williams, Friedrich Meinecke, Conor Cruise O’Brien, and J.G.A. Pocock – associated Burkean political thought in *Reflections* with a nascent historicist conception of culture and human nature” (838).

Having said this, Herder’s oeuvre defies easy categorization. Steven Lestition notes that Herder contributes “to a variety of cultural positions which have variously been describes as the movements of Counter-Enlightenment, historicism, pre-Romanticism, or Romanticism itself.” This is not to mention the “enormous range of post-Enlightenment, Romantic, or historicist thinkers who followed immediately after [Hume and Kant, Hamann and Herder] and built upon their thinking in ways they could not have expected or anticipated.” “Countering, Transposing, or Negating the Enlightenment? A Response to Robert Norton,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 68.4 (Oct. 2007): 674, 671.


Wordsworth’s *Prelude* of 1805 captures this spirit of rebirth in describing the early years of revolution as “a time when Europe was rejoiced, / France standing on the top of golden hours, / And human nature seeming born again.” *The Prelude*, eds. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979), VI.339-42.


35 Burke subsequently derides those who would “cast away the coat of prejudice… to leave nothing but the naked reason” (R 87).


37 More broadly, Samantha Matthews uses Godwin’s text to support her claim that the “substitution of an abstract sign system for the material and ‘personal’ body [of the dead author] is alien to nineteenth-century sensibility… [T]he ‘communication’ with readers enabled by ‘literary remains’ was not purely verbal and impersonal, but biographical, spiritual, and affective.” *Poetical Remains* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 3.

38 Nicola Watson, *The Literary Tourist* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 47. Westover searches for middle ground between these positions in asserting that “books and bodies point to (and away from) each other in their efforts to establish literature’s cultural authority.”


42 “The house,” Bernstein notes, “is thus both the essence and the absence of architecture. In Hegel we might say that the relation between the architectonic and housing is one of disjunction” (10). This tension derives from questions about the purpose of architecture: “The intrusion of purposiveness into architecture implies a differentiation between means and ends following the organization of interior and exterior. As the means of building are subordinated to the purpose of shelter, the exterior of the house is seen as fully distinct from the interior spirit it shelters” (8).

43 In Bernstein’s reading, Hegel’s conception of architecture entails “the predominance of a material exteriority insufficiently penetrated by spirit – as an exterior subsisting on its own, giving vague intimations of interiority or meaning, but remaining predominantly as unworked exteriority” (7).


45 For Derrida, Hegel's account of symbolic art is shot through with problems of signification: “The obscure instability of meaning has to do with spirit’s not having clearly and freely returned to itself. Certainly nature has begun to animate itself, and itself to relate to itself, itself to examine itself, is in motion enough to signal and to symbolize itself with itself. But spirit does not come back to itself in this, does not yet recognize itself. The materiality of the signifier, it could be said, functions by itself as ‘unconscious symbolism.’” “The Pit and the Pyramid: Introduction to Hegel’s Semiology,” *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982), 98-9.
46 Paul de Man speculates whether “Hegel is saying something more complex about the symbol and about language than what we recognize in him as so familiar to us, but that part of what he has to say is something that we cannot or will not hear because it upsets what we take for granted, the unassailable value of the aesthetic.” “Sign and Symbol in Hegel’s Aesthetics,” *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. Andrzej Warminski, (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996), 95. *Aesthetic Ideology* is hereafter abbreviated as *AI*.

47 Hegel makes it clear that the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified is not suitable for the general purposes of art: “In the case of art, we cannot consider, in the symbol, the arbitrariness between meaning and significiation [which characterizes the sign], since art itself consists precisely in the connection, the affinity, and the concrete interpretation of meaning and form” (qtd. in de Man, “Sign and Symbol,” 93). Nevertheless, de Man also recognizes that it would be a mistake to say that Hegel valorizes the symbol over the sign. According to de Man’s reading of Hegel, “the sign illustrates the capacity of the intellect to ‘use’ the perceived world for its own purposes, to efface (*tilgen*) its properties and to put others in their stead. This activity of the intellect is both a freedom, since it is arbitrary, and a coercion, since it does violence, as it were, to the world (96). Derrida concurs on the former point: “The production of arbitrary signs manifest the freedom of the spirit. And there is more manifest freedom in the production of the sign than in the production of the symbol. In the sign spirit is more independent and closer to itself. In the symbol, conversely, it is a bit more exiled into nature” (“Pit and the Pyramid” 86; see also 83-4).

Romanticism’s discourse of the arbitrary receives its fullest treatment in William Keach’s *Arbitrary Power* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004). For Keach, the arbitrary specifies “the historical and social process through which what is initially random and contingent becomes absolute, or conversely through which absolute will and authority give way to the random and contingent” (4).


49 Derrida’s suggestive remarks is that “the pyramid becomes the semaphor of the sign, the signifier of significiation” (“The Pit and the Pyramid” 83).


51 In “imagining visiting Milton’s grave,” Nicola Watson explains that Godwin “all but literalizes the euphemism of ‘the last home’ or ‘last resting-place’ or last dwelling-place” (36).

52 Forest Pyle, *Ideology of the Imagination*, 59-62, 93. According to Pyle, Wordsworth aims to enshrine “the imagination for ‘future restoration,’ preserving ‘man’s power’ from deluge, sheltering it in the crypt of the poem from which it can be resurrected as a monument of English poetry” (61). It is not clear to me, however, that the broader formation of romantic historicism is predominantly recuperative in its emphasis. Whereas Pyle’s analysis ultimately favors those formulations in which writers treat memorials and monuments as interiorized sites for the preservation and celebration of spirit, I argue that romantic historicists stress a susceptibility to fragmentation, decay, and ruin, which makes all institutions and their associated structures poorly suited to conserve the interiority of ages past.

53 In discussing the “arbitrary nature of the connection between the sensuous materials and a general idea,” Hegel comments that “a cockade, a flag, or a tomb-stone, signifies something totally different from what it immediately indicates” (*Enc*. III, par. 457, p. 212).

54 In this respect, Hegel’s and Godwin’s views touch on a broader romantic debate about language and the arbitrariness of the sign.

55 By comparison, Enlightenment historiography is characterized as cold, unsympathetic, and bloodless. For a reconsideration of the polarity between Enlightenment and Romantic historiography, see Mark Salber


57 Notwithstanding the secondary status often given to the function of memory, Hegel retorts that *Gedächtnis* holds the honor of a direct etymological kinship with thought (*Gedanke*) (*Enc.* III, par. 464, p. 223).


59 Derrida’s French reads, “Au fond de ce monument, l’âme se garde vive, mais elle n’a besoin du monument que dans la mesure où elle s’expose – à la mort – dans son rapport vivant à son propre corps” “Le Puit et la Pyramide: Introduction à la sémiologie de Hegel,” *Marges de la Philosophie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972), 95. “Au fond de” translates in various ways: at the bottom of, at the back of, in the depths of; the phrase can also be rendered as root, essence, or heart.

56 I agree with Terada’s assessment that Derrida’s and de Man’s aim “is not to discredit emotion, but to extricate it from expedient mythologies” of expression (11). In this vein, Terada makes an effort to debunk two commonplace suppositions: “first, that this [poststructuralist] theory does not have an account of emotion, and second, that evidence of its own emotion belies its own nonbelief in the human subject” (3). While I concur that deconstruction is not anathema to feeling, there remains some truth to the view that deconstruction detracts from the vivacity of affect. On this point, see Terada 82-9.

56 My reading departs from Esther Schor’s more general assessment that “the mourner at the grave is merely one point in a network of emotional exchanges which constitute the moral circulation of a society. The dead, because they cannot be remediated – because they evoke and warrant our feelings of ‘dread and endless’ melancholy – provide the gold standard for the endlessly circulating currency of sympathy which constitutes a normative morality” (37).


56 Noticing Wordsworth’s pervasive interest in both dwellings and their material remains, Andrew Bennett comments that “like the tombstone, grave or funerary monument, the ruin itself articulates a form of survival: rather than a dwelling which contains or encloses the remains of the dead, the ruin is itself a kind of dead house, the carcass or corpse of a home, that which remains of the home after its ruin” (98).


68 Collings makes this point: “Thus despite Wordsworth’s ambitions for the poem, ‘Michael’ is finally a preternatural tale. Rather than initiating young minds into the social affections, as the prologue claims, it exposes the failure of precisely such an initiating tale (the one Michael tells Luke). Or, more perversely, it initiates the reader into the tale of how initiation must fail” (179).

69 Along these lines, Marjorie Levinson argues that “the poem endorses a mode of being which is realized through material loss and in the individual’s subsequent detachment from ‘effort, and expectation, and desire’ – or, positively expressed, in his achievement of *apatheia*” (60).

70 My reading thus redirects the impetus of Frances Ferguson’s influential assessment that “Wordsworth establishes the sign of mortality at the origin of language, so that the incarnation of language always seems to involve a gesture nor merely toward the feelings which precede language but also towards the disembodied state of immortality which no longer has need of language.” *Wordsworth: Language as Counter-Spirit* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1977), 33.

Chapter Three
Walter Scott’s Poetic Prose and the Problem of Periodization

The relationship to his own language (in greater or lesser degree) could never be foreign to a historically existent poet, as a human being surrounded by living hetero- and polyglossia; but this relationship could not find a place in the poetic style of his work without destroying that style, without transposing it into a prosaic key and in the process turning the poet into a writer of prose.\(^1\)

-- Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel” (1935)

The opinion that the novel is no poem is founded on the thesis: All poetry should be metric. But an exception from this thesis can be made for the sake of progressivity, if only for that. The novel is a yet incomparably more mixed mixed [sic] poem than idyll or satire, which follow a definite law of mixture.\(^2\)

-- Friedrich Schlegel, unpublished fragment (1797)

If Walter Scott’s Waverley novels cast a long shadow over post-Enlightenment Edinburgh, as Ian Duncan has argued, it is also worth remembering that Scott’s prose fiction was itself overshadowed by his earlier work in poetry and ballad collecting.\(^3\) Scott’s first novel, *Waverley; or, ’Tis Sixty Years Since* (1814), offers a prime opportunity to reassess the hybridity of romantic discourse – all the more so because it has become “commonplace to say that Scott gave up his Romantic narrative poems to write the Waverley Novels,” as Homer Brown observes.\(^4\) The plot of *Waverley* reinforces this critical trajectory when its protagonist, Edward, declares “that the romance of his life was ended, and that its real history had now commenced,” effectively abandoning his poetic sensibility for a more prosaic existence.\(^5\) Yet what this reading tends to deemphasize is the formative moment in romanticism when a movement from poetry to prose is underway but not wholly operative. In Scott’s hands, the result is a poetically inspired prose fiction or what Schlegel calls romantic (i.e. novelistic) poetry. This “incomparably mixed” formation disrupts the compartmentalization of poetry from prose fiction at a juncture when their division was more prescribed than established.
This sea-change in romantic writing practices involves broader historiographical questions. After all, what is it about Edward’s turn away from romance and from poetry that warrants his entrance into “real history?” My discussion takes its provocation from M.M. Bakhtin’s assertion that poets gain the ability to think historically in the process of “transposing [their writing] into a prosaic key.” To be sure, there is good reason to find fault with Bakhtin’s underlying view that “the boundedness, the historicity, the social determination and specificity of one’s own language is alien to poetic style” (285). If anything, the last three decades of New Historicist criticism have been preoccupied with just that proposition: namely, to what extent and in what way is romantic poetry historical? Though Bakhtin’s assessment of poetry may need adjustment, his sense that historical consciousness emerges from the “process [of] turning the poet into a writer of prose” remains influential. Critics are perhaps most familiar with this diachronic narrative from two often told stories: one about the “rise of the novel,” the other about the “rise of history.”

For all the consideration given to Ian Watt’s *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), relatively little attention has been paid to what his paradigm implies about poetry. It is a durable, though perhaps little discussed, truism that the novel is a prose phenomenon – which is to say, not poetry. To the extent that histories of the novel tend to consolidate an opposition between prose and poetry, the “rise of the novel” narrative frequently involves a corollary subplot about what we might call the decline of poetry. The novel’s emergence reorients the function of poetry with the result that the novel becomes, as Clifford Siskin puts it, “the discursive site in which the naturalization of writing is negotiated.” This development has special significance for how critics understand
Scott’s career. For one, Homer Brown goes so far as to declare that Scott’s *Waverley* spells “the death of poetry and the institution of the novel.” In effect, Scott supersedes the romance of poetry for realist prose and thereby settles the dividing line between these discursive modes: “Banished from the living culture, poetry is preserved as quotation or epigraph. The poetic only achieves an afterlife as prose” (164, 168). Poetry, following Brown’s vitalism metaphor, is the specter of a fading cultural authority that survives only through its incorporation into prose fiction. The novel serves a yardstick for measuring the deracination of poetry.

If Bakhtin’s comment about the discursive “process of turning the poet into a writer of prose” lends itself to familiar narratives about the “rise of the novel,” his observation about the “prosaic key” of historical consciousness is likewise a touchstone for another storyline: the “rise of history.” On this account, romanticism articulates a distinctive “desire for history,” as Stephen Bann writes, which manifests as an emotional bond or felt connection between past and present.9 Bakhtin’s contemporary, György Lukács, finds confirmation for this view in Scott’s fiction. “This is vital for the creation of a real historical novel,” Lukács explains, “one which brings the past close to us and allows us to experience its real and true being.”10 Lukács deems Scott’s fiction exemplary insofar as it is able to make history vital for the present.

Romanticism’s desire to cultivate an affective engagement with the past serves as an inflection point in recent critical narratives about the “rise of history.” Mark Salber Phillips plots the continuities between Enlightenment and Romantic historiography, showing that “the sentimentalism of Hume and his contemporaries contributed a great deal to the growing taste for immediacy in historical writing, but in encouraging this
tendency, these writers unintentionally fostered a new climate of taste by which their own works would come to be judged as excessively cold and detached.\textsuperscript{11} Phillips defines the eighteenth-century emergence of modern historical consciousness as a movement toward romanticism’s privileged modes of historical feeling. His account finds its mirror image in Mike Goode’s \textit{Sentimental Masculinity and the Rise of History}, which charts a dénouement for the eighteenth-century trend that increasingly sought an emotional link to the past. “Only by recognizing the centrality of feeling to Romantic historicist epistemology,” Goode asserts, “can we begin to appreciate fully the extent to which history severed its ties to its Romantic forebears as the nineteenth century unfolded and historians began adopting the ideal of an impersonal, disinterested, and almost anaesthetized scientific impartiality toward the historical record.”\textsuperscript{12} The discipline of history modulates into a “prosaic key,” as it were.

In showing that the discursive and affective connotations of the “prosaic” are two sides of the same coin, Bakhtin suggests a connection between critical narratives about the “rise of the novel” and the “rise of history.” Yet this point of convergence makes it possible to identify the discrepancy between these accounts. Where the novel’s rise correlates with a displacement of poetry, the “rise of history” narrative arrives at the opposite conclusion. There historiography comes to fruition in romanticism’s poetic, which is to say an affective, engagement with the past. This scenario finds its falling off point in the emergence of history as a more prosaic science. Part of the reason why these two narratives are at odds over the relationship between poetry and prose, the poetic and the prosaic, is because each is – in a word – too much of a narrative; that is to say, “the
rise of the novel” and the “rise of history” tell their stories of diachronic development at the expense of recognizing synchronic complexity.

To resolve the impasse, I read dialogically, as Bakhtin might say, emphasizing the hybridity at play within romantic discourse. Examining Scott’s amalgamation of poetry with prose reveals the interplay between his desire to enliven the past and the attenuation of that connection. Scott’s treatment of the romantic novel provides the focus for my discussion. As the epigraph from Friedrich Schlegel’s notebook begins to suggest, the romantic novel sets a notable precedent for – and challenge to – Bakhtin’s sense of the “process [that] turns the poet into a writer of prose” – above all, by exploring the intermixing of these modes.

My larger aim is to identify the historiographical ramifications of Scott’s literary experimentation, showing that Waverley destabilizes the notion of a literary-historical period as it emerges in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. This is to say that the instability of historicist thought makes itself felt in Scott’s mixed emotions, if you will, which unhinge the period designations that critics have come to rely on.

“Walter Scott has no business to write novels, especially good ones”

Jane Austen is one of the first to raise the possibility that Scott’s poetry might have stolen the limelight from the 1814 reception of Waverley. Remarking on Scott’s career change in a letter to her sister, Austen formulates an aesthetic response to what she sees as the economic ramifications of his foray into novel writing. In doing so, she gains a distinctively historical perspective that ironizes her present-day concerns. I begin with Austen’s comment as an occasion to explore the historiographical instabilities set into motion by Scott’s text. Her response reads as follows:
Walter Scott has no business to write novels, especially good ones.—It is not fair.—He has Fame and Profit enough as a Poet, and should not be taking the bread out of other people’s mouths.—I do not like him, & do not mean to like Waverley if I can help it – but fear I must.14

Austen’s tongue in cheek observation is that the literary marketplace is not big enough to accommodate Scott’s novelistic endeavors, especially given the outsized “Fame and Profit” he already enjoys as a poet. The potential success of Waverley might deprive other novelists of their ability to earn a living, she worries. As if to confirm her amusingly dire prediction, Austen confesses that she cannot help but like Waverley; her critical judgment trumps her economic self-interest. With the recognition that Scott’s entrance into the not quite respectable business of novel writing comes backed by the cultural capital he has accrued as a poet, Austen finds herself obliged to respect Scott’s work; she fears that she “must” like his new novel.15

Yet Austen’s response is more than a quip about the economics of authorship. If Austen’s business interests make her resistant to Scott’s first novel, her aesthetic judgment undercuts her market analysis. The latter perspective comes through in Austen’s ironic admission that despite her exasperation, Scott’s novel is a “good one.” The pressures of the literary marketplace are further qualified by her allusion to Edmund Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757). In that work, Burke observes that “the removal or moderation of pain has something in it far from distressing, or disagreeable in its nature,” going on to define “delight” as a variant of outright, positive pleasure.16 Austen’s equivocal fear that she may like Waverley takes after Burke’s treatment of the “delightful horror” he associates with the sublime (123).
The Burkean inflection of Austen’s “fear” is brought into focus by an episode from *Northanger Abbey* (volume I, chapter VII). In a conversation between Catherine Morland and John Thorpe, Catherine inquires whether her companion has read Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). John initially responds that he would never read *Udolpho* or any other novel for that matter. When Catherine presses her suggestion that he might find the book interesting, the following exchange takes place:

“Not I, faith! No, if I read any, it shall be Mrs. Radcliff’s [sic]; her novels are amusing enough; they are worth reading; some fun and nature in *them.*”

“Udolpho was written by Mrs. Radcliff [sic],” said Catherine, with some hesitation, from the fear of mortifying him.

“No sure; was it? Aye, I remember, so it was; I was thinking of that other stupid book…”17

If Austen found herself liking Scott’s *Waverley* despite her inclination not to, John Thorpe has the comparable realization that he will probably enjoy Radcliffe’s *Udolpho*, notwithstanding his bias against novels of that sort, which he regards as a waste of time. In turn, Catherine is concerned, as a gothic heroine might be, that she will do more than embarrass John by pointing out that *Udolpho* is, in fact, written by Radcliffe; she fears that her correction will bring him bodily harm or even death, etymologically speaking; rectifying the mistake will mortify him.

By framing her response to Scott as a subtle echo of the fictional exchange between Catherine and John about *Udolpho*, Austen recalls the initial efflorescence of the gothic during the 1790s – a time when, as Natasha Duquette point out, “women writers were experimenting with and modifying the ideas of Burke,” and the Burkean sublime.18 Certainly, Austen’s comment about Scott stands fifteen years removed from when she finished the initial draft of *Northanger Abbey*, then titled *Susan*, in 1799. The distance begins to shrink, however, given the text’s circuitous publication history: sold for
publication in 1803 but never published, Austen successfully repurchases the rights to the manuscript in 1816 after failing to do so a decade earlier, finally getting the novel into print a year later.¹⁹ Combining the publication history with evidence suggesting that Austen made stylistic revisions to the text as late as 1816, it is plausible that Austen could have had *Northanger Abbey* at the back of her mind when she responds to *Waverley*.²⁰ This is all to say that Austen’s comments about Scott produce a distant echo of *Northanger Abbey*, which itself recalls the gothic novels of the 1790s and specifically Radcliffe’s *Mysteries of Udolpho*, which – to finally arrive at my intended objective – are experimenting with Burke’s conception of the sublime.

In an extended sense, then, Austen tempers her complaint about the market implications of Scott’s career move by invoking the extended legacy of a Burkean idiom. Burke could have been a help to Austen insofar as he suggests that the experience of the sublime requires a measure of detachment. “When danger or pain press too nearly,” he writes in the *Philosophical Enquiry*, “they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful” (36-7). For Burke, pain offers a kind of relative pleasure – albeit at a distance and in its diminution. Along similar lines, Austen stands back from her uneasiness about the impact of Scott’s novel. She does so by signaling that her concerns are, to a certain extent, overstated. At the risk of killing Austen’s joke, it is worth noting that Scott’s transition into the novel writing business does not threaten the lives of his competitors, only their livelihood. To accuse Scott of “taking the bread out of other people’s mouths” is, of course, hyperbole. In order to enjoy *Waverley*, Austen makes her
financial anxieties into a punch line: success in the literary marketplace is not a matter of life and death and to think so is laughable.

In reorienting her thinking about the political economy of novel writing, Austen’s Burkean perspectives no doubt have the hallmarks of an aesthetic ideology. Yet by the same token, her remark is especially clear-eyed about the economic determinants that underwrite the language of the sublime. Indeed, for the last twenty five years or so, critics have debated whether the aesthetic commitments of Austen and her contemporaries mystify the conditions under which they wrote. It is only recently, however, that critics have begun to acknowledge the romantic discourse of aesthetics as an intervention within the form of historical thought.

The historiographical dimension of Austen’s comment comes into focus through a striking parallel: much as Scott frames his narrative as a tale about “Sixty Years Since,” Austen’s 1814 response to *Waverley* likewise reaches back via Radcliffe almost sixty years to the 1757 publication of Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry*. By transposing her thoughts about *Waverley* into the vocabulary of the sublime, Austen gains a historical perspective on the emerging opposition between political economy and aesthetics. Burke’s dated viewpoint affords Austen a vantage on the partition of Scottish moral philosophy into these distinct fields of endeavor. In this respect, Austen anticipates Mary Poovey’s salutary effort to “uncover not some truth of economics behind the self-justifications of aesthetics, but the process by which the appearance of autonomous realms was generated from what was actually a continuum of human activity.” If the works of Smith, Malthus, and Ricardo mark political economy as a newly influential
discourse of modernity, as critics have argued, Austen takes a decidedly retrograde stance in using the Burkean sublime to interrogate the dynamics of the literary marketplace.24

Austen’s aesthetic perspective discloses her uncertainty about the relationship between past and present. Here it is important to clarify that I touch on Austen’s – or for that matter, Scott’s – views about political economy only tangentially and as an occasion to note the aesthetic disruptions at work within romantic historiography. The issue comes to a head in Austen’s concluding exclamation: “I do not like [Scott], & do not mean to like Waverley if I can help it – but fear I must.” As I have been arguing, Austen invokes Burke to make light of her financial anxieties. But from another perspective, she is also doing the opposite. After all, it is possible that Scott’s career turn might not live up to her magnified “fears.” In characterizing Scott’s Waverley as a sublime force, Austen points up her exaggerated sense of Scott’s impact on the literary marketplace. Taken together, these possibilities indicate Austen’s ambivalence about the literary-historical consequences of Scott’s intervention. Neither Burke’s Philosophical Enquiry of sixty years prior nor the latest political economics are adequate to the task of delineating the repercussions of Scott’s turn from poetry to prose fiction. Yet it is significant that Austen articulates her equivocal stance using an allusion to the Burkean sublime. The unstable authority of aesthetics provides Austen with a resource for addressing what is most problematic about her present.

“The lights and shadows necessary to give effect to a fictitious narrative”

If Austen pays special attention to Scott’s shift from poetry to prose, Scott is likewise mindful of the need to place Waverley between eighteenth-century romance and Austen’s nineteenth-century novel of manners. In the process of triangulating the genre
of *Waverley*, Scott comes to articulate the unevenness of his broader historiographical stance.  

Only a year after publishing *Waverley*, Scott wrote an essay on Jane Austen’s *Emma* for the *Quarterly Review*. There he identifies her work with an emergent “class of fictions” he as much as calls the modern novel.  

Jane Austen’s novels, argues Scott, “belongs to a class of fictions which has arisen almost in our own times, and which draws the characters and incidents introduced more immediately from the current of ordinary life than was permitted by the former rules of the novel” (Williams 227). For Scott, Austen’s realism consists in her ability to turn the genre’s imitation of *la beau ideal* into an examination of the ordinary and everyday.

Even so, he avoids positioning *Waverley* in similar terms. Scott foregrounds his awareness of genre with his full title, *Waverley; or, ‘Tis Sixty Years Since*. He decides against a protagonist with more name recognition, instead choosing Edward Waverly as an “uncontaminated name, bearing with its sound little of good or evil.” Likewise he rejects the connotations of several other subtitles: “Waverley, a Tale of other Days;” “Waverley, a Romance from the German;” “A Sentimental Tale;” and “A Tale of the Times.” By sidestepping these alternatives, Scott displays his “intimate knowledge of the particular ingredients necessary to the composition of romances and novels of various descriptions.” His aim is to avoid the generic “election,” as he terms it, that “may be held as pledging the author to some special mode of laying the scene, drawing his characters, and managing his adventures,” expressly forgoing generic identification (*W* 3-4).

Notwithstanding his high praise for Austen, Scott passes over her “fictions… of ordinary life” as one among several genres ill-suited for *Waverley*. 

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In positive terms, Austen heightens Scott’s sense for the distance between romance and the realism, finding a place for his own fiction between these poles. His approach is evidenced in an 1824 *Encyclopedia Britannica* “Essay on Romance,” which re-conceptualizes Samuel Johnson’s definitions of “romance” and “novel:”

*Romance* [is] a fictitious narrative in prose or verse; the interest of which turns upon marvelous and uncommon incidents; thus being opposed to the kindred term *Novel…* as a fictitious narrative, differing from the Romance, because the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events and the modern state of society.27

Scott enhances the novel’s claim to verisimilitude by mapping its divergence from the romance of “marvelous and uncommon incidents.” But this is not to say that Scott himself produces the modern novel. Far from it. Scott checks his analysis with a significant caveat: “Assuming these definitions, it is evident, from the nature of the distinctions adopted, that there may exist compositions which it is difficult to assign precisely or exclusively to the one class or the other; and which, in fact, partake of the nature of both” (129). Scott thus situates *Waverley* as an anomalous formation, notwithstanding his critical efforts to define the genre of the modern novel.

Scott’s 1831 introduction to *The Fortunes of Nigel* explains the historiographical implication of his generic positioning: “[T]he most picturesque period of history is that when the ancient rough and wild manners of a barbarous age are just becoming innovated upon, and contrasted by the illumination of increased or revived learning.” Scott concentrates on a moment of cultural transition. What makes this period of history “picturesque” is its intervening placement between a series of cultural oppositions: ancient and modern, barbaric and civilized, Scotland and England. Scott’s historical perspective corresponds to his mixed treatment of genre: “The strong contrast produced
by the opposition of ancient manners to those which are gradually subduing them, affords the lights and shadows necessary to give effect to a fictitious narrative.”28 His fiction focuses on the liminal interaction between otherwise distinct historical formations.

Quite deliberately, then, Scott patterns his novels after the historiographical unevenness of Scottish culture:

While such a period entitles the author to introduce incidents of a marvelous and improbable character, as arising out of the turbulence, independence and ferocity, belonging to the old habits of violence, still influencing the manners of a people who had been so lately in a barbarous state; yet, on the other hand, the characters and sentiments of many of the actors, may with the utmost probability, be described with great variety of shading and delineation, which belong to the newer and more improved period, of which the world has but lately received the light. (Allott 50)

For Scott to hold himself at arms length from romantic narratives of “marvelous and improbable” incident does not imply, however, that he embraces the modernity of a “newer and more improved period” of history. What interests him instead is the juxtaposition of “ancient manners” with contemporary modes of “shading and delineation.” In the same way, Scott situates Austen’s “modern novel” at one end of a generic spectrum that extends to romance. It is then between the poles of eighteenth-century romance and nineteenth-century realism that Scott finds a place for his own prose fiction.

“A writer of pure musical Addisonian prose”

To the extent that Waverley suspends – even as it enacts – Scott’s career change, his text deconstructs a series of distinctions between romance and novel, poetry and prose, the poetic and the prosaic. Or more accurately, Scott interrelates terms that have only subsequently come to stand in opposition. Along these lines, Scott’s historical fascination with the liminal space between past and present takes shape through his
attention to the hybridity of his generic, discursive, and affective engagements. From a generic perspective, Scott’s historical novel splits the difference between romance and realism; from a discursive standpoint, he narrates Edward’s love of poetry in prose; and in its affective tenor, *Waverley* fuses Edward’s poetic past full of romantic feeling and imaginative possibility with a prosaic present that is dull, mundane, and lackluster by comparison. If anything, the shifting terms of my own discussion testify to the instability of distinctions that overlap with and blur into each other. This problematic receives its defining formulation in Wordsworth’s preface to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, which asserts that prose and verse share a common essence. Throughout my discussion, Wordsworth’s view of the fundamental identity of prose and verse provides a baseline for gauging the historiographical implications of Scott’s like-minded efforts.

*Waverley*’s concluding “Postscript, which should have been a Preface,” identifies the role that feeling has to play in Scott’s treatment of Scottish culture: “It has been my object to describe these persons, not by a caricatured and exaggerated use of the national dialect, but by their habits, manners, and feelings” (*W* 341). Scott’s dedication proper further links *Waverley* with a sentimental tradition: “These volumes being respectfully inscribed to our Scottish Addison, Henry Mackenzie, by an unknown admirer of his genius” (*W* 343). We can glimpse what Scott admired in Mackenzie’s popular tale, *The Man of Feeling* (1771), by the preface Scott wrote for that work in *Ballantyne’s Novelist’s Library* (1824):

> His country may boast, that, in one instance at least, she has produced, in Mackenzie, a writer of pure musical Addisonian prose, which retains the quality of vigor, without forfeiting that of clearness and simplicity. We are hence led to observe, that the principle object of Mackenzie, in all his novels, has been to reach and sustain a tone of moral pathos. (Williams 79)
What makes Mackenzie’s language affective, in Scott’s view, is its blend of poetic musicality and clear prose. Yet it is no small irony that in styling his novel after Mackenzie’s Addisonian prose, Scott makes a substantial departure from Addison’s own warning that poets should “have more than ordinary care not to fall into prose and a vulgar diction.”

In the better known version of this view, Wordsworth’s preface to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* claims “that there neither is nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition.” By Don Bialostosky’s reading, Wordsworth indicates that the “essential” identity of prose and verse resides “in that common power rather than in their distinguishing forms.” Notwithstanding the “superadded” meter, as Wordsworth wrote in his 1850 text, verse and prose are more alike than different (*Prose* I: 137). Back in the 1800 preface, Wordsworth makes the point this way: “the language of a large portion of every good poem… must necessarily, except with reference to the meter, in no respect differ from that of good prose, but likewise that some of the most interesting parts of the best poems will be found to be strictly the language of prose when prose is well written” (*Prose* I: 132). While Wordsworth recognizes the binary distinction between metrical verse and prose, the acknowledgement does not keep him from exploring the commonality between the language of poetry and the language of prose. Both derive, Bialostosky observes, “from the same substance” or alternatively “possess the same power from the same inner source” – a proposition that Coleridge vigorously disputes (not to mention significantly obfuscates) in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817). There Coleridge comes back with the
rejoinder that “I write in meter, because I am about to use a language different from that of prose.”

It is worth reviewing the exchange between Wordsworth and Coleridge in order to clarify Scott’s participation in and contribution to a contested debate. If Scott echoes an implicitly Wordsworthian amalgamation of the language of verse with the language of prose, he also introduces his own historiographical concerns into the discussion. In this vein, Scott’s high regard for Makenzie’s style dovetails with an appreciation for Mackenzie as a “historian of feeling,” who gives his attention to “the history of effects produced on the human mind by a series of events, [rather] than the narrative of those events themselves” (Williams 80, 83). Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) sounds the common refrain, Mike Goode explains, when Burke concludes that “the proper judge must be able to feel his way into the case of his predecessors, to feel how individual hearts throughout history were excited to submit to the codes of conduct that he inherits from them” (34).

Scott’s sentimental historiography finds an expression in Edward Waverley’s love of Old Scotland, a passion which peaks in a chapter on “Highland Minstrelsy.” Edward is Scott’s “mediocre, prosaic hero” – as Lukács describes him – a bookish ne’er-do-well from the lesser English aristocracy (34). “Warm in his feelings, wild and romantic in his ideas and in his taste of reading, with a strong disposition towards poetry,” Edward is particularly fascinated with the Scottish Highlands. There he meets Fergus Mac-Ivor, the Highland chief, who is fomenting a Jacobite rebellion on behalf of the exiled Stuart king. On learning that Edward loves poetry, Fergus introduces Edward to his sister, Flora:

> My dear Flora, before I return to the barbarous ritual of our forefathers, I must tell you that Captain Waverley is a worshipper of the Celtic muse, not the less so
perhaps that he does not understand a word of her language. I have told him you are eminent as a translator of Highland poetry, and that [the poet] Mac-Murrough admires your versions of his songs upon the same principle that Captain Waverley admires their original, – because he does not comprehend them. Will you have the goodness to read or recite to our guest in English, the extraordinary string of names which Mac-Murrough has tacked together in Gaelic? (W 102)

Here Fergus uses irony to negotiate the politics of his interaction with Edward. By invoking the “barbarous rituals of our forefathers,” Fergus ventriloquizes the prejudices of English gentry like Edward who look down on the supposed backwardness of Scottish culture. Yet Fergus nevertheless caters to Edward’s tourism. In one moment, Fergus obliges Edward love of poetry by asking Flora to give a recital. In the next, he implies that Scotland interests Edward only insofar as it flatters his unstated sense of cultural superiority. Fergus’s ambivalence about the cultural politics of his engagement with Edward leads him to suggest that Edward is drawn to the culturally mediated status of Scottish poetry. The allure, or romance, of bardic verse is that neither Edward nor Mac-Murrough can fully understand one another. True to the Greek etymology of the word “barbarous,” Fergus characterizes Mac-Murrough’s poetry as a foreign mode of speech that retains the vestiges of incomprehensibility even when heard in translation.

Counterintuitive though it may seem, Fergus intimates that this mutual lack of understanding might be the source of Edward’s fascination.

In response, Flora takes a self-deprecating attitude towards her translation of Gaelic poetry. Yet doing so only intensifies the affective power of her language, counterintuitive though it may seem. She observes to Edward that “much of [the original poetry] must evaporate in translation, or be lost on those who do not sympathize with the feelings of the poet” (W 103). For all its elusiveness, Flora’s poetry is highly effective at bringing her together with Edward. In the same way, Flora attributes her poetic allure to the gaps
and fissures in her performance. She explains to Edward: “I have given you the trouble of walking to this spot, Captain Waverley, both because I thought the scenery would interest you, and because a Highland song would suffer still more from my imperfect translation, were I to produce it without its own wild and appropriate [natural] accompaniments” (W 106). Flora is well aware that the contrived or “produced” nature of the scene only heightens the poetry’s ability to stir Edward’s feelings.

Here, then, we can see that for Scott, sentimentality marks poetry as a site of cultural exchange. Surely this is the point of Flora’s performance for Edward:

Mist darkens the mountain, night darkens the vale,  
But more dark is the sleep of the sons of the Gael:  
A stranger commanded – it sunk on the land,  
It has frozen each heart, and benumb’d every hand!

The dirk and the target lie sordid with dust,  
The bloodless claymore is but redden’d with rust;  
On the hill or the glen if a gun should appear,  
It is only to war with the heath-cock or deer. (W 107)

These lines depict the reemergence of a barbaric culture whose “battle-song” revolts against its colonial domestication. A “strange,” foreign authority has brought “darkness” down on the community and sapped its power to act. That the weapons are “redden’d” portends both a bloody history and a potentially violent future for Scotland. Flora’s song grows in volume and energy into a full-throated cry, ultimately calling to all the families of Scotland: “For honor, for freedom, for vengeance awake” and “burst the base foreign yoke as your sires did of yore.” Edward responds with a “wild feeling of romantic delight… amount[ing] almost to a sense of pain” (W 107-9). Yet the raw passions, perse, are not what compel his attention. Rather, he is drawn to the way that archaic artifacts, such as “The dirk and the target [lying] sordid with dust,” reactivate within
modern culture as weapons that “only war with the heath-cock or deer.” This exchange between Flora and Edward demonstrates Scott’s interest in the liminal interaction between Scottish primitivism and English modernity. Scott is less concerned with the opposition than he is enthralled by the ground that holds them in “lights and shadows.”

What, then, is the relationship between Scott’s poetry and prose? In explanation, I would like to notice that what originally prompted Edward’s exchange with Flora was the reference to his family name in Mac-Murrough’s Gaelic poetry. Fergus specifically introduced Flora to Edward so that she could “read or recite to our guest in English, the extraordinary string of names which Mac-Murrough has tacked together in Gaelic” (W 102). Yet Flora never refers to the Waverleys in any of the poetry she recites to Edward, offering instead this prose summary of the truncated material:

> Besides, you should have heard a practical admonition to the fair-haired son of the stranger, who lives in the land where the grass is always green – the rider on the shining pampered steed, whose hue is like the raven, and whose neigh is like the scream of the eagle for battle. The valiant horseman is affectionately conjured to remember that his ancestors were distinguished by their loyalty, as well as by their courage. – All this you have lost. (W 109)

Flora displaces her poetic performance into a moment of prosaic elaboration. Edward is figuratively identified as “the fair-haired son of the stranger,” a description that resonates with Flora’s earlier poetic invocation of the “stranger [that] commands.” The eagle’s battle scream likewise reprises the call to arms of Flora’s war song. Her statement relies on similes and vivid images to call attention to its poetic source material; Edward’s horse is variously figured as a raven, an eagle, and a “shining pampered steed” that travels from a “land where the grass is always green.” The passage emulates the synthesis of poetry and prose that Scott praised in Mackenzie’s writing: a “pure musical Addisonian prose, which retains the quality of vigor, without forfeiting that of clearness and simplicity”
In his effort to cut across the conventional poetry/prose binary, Scott’s “musical prose” also aligns him—albeit tacitly—with the stylistic project of Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads*. Where Wordsworth argues that the language of prose is indispensable for writing verse, Scott demonstrates the converse: namely, that poetry is constitutive of prose—except, of course, with reference to the meter.

Case in point, the prose of Flora’s “practical admonition” makes it possible for her poetry to sentimentalize colonial revolt. Edward’s awe of bardic poetry keeps him from recognizing Flora’s political overtures. He remains naively unaware that Flora’s effort to “conjure” him as a “valiant horsemen” aligns his ancestral “loyalty” with the Jacobite cause and against the Hanoverian monarchy. Despite Edward’s limited grasp of her insinuations, though, the poetry opens new avenues of emotional receptivity. Where Flora’s prose tells Edward how it “affectionately conjures” his allegiance, her poetry shows him how it feels to be roused by anti-colonial passions. In order to portray the cultural flux that brings the Celtic periphery into contact with modernity, Scott looks to poetry to create the sentimental connection across cultures that prose cannot accomplish under its own auspices. Edward’s feeling for bardic verse makes the novel’s prose serviceable. The result is a poetically inspired prose fiction that—as I go on to explain—nevertheless remains in dialogue with the other connotation of the word “prosaic”: namely, the dull, uninteresting, quotidian, and largely unaffected.

“The romance of his life was ended…its real history had now commenced”

Scott is hardly alone in his desire to overcome the longstanding polarity between the language of poetry and the language of prose. Wordsworth’s preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) announces the pattern with his effort to collapse the
distance between the two modes. In effect, Wordsworth precipitates the “fall into prose” that Addison found so objectionable. Friedrich Schlegel contributes to this line of thought by positioning the language of prose as a critical reflection on poetic tendencies that are “always becoming and… can never be completed.”\textsuperscript{34} The novel hereby affords what Benjamin subsequently describes as “the highest poetic form.”\textsuperscript{35} Failing that synthesis, Hegel’s \textit{Aesthetics} associates post-romantic art with an emergent “prose of actuality” or “prose of life” that distances itself from the work of \textit{poesis}.\textsuperscript{36}

Strikingly, matters of periodization are never far removed from romantic discussions about the shifting relationship between poetry and prose. The present tense of Wordsworth’s assertion that “there neither is, nor can be any \textit{essential} difference between” the modes is keyed to a specifically \textit{fin du (dix-huitième) siècle} moment;\textsuperscript{37} the discursive innovation that Schlegel associates with a “progressive universal poetry” connotes, among other things, temporal movement; likewise, the ascendant “prose of the world” marks a watershed in Hegel’s history of art.\textsuperscript{38} In this context, it is worth re-reading Edward’s oft-quoted turn away from poetry for what it says about how Scott situates himself historically. Edward’s declaration is rather more ambiguous than either the “rise of the novel” narrative or the “rise of history” narrative generally allow. It is by no means clear, in other words, that the episode confirms the stories of diachronic development that critics tell about Scott’s career in general and \textit{Waverley} in particular.

In this scene, Edward contemplates the failed Jacobite revolt that has crushed the hopes of his Highland companions, Fergus and Flora Mac-Ivor, and left his Lowlands friends, Baron and Rose Bradwardine, destitute. As Edward reflects on his involvement
in the debacle, he comes to reevaluate the poetic sensibility that brought him to the Highlands in search of romance:

Then his mind turned to the supposed death of Fergus, to the desolate situation of Flora, and, with yet more tender recollection, to that of Rose Bradwardine, who was destitute of the devoted enthusiasm of loyalty, which, to her friend, hallowed and exalted misfortune. These reveries he was permitted to enjoy, undisturbed by queries or interruptions; and it was in many a winter walk by the shores of Ulswater, that he acquired a more complete mastery of a spirit tamed by adversity, than his former experience had given him; and that he felt himself entitled to say firmly, though perhaps with a sigh, that the romance of his life was ended, and that its real history had now commenced. (W 283)

In saying that “the romance of his life was ended, and that its real history had now commenced,” Edward divides his life into two chronological periods. Like his subsequent critical readership, Edward considers himself “entitled” to make this delineation. Not only does he bestow a heading or designation upon each period of his life, literally en-titling them as “romance” and “real history,” but “he felt himself entitled” to make these determinations; it is his right.

Scott’s treatment is instructive because he discloses the rhetorical maneuvering that underwrites Edward’s statement. In one sense, Edward’s assertion that “the romance of his life was ended” is the product of a different kind of period – namely, a lull or pause in the rhetorical sense of the term – in which “many a winter walk by the shores of Ulswater” allows his mind to “turn” and re-turn to recent events. Edward’s “reveries” constitute an interval of time that goes nowhere, so to speak. From this perspective, cracks begin to appear in Edward’s sense that he has left behind the “romance of his life.” In particular, I would like to put pressure on Edward’s assertion that his turn toward a novelistic preference for the “real history” of everyday life involves a corollary turn away from romance and from poetry. My aim is to demonstrate that these tropes of turning

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both work and un-work Edward’s ability to periodize his life as a sequential
development.

To be sure, Edward’s newfound self-discipline is intended to counteract the “wild
feeling of romantic delight” he once felt when Flora Mac-Ivor stood before a rustic
waterfall and sang of ancient Celtic heroism. Sadder but wiser, Edward realizes that his
affection for the poetical Flora is untenable given her single-minded devotion to the
Jacobite cause. Instead, he redirects his attention to the prosaic Rose, whom he
previously considered “too frank, too confiding, too kind; amiable qualities undoubtedly,
but destructive of the marvelous with which a youth of imagination delights to address
the empress of his affections” (W 66). It is tempting to interpret the novel’s marriage plot
as an indication that Scott comes to favor prose over poetry. Yet as Nancy Armstrong
observes, critics do so at the risk of “read[ing] the novel from a later-nineteenth-century
perspective that could, unlike Scott, see Rose as Flora’s aesthetic superior.”39

In this respect, Edward’s fall into the “prose of the world,” as Hegel might term it,
is far from clear cut. After all, Scott stages Edward’s coming of age into “real history” as
a characteristically romantic epiphany; that is, a melancholy “reverie” about the “desolate
situation” of extra-ordinary individuals. We need look no farther than Scott’s earlier
narrative poem, “The Lay of the Last Minstrel” (1805), to recognize Edward’s fascination
with the demise of the old Scotland. Quite to the contrary of his stated aims, Edward’s
efforts at self-mastery facilitate his enjoyment, if not outright indulgence, in the romantic
poetry he purportedly gives up.

For one, the “turns” of Edward’s prose reverie adheres to romantic methods of
poetic composition if not the metrically determined turns of its verse form. By William
Hazlitt’s account, “Coleridge has told me that he himself liked to compose in walking over uneven ground, or breaking through the straggling branches of a copse-wood; whereas Wordsworth always wrote (if he could) walking up and down a straight gravel-walk, or in some spot where the continuity of verse met with no collateral interruption.”  
While Edward’s musings may not be “the turnings intricate of verse” that Wordsworth traces in the *Prelude* (1805 V.603), his fictional perambulations are nevertheless consistent with the composition habits of Scott’s romantic contemporaries. Moreover, the bleak setting only seems to encourage Edward’s rumination on the “hallowed and exalted misfortune” of his friends. Even in the moment when Edward announces his supposedly “firm” conviction that the “romance of his life was ended,” he punctuates his statement with a sentimental sigh. Suffice it to say that Edward does not enact the newfound maturity his remarks apparently announce.

The implication is that Edward’s movement from error to insight, from poetry to prose, from romance to realism, is not a sequential progression. The linearity of Edward’s growth and development is undercut by Scott’s interest in juxtaposing an array of temporal perspectives on his experience. I am far from the first, and certainly not the last, to focus on Scott’s subtitle, *Waverley; or, ‘Tis Sixty Years Since*, which situates Edward’s narrative within a complex historical frame. Scott’s introductory chapter explains that he has fixed “the date of my story Sixty Years before this present 1st November, 1805” (4). From this vantage, Scott looks back on a time when old Scotland was a residual (though not yet archaic) formation contesting an emergent English modernity. In turn, the mature Edward of the novel’s close looks back on his youth as a
romantic flight of fancy. And finally, Scott presents Edward in the act of looking back on the events he has just experienced.

With each shift in the perspective, an updated point of view supersedes a prior outlook. The novel contains at least three separable narrative perspectives: Scott’s historical outlook (circa 1805) on “Sixty Years Since,” Edward’s mature reminiscences about his youthful adventures, and young Edward’s account of his own experiences as they occur. But let’s not stop there. Scott dates his own narrative persona when his published text of July 1814 locates its narrator in November 1805. The temporal dislocation is readily apparent in Scott’s choice not to update his subtitle, which by rights should read “‘Tis Sixty Nine Years Since.” The overall effect is that Waverley becomes a veritable Russian tea doll with one historical frame nested inside another, nested inside another, and so on. There is no stable position available for recounting the telos of Edward’s development. Instead, Scott uses a tangle of interlocking perspectives to recast Edward’s period demarcation as, well, periodic. Edward’s assertion that “the romance of his life was ended, and that its real history had now commenced” serves as one node within an ever-expanding series of reflections on his composite narrative. Scott’s historical relativism, if I may call it that, consequently subverts the authority of any single frame of reference.

Returning to the main terms of my argument, Scott’s Waverley reevaluates the decisiveness of Edward’s fall into a prose, and in doing so makes it possible to move behind familiar critical narratives about the “rise of the novel” and the “rise of history.” Edward may have felt himself “entitled” to his conclusions. Yet Scott leaves the reader in some doubt about whether Edward’s turn away from poetry and romance and toward

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what Hegel describes as the “prose of the world” is effectual. By decoupling the novel’s rise from the supposed “death of poetry,” as Homer Brown puts it, Scott opens up a discursive space in which it is possible – even fitting – to understand novelistic prose as poetic in all but its verse form.41

Furthermore, Scott’s amalgamation of poetry with prose unsettles what critics have come to describe as the “rise of history.” Much as it is Edward’s sense that he must abandon his poetic sensibility for a prosaic “real history,” critics likewise see what Mike Goode describes as a “chasm” between romanticism’s interest in historical feeling and the disembodied, impersonal idea of history advocated by scientific-minded historians of the Victorian era (8). This account, convincing though it may be, tends to deemphasize the uncertain status of Edward’s affective connection with history. In this regard, Scott makes a point of observing that Edward’s love of poetry from the Celtic past has a great deal to do with the fact that he cannot fully understand it. Similarly, Edward has no trouble responding to Flora as she shifts from poetic performance to prosaic elaboration and back again. If anything, Scott underscores the consonance between the poetic and the prosaic, not their dissonance.

What sets these narratives apart is their different emphases on romanticism. Noting the trend toward using “nineteenth century” as an umbrella term for both Romantic and Victorian literature, Tilottama Rajan observes that “inasmuch as [the label] divides the labor of literary history between Romantic poetry and the Victorian novel, the teleology of the Nineteenth Century favors the emergence of the novel” (495). By contrast, the “rise of history” narrative positions romanticism’s “desire for history” as a decisive turning point in the history of historiography. But regardless of whether critics
see Romanticism as a climax or a transitional period, the disagreement does little to alter the underlying narrative of sequential development. Though they may differ in emphasis, both accounts apply the same diachronic schema.

It is exactly at this juncture that Scott opens up the synchronic complexity of romantic discourse. Studies as varied as Georg Lukacs’ *The Historical Novel* (1937), R.G. Collingwood’s *Idea of History* (1946), Friedrich Meinecke’s *Historism* (1959), Michel Foucault’s *The Order of Things* (1966), Reinhart Koselleck’s *Futures Past* (1979), Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983), and J.G.A. Pocock’s *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (1985) all concur that historical sensibilities undergo a fundamental shift during the romantic period. In the most recent version of this argument, James Chandler’s *England in 1819* demonstrates that our modern notion of a literary-historical period emerges in a time roughly associated with the advent of Romanticism.42 In effect, Chandler works to justify romantic historicism to a New Historicism. By contrast, my reading of Scott emphasizes that the formation of romantic historiography was highly unstable and in flux. Thus repositioned, romanticism disrupts the coherence of the period designations that underwrite contemporary critical practice.

“*The idea of poetry is prose*”

To bear out this claim, I situate Scott’s historical interests within what Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy term the aesthetics of the literary absolute. Succinctly put, the literary absolute entails a projection of closure that “is perpetually in excess in relation to itself;” it is “a discourse of framing,” as Marc Redfield says about romanticism more generally, “that violates its own frame.”43 Crucially, the instability of romantic aesthetic emerges at the far end of a process of historical reflection.44 Scott’s
romantic novel is accordingly defined by the way it situates Edward’s growth and development within a series of historical frames. While Edward may emphasize his newfound maturity, Scott shows that the wisdom afforded by this entrance into “real history” is elusive. Although Edward sees his present perspectives as a break with the past, that contemporary understanding of his history is never definitive. Scott’s historicism thus does away with the supposition that the latest and most recent version of the past is the final word. To adapt Ted Underwood’s description, Scott contemplates the “dizzying prospect of a perspective that would render [his] own assumptions dated.”

Edward’s attempt to periodize his life comes unhinged as an inconclusive act of aesthetic formalization. Demarcating a break between the romance of his life and its real history must be, to cite Redfield again, “both absolute and permeable – a pure cut, yet a suspended one” (16). The dynamics of the literary absolute hereby open up Romanticism’s indeterminate status as a literary-historical period.

It should be noted from the outset that a British theory of “aesthetics” did not exist as such in romantic England as it did in Germany. Separate and apart from the German philosophical debates about the aesthetic power of judgment that consolidate around Kant’s third Critique (1790), Coleridge remarks in 1821 that the word “aesthetic” strikes him as an unfamiliar and obscure term in English. By bringing Scott into dialogue with his German contemporaries, the intent is not to conflate distinct but related histories of the word “aesthetic” that take shape in German and English. Rather, I call upon conceptualizations of the aesthetic that derive from British and German Romanticism as a lens for interpreting the writing of that period.
In particular, I trace the aesthetics of the literary absolute as initially theorized by the Jena circle and its *Athenaeum* journal (1798 – 1800) and subsequently developed in Walter Benjamin’s *The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism* (1920). In these conversations, the literary absolute involves *poesis* – or as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy have it, production: “The thought of the ‘literary genre’ is thus less concerned with the production of the literary thing than with production, absolutely speaking” (12). By way of elaboration, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy explain that “the poetic is not so much the work as that which works, not so much the organon as that which organizes (48). *Poesis* specifies the possibility of literary genesis, rather than the finished literary product. Schlegel sounds the keynote in the 116th of his *Athenaeum Fragments* (partially quoted above): “the Romantic type of poetry is still becoming; indeed, its peculiar essence is that it is always becoming and that it can never be completed” (*Aphorisms* 141). The result, as Benjamin explains it in *The Concept of Criticism*, is a mixed medium in which “all the presentational forms hang constantly together, interpenetrate one another, and merge into the unity of the absolute art form, which is identical to the idea of art. Thus, the Romantic idea of the unity of art lies in the idea of a continuum of forms” (165). Case in point, the distinction between metrical verse and prose points beyond itself and toward an underlying unity or continuum; what Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy term the literary absolute. Scott’s efforts to search out the poetic inspiration for his prose fiction are thus brought into focus by the theoretical legacy of romanticism as it extends from Schlegel to Benjamin to Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy and beyond.

However, to say that Scott’s *Waverley* ranges over a “continuum of forms” only begins to address what Benjamin describes as the “unity of the absolute art form.” The
difficulty lies in specifying the notion of a total work of art that “exceeds – in every way – the general theoretical (or philosophical) power of which it is nonetheless the completion” (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 92). Although there is no shortage of names denoting this “idea of art” – the work, genre, criticism, poetry, literature, and romanticism are a few among them – it is not possible to name this idea properly or definitively, as commentators have observed.  

The unnamability of the literary absolute finds expression in what Friedrich Schlegel describes as the hybridity of romantic discourse. To cite another passage from *Athenaeum Fragments* 116, Schlegel speculates about the amalgamation of “poetry and prose, genius and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature, [that] render[s] poetry living and social, and life and society poetic…” (*Aphorisms* 140). Schlegel’s poetics of mixture finds its apotheosis – appropriately enough – in the novel, which he identifies as the trans-generic form *par excellence* and the essence of romanticism. Playing on the etymological connection between the terms “romantic” and “novelistic” (*romangemäss*), Schlegel explores the dialogism, as Bakhtin would have it, of a romantic poetry.  

An unpublished notebook fragment from 1797 elaborates on Schlegel sense of the novel’s formal heterogeneity:

The opinion that the novel is no poem is founded on the thesis: All poetry should be metric. But an exception from this thesis can be made for the sake of progressivity, if only for that. The novel is yet incomparably more mixed mixed [sic] poem than idyll or satire, which follow a definite law of mixture.

In this passage, which I also take as my epigraph, Schlegel characterizes the romantic novel as an experimental genre that fuses poetry with prose. In the absence of any “definite law of mixture,” the form necessitates what Kant terms reflective judgment. Ordinarily, the function of determining judgment “is the faculty for thinking of the
particular as contained under the universal,” as Kant explains.49 Here, by contrast, “we are not given a concept under which to subsume a particular but are instead given a particular for which we must seek to find a universal, a concept or rule of some kind that we are not immediately given.”50 By application, we might say that the romantic novel contravenes the first law of genre: as Derrida has it, “genres are not to be mixed.”51 “Through its bifold nature,” Marshall Brown explains, “the ‘Romantic novel’ gives privileged access to the unplumbed and unthought,” or what he terms “the limits of the knowable” (115, 121).

Schlegel’s treatment of the novel underscores an instability that is endemic to the faculty of aesthetic judgment. Marc Redfield offers this succinct assessment:

In Kant, an aesthetic judgment of taste claims universal validity despite the fact that it bears on a singular event and has no conceptual status. Judgment here becomes reflexive rather than determining, which is to say that it reflects back on itself: the judgment is made as if it were a cognitive judgment. As Samuel Weber puts it, judgment “imitates itself”: it projects onto the world the purposiveness that judgment must presuppose in order to occur. (Redfield 17; Weber 18-9)

Aesthetic judgment comes to reflect on the provisional and inconclusive status of its determinations. In this respect, reflective judgment signals what Weber describes as “the discrepancy between its own intent to subsume and a singular event that eludes or resists such subsumption” (19). Judgments of taste proceed under the operative assumption that utterly singular occurrences have a purposive form – albeit one that the perceiving subject cannot readily apprehend. To follow Kant’s notable formulation, it is “as though” or “as if” the object under consideration “were the product,” as Weber writes, “of an ‘understanding’, which, however, cannot be ‘our understanding’, since the latter is precisely incapable of bringing the phenomena at hand under the aegis of a general principle, law or concept” (18). The subject continues to think the particular as contained
under the general, but without the benefit of knowing what that governing principle is.

Following the trope of the literary absolute, we might say that aesthetic judgment continually exceeds its self-defined conceptualizations.

The unhinging of aesthetic judgment becomes evident in equivocations about the romantic novel. Weber explains:

"Although in their theoretical pronouncements the Romantics insist that the general medium of reflection constituting the determining idea of art must be conceived as a "continuum of forms," when they set about analyzing the kind of language and writing that most powerfully exemplifies "the highest of all symbolic forms" and "the Romantic Idea of poetry itself," the prosaic writing of the novel, they describe it precisely as discontinuous."  

The status of the romantic novel is highly inconsistent. In the very gesture of affirming the ascendance of novelistic prose as what Benjamin terms the "idea of poetry," Schlegel and his respondents co-opt the expansiveness of romantic discourse. Schlegel’s 297th Athenaeum Fragment makes this tension into a paradox: "A work is [formed] when it is everywhere sharply delimited, but within those limits limitless and inexhaustible; when it is completely faithful to itself, entirely homogeneous, and nonetheless exalted above itself." At its most antithetical, Schlegel characterizes the novel as a threshold – both a boundary, confining and restrictive, and an ultimate extreme, "limitless and inexhaustible."

In one sense, then, Schlegel designates the romantic novel as the culmination of romanticism and its highest artistic embodiment. According to Novalis, Schlegel upholds the doctrine "that the genuine novel is a ne plus ultra, a summa of all that is poetic, and he consistently designates this poetic ideal with the name ‘romantic’ poetry" (qtd. in Benjamin 173). Epigrammatically, "the idea of poetry is prose," as Benjamin has it, which is to say that the language of prose critically reflects on the formation of poetry.
Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy find this motif in August Schlegel’s *Lectures*: “A genre has opened up in Romantic poetry that not only can do without verse, but that even in many cases forbids versification: the novel” (143-144). As with Scott’s treatment of Flora’s poetic prose or the non-metrical verses of Edward’s turning mind, the novel is capable of producing poetry without the versification. The implication is that the novel supplants poetry from the vantage of its formal apex such that “the conception of the idea of poetry as that of prose determines the whole Romantic philosophy of art” (Benjamin 175). Schematically, novelistic prose begins where poetry leaves off.

Yet in the very process of defining novelistic prose as “something cut off, delimited, a whole on its own,” as Novalis has it, the genre alters a central feature of the literary absolute: namely, the generativity that “consists in its capacity to give itself in every form” (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 108). According to Marshall Brown’s adept formulation, poetry is the “realized potential (a philosopher would call it the *entelechy*) that fulfills the ramified form of the prose” (115). In asserting the novel’s status atop the generic hierarchy, writers simultaneously close off what Benjamin describes as the “many-sidedness” of an “undogmatic or free formalism” (158). Yet “this does not mean that the novel is not the ‘genre’ that Romantic theory so stubbornly sought,” Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy are quick to point out. “Indeed, the contrary is true. Rather, it means that the inability to be defined or delimited probably belongs to the very essence” of romanticism (90-91).

These same inconsistencies reappear on an affective register that Benjamin associates with the “prosaic” dimension of romanticism. “Art is the continuum of forms,” Benjamin reiterates, “and the novel, in the interpretation of the early Romantics,
is the comprehensible manifestation of this continuum. It is this thanks to prose” (173). Following Bakhtin’s formulation, we might say that romanticism modulates into a “prosaic key.” Indeed, Benjamin pays special attention to the affective connotations of the prosaic. Citing passages from Novalis and Hölderlin, Benjamin underscores the “austere sobriety” of romantic art whose “core consists not in ecstasy, which can be disintegrated, but in the unassailable, sober prosaic form” (175-7). This “prosaic kernel,” as Benjamin subsequently describes it, is “soberly constituted within the infinite – at the limit-value of limited forms” (176, 178). In reaching toward prose, romanticism “sets itself forth, sets forth, departing from itself to become something else,” as Weber aptly remarks (“Criticism Underway” 317). For Benjamin, the prosaic “sobriety of art” becomes that “essentially quite new and still incalculably influential leading idea of the Romantic philosophy of art” (175). While Benjamin privileges romanticism’s boundless novelty (and novelism), he also warns that romanticism proceeds in advance of its encapsulation as an artistic doctrine; this is to say that romanticism draws attention to the provisional and inconclusive status of its determinations. In effect, Benjamin points to the formative moment in romanticism when the division between poetry and prose is far from settled. By contrast, diachronic narratives about the “rise of the novel” and the “rise of history” stratify the distinction between the poetic and the prosaic without fully acknowledging their intermixture.

Schlegel and his interpreters do not then prescribe a normative model for Scott’s *Waverley* so much as open up the speculative and experimental dimension of his writing. In this respect, I second Ian Duncan’s contention that “the impulse to read Scott’s novels as closing down the formal and political potentialities of Romantic-era fiction has made it
harder, perhaps to attend to all that they opened up – as though their author’s counter-revolutionary politics must have determined a general dynamic of closure” (Scott’s Shadow 98). Such a perspective complicates the role that Scott’s text has come to play in familiar critical narratives about the “rise of the novel” and the “rise of history.” In telling their narratives of diachronic development, both accounts deemphasize the anomalous status of the romantic novel, Scott’s among them – forgetting, as Marshall Brown rightly observes, that “both before and after the Romantic decades authors conspicuously avoided mixing prose and verse” (108-9). Yet for all its historical oddity and discursive idiosyncrasy, critics rarely hesitate when generalizing about the romantic novel and its literary-historical classification. The tendency, in other words, is to downplay the indeterminacy of Scott’s engagements. My contrasting aim has been to show that the romantic novel opens outward in the very process of closing on itself.

“Highland chiefs do all but walk out of the canvas”

To bookend my discussion, I turn to the conclusion of Waverley, which stages Edward’s fall into prose. Relegating Celtic poetry to an archaic past, Scott consolidates the indeterminacy that has been the hallmark of his historiographical approach. Where the novel had invited readers into an open process of historical reflection, it concludes by rearranging Edward’s past, present, and future along a linear timeline. In making this historiographical shift, Scott consolidates the hybridity of romantic discourse. Yet this is not to locate the telos of Scott’s novel in its ending so much as indicate the point at which Scott’s historiographical innovation finds its terminus or delimitation.

Critics often focus on Edward Waverley’s return to the Scottish Lowland estate of Tully-Veolan as the novel’s moment of closure. In the wake of Jacobite defeat at the
Battle of Culloden, Fergus’ execution for high treason, and Flora’s exile to a French convent, Edward forsakes the Highlands to marry Rose Bradwardine. Edward’s union with Rose’s Lowland family is symbolized by a newly commissioned painting:

There was one addition to [Baron Bradwardine’s] fine old apartment, however, which drew tears into the Baron’s eyes. It was a large and spirited painting, representing Fergus Mac-Ivor and Waverley in their Highland dress, the scene a wild, rocky, and mountainous pass, down which the clan were descending into the background… Beside this painting hung the arms which Waverley had borne in the unfortunate civil war. (W 338)

This portrayal brings the novel’s engagement with romance to a close in characterizing the “wild” spirit of the Highlands as art instead of lived experience. Fergus is evoked in memoriam just as Edward’s “Highland dress” is depicted as a historical artifact. Such clothes are no more suitable to wear than his old weapons are serviceable. Previously, Flora’s poetry at the waterfall bemoaned the arms that “only war with the heath-cock or deer” (W 107). Here the vestiges of Highland militancy have been even further repurposed as nonfunctional ornaments.

So what is prosaic about the painting’s mode of representation? Edward and Fergus’ portrait is given a prosaic rendering through its objectification as bourgeois art. In the same way that Edward’s arms are put on display, the depiction of Highland culture serves to adorn the domestic space of Tully-Veolan. Notwithstanding Bradwardine’s tears, the painting is prosaic in the secondary sense that it lacks historical imagination. It cannot conceive of bardic culture as anything but antiquated and inaccessible to the present; the pastness of the past is definitive. With the clan “descending into the background,” bardic culture is relegated to “Sixty Years Since.” The end result is that the “large and spirited painting” makes Edward’s return to the world of Highland romance
unimaginable, or at least incompatible with his modern lifestyle. The Highlands becomes a historical relic rather than an ongoing cultural influence.

Scott goes on to describe the painting’s depiction of its historical subject matter in this way:

It was taken from a spirited sketch, drawn while [Edward and Fergus] were in Edinburgh by a young man of high genius, and had been painted on a full length scale by an eminent London artist. Raeburn himself, (whose Highland Chiefs do all but walk out of the canvas) could not have done more justice to the subject; and the ardent, fiery, and impetuous character of the unfortunate Chief of Glennaquoch was finely contrasted with the contemplative, fanciful, and enthusiastic expression of his happier friend. (W 338)

In the process of converting from a “spirited sketch” into a “full length scale” painting, Edward and Fergus’ image travels from the colonial periphery to the imperial metropolis, from a Scottish product of “high genius” to a type of English portraiture. The implication is that a nameless though reportedly “eminent London artist” patterns the portrait after the manner of the Scottish painter, Henry Raeburn. In what Wolfram Schmidgen describes as a “familiar pattern, Scottish things pass through English hands and return transformed – clearly visible and stripped of their native power. The image of Scottish independence, sketched in Scotland at the height of the ’45, is ultimately painted by an Englishman on behalf of another Englishman, Waverley, who reintroduces the painting into Scotland.” The imitative style underscores the painting’s historical and cultural distance from its subject matter. To say that Raeburn’s “Highland Chiefs do all but walk out of the canvas” (my emphasis) is to suggest that their verisimilitude only extends so far. Although “the rebellious Highland Jacobites seem poised to walk back into the present,” as Schmidgen notes, they cannot take this step.57 The figure of the Highland Chief is limited to the realm of art, since by implication he no longer walks the Scottish
countryside. The painting suggests that Highland culture has died out, to the point where Fergus’ kind only exists in its artistic depiction that converts him “into as object, a figure of the past,” as Ian Duncan puts it. The painting’s “fine contrast” between Fergus’ passionate “character” and Edward’s “enthusiastic expression” serves to reinforce the sense that their image is, above all, a re-presentation rather than a living cultural form. The painting’s “full length scale” strives for an iconic rendering of a bardic culture that exists only in the past.

Whereas poetry let Edward sentimentalize the Celtic periphery, the painting prompts Baron Bradwardine to feel for Highland culture in its absence. As Nancy Armstrong explains, “by enclosing the wild Fergus within the respectable parlor, the social organization represented by the clan passes from the status of a residual social formation actively contesting English modernity to that of a relic of Old Scotland and an ornament of modern British life” (67). The painting forgoes the romantic “lights and shadows” that Scott’s introduction to The Fortunes of Nigel says he strives to achieve, instead consigning Fergus to a past time. The portrait thus cuts against the grain of how Waverley has engaged with Scottish culture. For Scott, bardic culture represents anything but the removed and untenable pre-history of English modernity. To the contrary, Scott explores the hybrid relationships between Scotland and England, romance and the novel, poetry and prose, past and present. If Edward’s fall into prose resolves this ambiguity, it does so only at the expense of closing down Scott’s attention to the liminal interaction between a residual bardic culture and an emergent British modernity. Such a conclusion should not, however, obscure Scott’s engagement with the instabilities of romantic
aesthetics that makes his historicism – along with the underlying notion of a literary-historical period – what Schlegel describes as an “incomparably more mixed” affair.

NOTES

All citations are given parenthetically after an initial footnote.


13 Scott’s poetry is so recognizable that a reviewer from the British Critic uses the verses interspersed throughout Waverley to identify the anonymously published work as Walter Scott’s. See this August 1814 review in John O. Hayden, ed., Scott: The Critical Heritage (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1970), 73.


25 Along these lines, James Chandler and Ian Baucom identify Scott’s brand of romantic historicism by its fascination with the multi-temporal, dis-synchronous, or what Reinhardt Koselleck has called the “contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous.” I am closer to Baucom than Chandler, however, in stressing that Scott finds his engagement with history more elusive than systematic. See Chandler 107; Ian Baucom, “Globalit, Inc.; Or, the Cultural Logic of Global Literary Studies,” *PMLA*, 116.1 (Jan. 2001): 161; Reinhardt Koselleck, *Futures Past*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia UP, 2004), 239.


29 The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the “prosaic” as “[a.] Having the character, style, or diction of prose as opposed to poetry; lacking poetic beauty, feeling, or imagination; plain, matter-of-fact. Hence b. unpoeitic, unromantic; commonplace, dull, tame.” Significantly, the *OED* traces this connotative divergence between the poetic and the prosaic to its origins to the romantic period. “‘Prosaic,’ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., prepared by J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1989), draft revision Sept. 2009, Web, May 3, 2010).


44 Forest Pyle makes this point in “Kindling and Ash: Radical Aestheticism in Keats and Shelley,” *Studies in Romanticism*, 42.4 (Winter 2003): 427-60


48 As Schlegel puts it in his “Dialogue on Poetry” (1800), “a novel [ein Roman] is a romantic book” (Literary Aphorisms 101). Bakhtin takes Goethe’s Wilhelm Meister as his example in observing that “the Romantics incorporate their own verses into their prose – and, as is well known, the Romantics considered the presence of verses in the novel… one of its constitutive features” (“Discourse in the Novel” 322).


54 As Marc Redfield observes, “the specter of the Bildungsroman haunts literary criticism. This genre does not properly exist, and in a sense can be proved not to exist: one can take the canonical definitions of Bildung (itself no simple term), go to the novel most frequently called Bildungsromane, and with greater or lesser difficulty, show that they exceed, or fall short of, or call into question the process of Bildung which they purportedly serve” Phantom Formations (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1996), vii.

55 See the 206th of Schlegel’s Athenaeum Fragments: “An aphorism ought to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world like a little work of art and complete in itself like a hedgehog” (Literary Aphorisms 143). For Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, this passage indicates Schlegel’s sense that “the detachment or isolation of fragmentation is understood to correspond exactly to completion and totality” (43).

56 Of course, this is not to say that poetry is less susceptible to bourgeois objectification.


Chapter Four
Hyperion’s Impatience

This fourth and final chapter identifies the retrenchment of emotion that accompanies John Keats’s efforts to produce an affecting evocation of the past. Instead of privileging the heights and depths of Keats’s affective engagements, as New Historicist critics have done, I trace his fascination with the paradoxical feeling of the failure of feeling. My reading, which focuses on the first two books of Hyperion: A Fragment (1818-1819) and does not address his revision of the project into The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream (1819), pays special attention to the phenomenon of Hyperion’s impatience – an emotion that traces the rhetoric of prolepsis in its disfiguration. As the last of the Titans to fall before the emergent Olympians, Hyperion is impelled by a desire to clarify his otherwise uncertain future. I use the term impatience to describe the mix of vexation and exhaustion that comes of Hyperion’s inability to advance to some future point in which he can retrospectively reflect on his present downfall.

The figure of prolepsis, or the anticipation of retrospection, arguably serves as the defining trope of romantic New Historicism. Consider this: Marjorie Levinson encapsulates the early effort “to position literary works within a historical domain” as a journey “back to the future”; James Chandler’s revisionary critique of the “attempt to resist Romanticism by means of historicism” models itself after Shelley’s “England in 1819,” a poem that proleptically imagines England’s ills as “graves from which a glorious Phantom may / Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day”; and most recently, Alan Liu “faces the mortality of one’s intellectual moment,” anticipating the time when New Historicism’s heyday will have become a thing of the past. Yet for all the discussion,
critics have yet to fully consider how the rhetoric of prolepsis shapes the field’s structure of feeling. What, in other words, is the emotional tenor of its discursive practice?

By and large, the last three decades of New Historicist criticism gravitate towards what Alan Liu terms “melancholic regret and jubilant assay [as] the two faces of a single meditation on loss and history.” On this point, at least, New Historicism’s critics as well as its advocates seem to agree: the late twentieth-century variant of romantic historical consciousness takes shape as what Thomas Pfau terms a “deeply conflicted intellectual project.” Liu makes much the same remark, but not as a criticism. Speaking on behalf of his fellow New Historicists, Liu readily admits that “we exaggerate the fiction of all-or-nothing, present-versus-absent history as an illusion saving the possibility that there can be absolute losses and absolute gains.” Pfau and Liu concur that contemporary historicist thought undergoes a bifurcation. “It may say a lot,” Pfau elaborates, “not only about the institutions and practices of historicism but also about Western culture’s intuitive sense of history for the past two hundred years or so, that its critical representations designed to render the past comprehensible are continually predicated on an extreme form of affect, be it one of euphoria or despondency.” In exaggerating the oscillation between “present-versus-absent history… absolute losses and absolute gains” or noticing that historical representation drifts towards the extremes of mania and mourning, Liu and Pfau jointly articulate the dual vectors of a “desire for history” that twentieth-century critics have routinely traced back to the Romantic period.

Keats’s supplements the prevailing structure of feeling by tracing the un-working of emotion into an altogether understated and impersonal phenomenon. In other words, Keats’s Hyperion: A Fragment tempers the polarization of New Historicism’s critical
sentiments with its treatment of Hyperion’s impatience as a self-cancelling emotion. This undercurrent of affective experience traces its way back to Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiment* (1759). There Smith tacitly identifies the evacuation of feeling that attends the figurative, which is to say dis-figurative, texture of sympathetic feeling – thus creating an opening for Keats’s rhetorical engagement with the minimal experience of emotion. Succinctly put, Keats does for Smith what I propose to do for New Historicist criticism: namely, locate the degree zero of emotion within a structure of feeling that privileges the heights and depths of emotion.

The implication is that Keats models a version of the turn to affect that is now ongoing in romantic studies and across the discipline of English. He does so, I argue, by exploring the turning or troping that un-works the emotions. Yet my reading complicates this trend by shifting the discussion of away from what Brian Massumi has characterized as the “incipient intensity” of affective experience and towards an examination of the after-affects, so to speak, of Keats’s rhetoric.

**Adam Smith’s sympathy for the dead**

If Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* serves as a touchstone for what Mike Goode describes as the characteristically romantic view that writers “needed to feel the idea of history in order to think it,” I would add that Smith’s text also sets the implicit point of departure for Keats’s engagement with the evacuation of feeling. In particular, I focus on the rhetorical instability that destabilizes Smith’s regard for what he considers the preeminent object of sympathetic feeling: namely, the dead. The fissures in Smithian sympathy leave an opening for Keats to explore the understated registers of affective experience that continue to work their way through contemporary critical discourse.
Even as I compare Keats with Smith, it should be noted from the outset that Keats did not read Smith directly or mention the Scottish thinker in his letters. No doubt a fuller analysis of Keats’s engagement with Smithian moral philosophy would have to account for the mediating influence of William Hazlitt on Keats’s conception of the sympathetic imagination.6 As Roy Cain has noted, Hazlitt function as a “bridge between Keats and the Enlightenment and goes a long way toward explaining Keats’s numerous affinities with Hume, Smith, and other thinkers of that period.”7 Instead of reconstructing the bridge linking Keats to Smith via Hazlitt, I simply point out that while the journey may lead back to Smith it also takes Keats away from him.

My story then starts with Smith, who conceptualizes sympathy as a structure of relation that enables individuals to put themselves in the place of another by supposing that they share a situation of like kind. “As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel,” Smith reasons, “we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation.”8 In the absence of an ability to directly access other people’s emotions, Smith treatment of “fellow-feeling” relies on a homology between discrete individuals (4):

Every faculty in one man is the measure by which he judges of the like faculty in another. I judge of your sight by my sight, of your ear by my ear, of your reason by my reason, of your resentment by my resentment, of your love by my love. I neither have, nor can have, any other way of judging about them. (18)

The socialization of feeling is made possible by the fact that each person can judge the sensations, reasons, and passions observed in others by a corollary set of faculties in him- or herself. The homological relationship between your sight and my sight, your ears and my ears, etc., establishes a set of parallels though which spectators can imagine changing
places. This is all to say that Smithian sympathy leans heavily on the power of figuration to establish likeness and overcome the opacity of each person’s experience.

The figurative texture of Smith’s discussion becomes especially pronounced when he turns to contemplate the grave. The dead are poignant for Smith exactly because they are incapable of benefiting from the consolation that the living have to offer:

That our sympathy can afford [the dead] no consolation seems to be an addition to their calamity; and to think that all we can do is unavailing, and that, what alleviates all other distress, the regret, the love, and the lamentations of their friends, can yield no comfort to them, serves only to exasperate our sense of their misery. (9)

For Smith, the exchange of feeling between the living and the dead is fundamentally asymmetrical. It is futile to console the deceased. After all, the dead feel nothing; they have no sentiments to share. Succinctly put, Smith recognizes that “those circumstances which strike our senses… can have no influence on their happiness” (8).

Smith’s figurative language steps in to bridge the divide by making it seem as if the mourner’s inability to console the dead “exasperates” the emotions instead of diminishing them. Consider Esther Schor’s formulation of the paradox: “The very ‘payment’ of ‘tribute of our fellow-feeling’ ‘doubly due’ the dead, compounds their ‘misfortune’ by ‘afford[ing]’ them no consolatory ‘yield.’” Schor draws attention to the economic metaphors Smith uses to figure his sympathies, further elaborating that “the dead, because they cannot be remediated… provide the gold standard for the endlessly circulating currency of sympathy which constitutes a normative morality.”

To continue with the commercial metaphor, the dead put the monetary currency of sympathy into circulation by virtue of the fact that, as Smith remarks, “we can never feel too much for
those who have suffered so dreadful a calamity” – not least of all because the living “can have no influence upon their happiness” (8, 9).

If anything, Schor’s observation about the economics of sympathetic exchange has been all too effective in encouraging critics to continue elaborating and extending Smith’s metaphors, as I just did in the immediately preceding sentence. In the hands of New Historicist critics, the procedure entails pushing the metaphor of Smith’s moral “economics” until it refers to its relevant context; by Schor’s reading, Smith’s language addresses a “crisis of public confidence caused by the proliferation of paper money” (37). Yet in reducing figurative language to matters of historical reference, critics downplay the unstable rhetoric that enables Smith to imagine “life” in the grave.

Schor opens the way for a reconsideration of this trend with her claim that romantic writers – Burke foremost among them – revise the discourse of “sentimentalism by displacing the figure of synchronic circulation with a figure of diachronic transmission” (82). Reworking Smithian sympathy into a communion with the past engages romantic writers in a process of re-figuration, Schor argues. As it turns out, however, Schor’s attention to the shifting figures that underwrite the rise of a sentimental historiography has been largely overshadowed. If anything, the fascination with tracing out Smith’s economic language seems to keep critics from examining how Smithian sympathy comes to rely on figuration in the first place and whether the play of metaphor sustains the exchange of sentiment in the way Smith envisions.

Consider Goode’s adaptation of Schor’s commentary with the suggestion that the romantics “effectively replace the Smithian ideal of the ‘synchronic circulation’ of sympathy among the living for the dead with an ideal of ‘diachronic transmission’…”

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grounded in the living’s ability to circulate sentiments with past generations.” In effect, Goode converts Smithian sympathy into the “ground” of romantic historiography rather than the point of departure for its figuration. The word choice is telling. A moment earlier, Goode veers away from the figural dimension of sentimental historiography in elaborating Burke’s sense that British jurisprudence – or what Goode goes on to describe as an emerging historicist consciousness – “can be ‘engraved [in our ordinances, and] in our hearts’ because it can be grounded in the heart” (832). To say that the workings of the heart serve as a “ground” for romantic historiography deflects the decidedly figural “engravings” that the heart sets down as a form of writing. In this vein, Goode certainly could have added that Burkean feeling perform a commemorative burial, or en-grave-ing, of the past. Making this point, however, opens up sentimental historiography to the play of figuration that Goode curtails. My counter-reading supplements this tendency by reexamining the disarticulation of metaphor that shadows Smith’s account.

It is worth noting, to start, that Smith’s sympathy for the dead is, strictly speaking, a functional impossibility. Smith acknowledges as much with the observation that the capacity to sympathize with the deceased rests on a specious proposition: namely, that the dead retain the ability to feel. A sentimental regard for the deceased requires the mourner to willfully ignore the truism that the dead feel nothing and cannot benefit from the exchange of sentiment. It is a fallacy, in other words, to transpose the sense experience of a living person into the situation of a dead person who is, by definition, insensible.

Metaphor steps in to reestablish a link between the living and the dead. As Smith observes in an oft-cited gothic formulation: “the idea of that dreary and endless melancholy, which the fancy naturally ascribes to their condition, arises… from our
lodging, if I may be allowed to say so, our own living souls in their inanimated bodies”

(9). To adapt the title of Schor’s book, “bearing the dead” entails a metaphorical substitution, in which a “living soul” is carried across the divide between life and death and placed in an “inanimated body.” Ostensibly, the metaphorical operation provides the mourner with a visceral understanding of the grave as a “dreary” and “melancholy” place cut off from all social interaction.

In this respect, Smith’s figurative language enlivens the logic of sympathy by making the grave seem habitable, so to speak, as a place where the mourner can imagine leading a posthumous life:

> It is miserable, we think, to be deprived of the light of the sun; to be shut out from life and conversation; to be laid in the cold grave; a prey to corruption and the reptiles of the earth; to be no more thought of in this world, but to be obliterated, in a little time, from the affections, and almost from the memory, of their dearest friends and relations. (8-9)

Phrasing his commentary in the negative (“deprived,” “shut out,” “cold,” “corruption,” “no more,” “obliterated,” “little,” “almost”), Smith describes death as a condition of privation. Death deprives the subject of sight and hearing; in the grave, the sense of touch goes cold and the affections dissipate; the body looses its corporeal integrity; the departed are blotted out from the sentiments of those who were closest to the deceased.

The viability of “life” in the grave further unravels if we heed Paul de Man’s warning that “this substitution is, of all substitutions, the one that is, thematically speaking, a radical impossibility: between the living and the dead self, no analogical resemblance or memory allows for any substitution whatever.” Case in point, it is impossible to utter the phrase “I am dead” in both the present and past perfect tense. For de Man it follows that there is no correspondence between the living and the dead.
Smith’s sympathies violate this postulate by attempting to connect the sense experience of a living person with the insensibility of the dead. Smith admits as much. Sympathy for the dead proceeds knowing full well that the deceased are perfectly happy in their insensibility and subject to none of the miseries that the living ascribe to their condition. The mourner’s feelings are sustained by what Smith describes as an “illusion of the imagination” that knows itself to be baseless (8, 9).

Hence, Smith’s attempt at “lodging… our own living souls in their inanimated bodies” formulates what can only be described as a dead metaphor. Where sympathy would otherwise afford an “experience of what other men feel… by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation,” Smith confronts the paradoxical feeling of the failure of feeling. As de Man notes, the substitution of a dead he for a living I is a “metaphor [that] is not a metaphor since it has no proper meaning, no sens propre, but only a metaphorical structure within the sign and devoid of meaning” (RCC 201). This is to say that Smith’s sympathy for the dead is a self-cancelling structure that extends feeling into the realm of its absence; Smithian sympathy strives to intuit what the living self cannot possibly known by means of the senses. In the attempt to transpose a “living soul” into an “inanimated body,” Smith undoes the correspondence “between your sight and my sight, your ears and my ears.” The result is a dead metaphor that accesses a sensuous experience of the failure of the senses.

To borrow a remark from Nietzsche’s “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense,” Smith’s feelings for the dead reveals themselves as “illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no
longer as coins.” Smithian sympathy wears out or effaces the sensuous context of its figurative language after the manner of “coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal.” More generally, Derrida terms the process “a certain usure of metaphorical force in the philosophical exchange.” As his translator, Alan Bass, notes, “usure in French means both usury, the acquisition of too much interest, and using up, deterioration through usage.” Here we return to the economics of sentimental exchange that Schor identified in Smith, but with a twist. Instead of referring Smith’s metaphors to their historical context, as New Historicist readings are inclined to do, my analysis identifies the self-undermining patterns of figuration that promise more than they give.

Consequently, I rework Schor’s account by identifying the insolvency of the moral sentiments that circulate without the backing of sensuous experience (37). My own use of figurative language should, however, make clear that both Schor and I are equally disposed towards what de Man describes as the “madness of words” whose play of figuration, disfiguration, and refiguration never ceases. Beyond redirecting Smith’s language, the broader objective is to call attention to the errant figures that underwrite sentimental discourse. On my account, the emotions are marked by a linguistic instability that manifests itself in the waning of feeling.

By reading the emotions as rhetorical structures that enact their undoing, my analysis participates in what critics call the turn to affect. Recent criticism in affect studies informs my sense of the correspondence between Smith’s unworking of emotion and his corollary evacuation of subjectivity. In this respect, my discussion builds on what Rei Terada’s departure from the classical view that “only subjects have emotions, so emotions must be ‘cognitive’ idealities expressed by subjects.” To pursue an impersonal
account of emotion, as I do here, does not discredit it, Terada rightly notes, so much as deactivate one of the more effective “authenticity effects” of modern subjectivity.\textsuperscript{18} Along these lines, critics open up a distinction between emotion and affect, in which the former requires a subject while the latter does not. “At the end of the day,” Sianne Ngai explains, critics differentiate emotion from affect in order to “distinguish first-person from third-person feeling, and, by extension, feeling that is contained by an identity from feeling that is not.”\textsuperscript{19} Making a rigorous distinction between emotion and affect is, however, less important for my purposes than exploring the rhetorical instability of feelings – broadly construed – that cannot sustain the projection of a coherent “self.”

The rhetoric of self-abstention is surely one of the defining features of historical discourse and Smithian sympathy alike. As critics often note, the practice of modern historiography de-centers the subject who writes. Roland Barthes identifies a “systematic deficiency of any form of sign referring to the sender of the historical message”; Emile Benveniste likewise “define[s] historical narration as a mode of utterance that excludes every ‘autobiographical’ linguistic form”; Michel de Certeau sums up this line of thinking with the assessment that “history is a discourse in the third person.”\textsuperscript{20} Yet this is not to say that the writing of history is successful in expunging the markers of its making. To the contrary, historical discourse is scored by the traces of maneuvering to suppress the first-person utterance.

To understand what’s involved in making this shift into the third person, there is no better place to look than Smith’s construction of an impartial spectator:

When I endeavor to examine my own conduct, when I endeavor to pass sentence upon it, and either to approve or condemn it, it is evident that, in all such cases, I divide myself, as it were, into two persons; and that I, the examiner and judge, represent a different character from that other I, the person whose conduct is
examined into and judged of. The first is the spectator, whose sentiments with regard to my own conduct I endeavor to enter into, by placing myself in his situation, and by considering how it would appear to me, when seen from that particular point of view. The second is the agent, the person whom I properly call myself, and of whose conduct, under the character of a spectator, I was endeavoring to form some opinion. The first is the judge; the second the person judged of. (*TMS* 164-5)

Here Smith describes the involution of sympathy as the subject turns to judge himself.

Through a process of self-division, Smith imagines judging his situation from the perspective of an outside spectator who can impartially assess “my own conduct.” In this respect, Smith creates a persona for himself, a “different character,” that stands apart “from that other I,” and it is “under the character of a spectator” that Smith assesses his actions. Grammatically, Smith’s impartial spectatorship moves the ground of sentimental judgment into the third person and out of the first person.

Yet in order to decouple the self as spectator from the self as agent, Smith performs a crucial rhetorical turn: “But that the judge should, in every respect, be the same with the person judged of, is as impossible as that the cause should, in every respect, be the same with the effect” (165). Where we might suppose that the third-person “character” of the impartial spectator succeeds the “the person whom I properly call myself,” Smith’s analogy takes a different direction. His alternative claim is that the impartial spectator is the cause to which the judged agent is an effect. In other words, Smith as third-person spectator generates or produces Smith as a first-person agent, not the other way around. Smith goes out of his way, in fact, to insist on the spectator’s primacy, asserting that “the first is the spectator… the second is the agent.” And again a moment later: “The first is the judge; the second is the person judged of” (164-5). Smith’s move reverses anteriority and posteriority. After all, there is nothing for the
impartial spectator to “examine into” prior to Smith’s actions as a first-person agent; an observer has no function without something to observe. Rhetorically, Smith’s thinking follows the logic of metalepsis: what comes later defines what comes before, an effect substitutes for its cause. The maneuver locates Smith’s discussion within a specifically discursive domain that has no corollary in empirical experience.

Smith’s mourner calls upon the power of rhetoric for exactly this reason: to explore a posthumous existence that is otherwise inaccessible to the sentient subject. To return to my earlier discussion, consider the temporal orientation of Smith’s sympathy for the dead. If Smith’s mourner first confronts death as a past event that befalls someone else, the discussion quickly refocuses on the mourner’s concern for his own future. The shift is evident in Smith’s surmise that a meditation on the grave conveys “foresight of our own dissolution,” or what he terms a “dread of death.” In this formulation, “dread” specifies mortal fear or apprehension about the future. We sympathize with the dead, Smith reasons, as an opportunity to anticipate our own demise. Although it seems retrospective, Smith’s meditation on death is, in fact, proleptic. His retrospection is future-oriented, which is to say that Smith conjugates his anticipation in the past tense.

But why, as de Man notes in another context, is it necessary to turn “posterior events that are to occur to the first person I… into anterior events that have occurred to a third person?” Why not speak in propria persona when attempting to imagine what it’s like to “be deprived of the light of the sun; to be shut out from life and conversation; to be laid in the cold grave” (TMS 9)? The substitution from the first to the third person is necessitated, de Man explains, by a unique epistemological constraint: to put the matter axiomatically, “we can proleptically anticipate empirical events, but not our death, which
is not for us an empirical event.” J.M. Bernstein similarly comments that “our death is unimaginable because each envisagement of it involves our survival as spectator.”21 The implication, to again follow de Man’s lead, is that Smith “does not reflect on death but on the rhetorical power of language that can make it seem as if we could anticipate the unimaginable” (RCC 201).

**Saturn’s affect of the remnant**

In total, the legacy of Smith’s sympathy for the dead creates an opening for Keats to rhetorical instability of subject-based emotions. The first two books of Keats’s *Hyperion* offer nothing less than a dramatization of the turning or troping that dispossess the self of its emotions. Keats’s opening characterization of Saturn, king of the recently deposed Titans, is a case in point. In keeping with Smith’s “joining to the change which had been produced upon [the dead], our own consciousness of that change,” Saturn lingers in a liminal state between life and death – an anachronistic condition marked by what I describe as the affect of the remnant. No more able than Smith’s mourner to experience his demise, Keats’s Saturn undertakes a like-minded effort to envision his misfortune from a third-party perspective. Doing so provides Saturn with the opportunity to proleptically reflect on his downfall as if it had already occurred to someone else. Keats differs from Smith, however, is in his willingness to acknowledge the unstable rhetoric of sympathetic feeling. This is to say that the rhetorical power of language asserts itself in Keats’s attention to the self-undermining construct of emotion.

The opening lines of *Hyperion* foreground the specifically temporal anomaly of Saturn’s stricken, death-like state:

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-hair’d Saturn, quiet as a stone. (I.1-4)22

Lately deposed from his throne, Saturn has “sunk” into a melancholia that deepens the surrounding gloom “by reason of his fallen divinity / Spreading a shade” (I.12-13). Saturn’s subsistence “deep in the shady sadness of a vale” is of a piece with Smith’s aversion to the grave as a place where one is “deprived of the light of the sun.” In effect, the sun no longer keeps time for Saturn’s posthumous life; his “now” does not constitute a gap “in” time between one identifiable moment and the next so much as a gap “of” time that escapes the diurnal cycle of morning, noon, and night.23

In spatial terms, Saturn dwells within a vale that has all the characteristics of a tomb. As he later explains to Thea, who has come to grieve by his side, Saturn finds himself “smother’d up / And buried from all godlike exercise” (I.106-7). Entombed and sealed off from his God-like powers, Saturn has been buried alive. His condition is marked by a deathly stillness that is distinctively Keastian: he sits “quiet as a stone, / Still as the silence round about his lair” (I.4-5). Unceasingly silent and motionless, Saturn subsists as a living gravestone – the remnant of a life that nevertheless persists.

To adapt Ina Ferris’s discussion, Saturn exhibits the affect of the remnant. As Ferris explains, the notion of a remnant belongs to a constellation of related terms, including trace, mark, and ruin, which all “converge on the idea of inert bits of the past retrieved by the present, activated by acts of cognition and imagination, and so refigured and reincorporated into present thought as signs of what no longer is.” The idea of a remnant is distinct, however, in connoting entities that continue to dwell in the present; “remnants, that is, are still alive, existing in and as themselves, albeit in a greatly diminished form.”24 Along these lines, Saturn’s affect indicates that he has outlived his
heyday: “Upon the sodden ground / His old right hand lay nerveless, listless, dead, / Unsceptered; and his realmless eyes were closed” (I.17-19). The negative suffixes (–less) and prefix (un–) emphasize that he exists in an attenuated state. Yet in defining Saturn’s incapacity as a negation of his former power, Keats implicitly recalls Saturn’s might. Though his eyes are closed, they were once open and farseeing; though “his old right hand lay… dead” and enervated, it used to be “warm and capable / Of earnest grasping,” as Keats famously turns the phrase in “This Living Hand” (1-2). The double vision of Saturn’s divine supremacy and human frailty situates his affective experience along the “margin-sand” between life and death, immortality and mortality (I.15); his “fallen divinity” makes it impossible to tell where life ends and death begins (I.12).25

Without the ability to demarcate his downfall, Keats’s Saturn tacitly adopts a set of conceptual tools that Smith had previously developed. Chief among them: reflecting on his downfall as if it had occurred to someone else.

I am gone
Away from my own bosom: I have left
My strong identify, my real self,
Somewhere between the throne, and where I sit
Here on this spot of earth. (I.112-16)

Saturn testifies as a witness to the self-alienating effects of his fall from power. In keeping with Smith’s conviction that an impartial spectator is required to examine one’s conduct, Saturn finds himself in exile “from my own bosom.” Yet Keats redirects the legacy of Smithian moral philosophy by suggesting that this retreat into the character of a spectator ends up fragmenting the self. Case in point, Saturn discovers that his use of the personal pronoun “I” has been emptied of “my strong identity, my real self.” Stranded in the gray area between what he was and what he is, between his former throne and his
current repose “deep in the shady sadness of a vale,” Saturn laments his virtual existence. To adapt Terry Castle observation, Saturn has undergone a “spectralization” of himself; he lingers as a shadow, the haunt of his faded existence.\textsuperscript{26}

It is therefore in exile from his sense of self that Saturn asks Thea to envision the course of action he can no longer undertake:

\begin{quote}
Search, Thea, search! and tell me, if thou seest
A certain shape or shadow, making way
With wings or chariot fierce to repossess
A heaven lost erewhile: it must – it must
Be of ripe progress – Saturn must be King. (I.121-25)
\end{quote}

For all Saturn’s urgency of purpose, his aspiration “to repossess / A heaven lost erewhile” is marked by the ambiguity of presence that comes with the disarticulation of prolepsis. Although Saturn is certain that his re-ascendance “must / Be of ripe progress,” his indistinct and shadowy projection cannot fully embody the agency that he “must” exercise. In this respect, Saturn’s anticipated recapture of the throne fails to provide the hindsight necessary to clarify his present condition. Calling upon Thea to confirm his speculative “progress” against the usurping Olympians only reinforces his self-estrangement in the present. “Saturn must be King.” While it may be the monarch’s prerogative to speak of himself in the third person, Saturn’s prescriptive and implicitly future-oriented declaration rebounds as an abdication of his first-person subject position.

The instability of Saturn’s proleptic rhetoric points up the discrepancy between his present, enervated condition and his vision of a future restoration. Accordingly, Saturn finds himself suspended between the dual uncertainties of what was and what will be. Keats’s Saturn thus functions as a living anachronism in Jerome Christensen’s sense of the term: a “potent icon of the past’s incapacity to coincide with itself, to seal itself off
as a period or epoch or episode with no or necessary consequences for our time.

Anachronism is the herald of the future as yet unknown.27 As a remnant that lingers on, Saturn opens a rift in the past that leaves the future precariously adrift.

Saturn’s existence is therefore anachronistic in the sense that he lives on past his proper time. As the former king of the Titans, Saturn occupies a belated or posthumous life that Martin Aske has observed in the structure of Keats’s poetic narrative: “Starting not in medias res but rather on the threshold of absence and loss, the poem’s beginning acquires, by an ironic paradox, a premature sense of an ending.”28 While Saturn’s downfall may have its place within the implied sequence of events, his defeat does not appear in the narrative proper. In other words, neither the reader nor Saturn can entirely remember the Titans’s downfall because that event does not take place, strictly speaking.

Saturn raises the issue this way:

Who had power
To make me desolate? whence came the strength?
How was it nurtur’d to such bursting forth,
While Fate seem’d strangled in my nervous grasp?
But it is so. (I.102-6)

Saturn lives the unthinkable. Even after the fact, he cannot conceive of an agent capable of deposing him; he’s at a loss to account for the unforeseen “bursting forth” of his Olympian rival. Casting about in what Ferris separately describes as an “intervallic moment… emptied of a sense of those who will come after,” Saturn struggles to fathom the course of recent events (“Narrative Situation” 90).

To adapt Jacques Lacan’s discussion from *Ecrits*, Saturn dwells within the dynamics of the future anterior:

What is realized in my history [i.e. in that of the individual subject] is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has
been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming.  

By Samuel Weber’s reading, Lacan disrupts “the perfected closure of the always-already-have-been by inscribing it in the inconclusive futurity of what will-always-already-have-been, a ‘time’ which can never be entirely remember, since it will never have fully taken place” (9). The “self” comes to inhabit a fractured temporality whereby future retrospection never makes its belated confirmation of what the present will have been.

As Weber goes on to note, the living present consequently recedes toward a vanishing point in which the “‘is’ (the presence of the present tense) should be understood only as an ‘anticipated past,’ which has yet to arrive” (17).

The corollary to Saturn’s discovery that he has outlived his proper time is the realization that he has enters into a future as yet unknown. Saturn’s concerns about the future comes to the fore in his pronouncement that “I am gone / Away from my own bosom” (I.112-13). In coming to regard himself as a stranger, Saturn situates himself on the brink of a future that defies his self-image. To put it differently, he departs or passes away into a time in which his former identity is dead and gone. As Saturn advances into the uncharted terrain of non-identity, he shadows forth subjectivity in its emptiness: “I will give command: / Thea! Thea! Thea! where is Saturn” (133-4)? Saturn projects the commanding rhetoric of sovereignty into the future tense, only to discover that he has lost possession of his proper name, now and for the time that is to come.

So while Keats inherits the rhetoric of Smithian moral spectatorship (albeit indirectly via Hazlitt and without attribution), he does not share Smith’s confidence that a reflection on someone else’s death can serve as an occasion to anticipate the “awful futurity which awaits.” Where the Smithian mourner relies upon the rhetoric of prolepsis
to produce a sensuous experience of the grave, Keats amplified the tacit legacy of
Smith’s own doubts about the “illusion of the imagination” that leads the mourner to
mistakenly suppose that the dead and buried retain their sensory capacities. Keats well-
known comment to Charles Brown, dated November 30, 1820, formulates what amounts
to a counter-statement: “I have an habitual feeling of my real life having past, and that I
am leading a posthumous existence.”30 Keats’s paradoxical suggestion is that his
“posthumous existence” has already begun in advance of his death; this is to say that
Keats’s backwards-looking reflection on “my real life having past” advances him into the
afterlife. The remark is retrospective with a proleptic twist. The comment turns on the
status of Keats’s “habitual feeling” – the kind of sensuous experience that loses its
vivacity with repeated exposure.31 Keats hereby locates what I term the affect of the
remnant in a specifically rhetorical encounter with the attenuation of feeling.

The modulation of subjective emotion into an impersonal affect is on display in
Saturn’s highly rhetorical encounter with the face of the other:

Thea, I feel thee ere I see thy face;
Look up, and let me see our doom in it;
Look up, and tell me if this feeble shape
Is Saturn’s; tell me, if thou hear’st the voice
Of Saturn; tell me, if this wrinkled brow,
Naked and bare of its great diadem,
Peers like the front of Saturn. (I.96-102)

By Joel Faflak’s reading, Saturn is a “questioning subject who requires the dialogic
supplementation of the other’s face, and more important, of the affect expressed by that
face, to validate the destabilized schema of his own identity.”32 Faflak’s observation
suggests that the self-presence of the face is, for Keats, a rhetorical construct whose
affective power enacts its undoing. Following a Smithian strategy, Saturn would “see our
“doom” through the envisagement of his former identity. The gesture hinges on the anachronistic manifestation of a face whose belated appearance (“I feel thee *ere* I see thy face”) heralds an unknown future. Or to put it differently, the affect of the face marks the site where an unimaginable future retrojects its deferral of closure onto a residual past. Saturn’s prosopopeia – the conferring of a mask or face – enters him into a cycle of rhetorical construction and undoing from which he cannot escape. As de Man notes, “words such as ‘face’ can be said to embody this very incompatibility. They do not master or certainly do not resolve it, but they allow for some mode of discourse, however precarious, to take place” (RR 92). Keats would seem to agree; the power of prosopopeia is inseparable from the provisionality of its rhetoric.

So contrary to Brian Massumi’s definition of affective experience as an incipient intensity that is only retroactively and reductively “dampened” down into words, Keats situates the affect of the remnant at the far end of a process of rhetorical (de)construction. In short, Massumi overlooks the rhetorical after-affects, if you will, that constitute the hallmark of Saturn’s posthumous existence. Case in point, the rhetorical brute force of Saturn’s repetitious insistence that Thea “Look up, and let me see… Look up, and tell me… / tell me… tell me” betrays his anxious dispossession of self in the very attempt to solidify his identity. Furthermore, by framing his doubts (“if this feeble shape… if thou hear’st… if this wrinkled brow”) as an imperative command (“tell me”), Saturn’s rhetoric of sovereign power only emphasizes his enervation.

Along these same lines, Saturn’s endeavor to phenomenalize the expressive self-presence of the face shades into an awareness that his façade presents only the simulacrum of his former self: “tell me, if this wrinkled brow / Naked and bare of its
great diadem, / Peers like the front of Saturn” (I.100-2, my emphasis). The simile foregrounds the rhetorical nature of Saturn’s move to stabilize his persona. Yet the effort only reintroduces the problem it was meant to resolve. In particular, Saturn’s request founders on the action of the verb “peers.” In one sense, Saturn asks Thea to confirm that he “peers” or ap-pears “like” his former self; he is concerned about whether or not his “wrinkled brow / Naked and bare of its great diadem” still bears his resemblance. If Thea were to reply that Saturn’s crownless features are, in fact, comparable to their former glory, she would effectively elevate his visage to the same rank or class as it used to have when he wore the “great diadem.” So in this second sense, Saturn pleads with Thea to ennoble or “peer” his visage, restoring his crown in mien if not in title.

Saturn’s request for Thea to “look up, and let me see our doom” does not, however, produce the desired vision of a posthumous life. In fact, Saturn’s prosopopoetic address makes his inability to see all the more apparent. It is therefore in a third sense that Saturn asks Thea to confirm that “this wrinkled brow… peers.” Tellingly, Saturn can only picture his countenance in the act of squinting or “peering.” Saturn’s subsequent command for Thea to “tell me if this feeble shape / Is Saturn’s” indicates his failing ability to recollect the contours of his own countenance as anything more than a faint, indistinct, or “feeble shape.” Saturn’s affective condition is marked by an inability to see himself seeing. The sleight-of-hand circularity of Saturn’s attempt to perceive his “wrinkled brow” in the act of straining to see is the kind of performance in which it is hard to distinguish rhetorical acuity from its fallibility. The power of Keats’s rhetoric becomes apparent in a moment of non-appearance; it is in language that Saturn apprehends a paradoxical vision of his inability to see.
In this vein, Keats describes the moment when “at length old Saturn lifted up / his faded eyes, and saw his kingdom gone” (I.89-90). The lines seem to suggest that Saturn intuits the loss of his kingdom through the medium of his failing eyesight. Saturn’s misfortune mars his senses, with the result that his fading vision mirrors the nothing he perceives. Following the metonymic conflation of an object of sight with the power of sight, Keats designates Saturn’s eyes as the after-image of a kingdom that is otherwise gone from view – a trope Keats elaborates in the *The Fall of Hyperion: a Dream* as the “blank splendor” of Moneta’s eyes (I.269). Keats’s metonymy affords a second sight that negatively registers the disappearance of Saturn’s kingdom through a specifically rhetorical vision of the attenuation of sight.

The linguistic force behind Keats’s encounter with the feeling of the failure of feeling culminate in Saturn’s plea: “Search, Thea, search! / Open thine eyes eterne, and sphere them round / Upon all space: space starr’d, and lorn of light” (I.116-118). In keeping with the characteristically Smithian effort to regard oneself from a third-party perspective, Saturn enlists Thea in an effort to supplement his ability to look at himself looking. It turns out, however, that the move only reproduces Saturn’s incapacity to witness his misfortune. Note the redundancy of Saturn demand that Thea should take here eyes and “sphere them round.” Playing on the notion that spheres are round, by definition, Keats’s pun underscores the impossibility of Saturn’s request. After all, the eyeball cannot do is rotate around in its socket. The contradiction owes its articulation to the rhetorical power of language that exceeds the epistemological limits imposed by the senses. Keats’s repetition (“Search, Thea, search!”), alliterations (“eyes eterne” and “lorn of light”), and mashup of both techniques (“space: space starr’d”) holds out the
possibility of insight and enlightenment amidst darkness. The fact that these overwrought effects mar the transparency of Saturn’s self-regard indicates Keats’s willingness to disclose the rhetorical underpinnings of sensuous experience that the legacy of Smithian sympathy otherwise obscures. If anything, such rhetorical excrescences make Keats’s understated fascination with the minimal experience of emotion all the more conspicuous.

“Am I too to fall?”

Keats’s rhetorical engagement with the paradoxical feeling of the failure of feeling coalesces in his treatment of Hyperion’s title character. In place of Smith’s view that a reflection on the grave affords a sensuous experience of the “awful futurity which awaits,” Keats foregrounds the waning of feeling that accompanies any such effort to produce an affecting evocation of the past. In particular, the formation of Hyperion’s impatience implicitly redirects Smith’s supposition that rhetoric can phenomenalize experiences beyond the reach of the senses. Keats characterization of Hyperion puts forward the alternative proposition that the power of rhetoric asserts itself in the unworking of emotion. My claim is that Hyperion’s most intense expressions of feeling undergo a countervailing withdrawal and attenuation. The heights and depths of Hyperion’s sentiments modulate towards a minimal experience of emotion that has gone overlooked by New Historicist criticism.

As the only remaining Titan who the Olympians have yet to depose from power, Hyperion confronts an uncertain future in which his downfall is imminent. Surveying the ruin of his fellow Titans, Hyperion wonders whether he will suffer the same fate: “Saturn is fallen, am I too to fall” (I.234)? Following a now familiar pattern, Hyperion invokes
the rhetoric of prolepsis to organize his thinking. On the premise that someone else’s
doom is more readily apparent than one’s own, Hyperion is able to make a declarative
statement that “Saturn is fallen” as the point of departure for questioning his fate. This is
to say that retrospection on Saturn’s fall (completed in the past) elicits Hyperion’s doubts
about the future. Turning “posterior events that are to occur to the first person I… into
anterior events that have occurred to a third person,” as de Man puts it, lets Hyperion
anticipate a future time in which he can look back and clarify his present doom.

In the execution, however, Hyperion’s formulation is far from effectual. Notice
the stutter. The infinitive, “to fall,” echoes the immediately preceding adverb, “too,” with
the result that Hyperion stammers the phrase “too to.” The hitch in Hyperion’s speech-
pattern is one indication of the rhetorical demands on his language. Ironically,
Hyperion’s anticipation of retrospection only hampers his present enunciation; his
eagerness to determine what his fate will have been only magnifies the messiness of its
present articulation.

These linguistic disruptions find their affective correlative, shall we say, in
Hyperion’s impatience to ascertain what de Man describes in another context as the
“future possibility of a retrospective reflections on [his] own decay” (RCC 88). In brief,
Hyperion’s impatience traces the figure of prolepsis in its disfiguration. This is to say
that Keats casts Hyperion’s emotions as structures that display the errancy of rhetorical
figures (Terada 50, 52). Etymologically, the word “impatient” derives from the same
Latin root (patī, patiēns, to suffer) as the word “passion.” Impatience is an impassioned
state in which the excitation of feeling enacts a specifically temporal disruption. On the
one hand, impatience expresses a desire to arrive at some future in which the
interminable present will have become a thing of the past. On the other hand, it is exactly
the failure to make this “advance backwards” that evokes the feeling of impatience. Combined, these conflicting dynamics suggest that the emotion of impatience is forged in
an unduly protracted present whose significance exists only in relation to a future that is yet to come. The frustration derives from the experience of being forced to tarry in a present that has been preemptively vacated without any intention of remembering it.
Impatience is therefore at its most combustible in the moment when the anticipation of retrospection confronts its failure to leap out of the now. Or to pick up on recent characterizations of emotion as a speeding force, I can rephrase my point this way: impatience is all the more vehement for discovering that its attempt to accelerate toward some anticipated future gets no traction. Conversely, impatience exhausts its fervor in the unsuccessful effort to quicken its teleological velocity (Terada 63). Impatience pushes dissatisfaction to such an extreme that the emotion falls off into exhaustion.

Keats suggests as much in his configuration of Hyperion’s impatience as one part aggravation mixed with one part weariness. Where Hyperion customarily found “rest
divine upon exalted couch / And slumber in the arms of melody,” Saturn’s overthrow has left him in a state of perpetual unrest (I.192-3). “He pac’d away the pleasant hours of ease / With stride colossal, on from hall to hall” (I.194-5). Hyperion’s nightly respite has been replaced by a ceaseless pacing that literally and figuratively goes nowhere.
Restlessly awaiting a future that cannot come soon enough, Hyperion finds himself stuck in an evacuated present. If Hyperion finds no ease in the present, his impatience is equally dissatisfied with the future that has yet to make its belated arrival. Consequently,
his formerly “pleasant hours of ease” have become a period of agitated expectation that leaves him weary and deprived of rest.

Hyperion’s impatience therefore distinguishes itself from the proleptic nostalgia that Wordsworth articulates in his “Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey.” There Wordsworth pens an anticipatory valediction to his sister, Dorothy, in which he anticipates that “thy mind / Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms, / Thy memory be a dwelling place” to house her future remembrance of their shared travels (lines 140-2). Ian Baucom cites Wordsworth’s gesture as romanticism’s defining formulation of a proleptic nostalgia in which “a traveler anticipates the bitter pleasure of occupying the present only in memory and thus begins the work of forgetting or evacuating the present in order that it might be later remembered or imaginatively reoccupied.” Akin to the tourist who buys a memento to facilitate the recollection of their experience at some future time, Wordsworth’s proleptic nostalgia moves to annul the present “by anticipating its re-presentation as an artifact or memory.”

By contrast, the feeling of impatience evacuates the present without any intention of remembering or imaginatively reoccupying it. In this sense, impatience anticipates a future in which the present will become a fleeting moment of no lasting significance. The sentiment doubles as an objection against a future whose arrival is noticeably behind its time. So where proleptic nostalgia searches the present for indications that the future has already made its arrival, impatience draws attention to the nagging suspicion that this redeeming future has been postponed indefinitely and may, in fact, never come. In one sense, Hyperion’s impatience then derives from his thwarted effort to clarify an uncertain future. Conversely, Hyperion’s passion directs itself toward resolving his confusion.
about whether “am I too to fall” (I.234). Rei Terada’s reading of Paul de Man arrives at just this conclusion: namely, that “emotion arises in uncertainty” as much as “emotions tend to put a stop to uncertainty” (51). For my purposes it would follow that Hyperion’s emotions call attention to his liminal condition in the very attempt to resolve his fate.

To understand the movement implied by the first half of Terada’s thesis that “emotion arises in uncertainty” (my emphasis), we need look no farther than Hyperion’s impatience for the sunrise:

Releas’d, he fled
To the eastern gates, and full six dewy hours
Before the dawn in season due should blush,
He breath’d fierce breath against the sleepy portals
Clear’d them of heavy vapours, burst them wide
Suddenly on the ocean’s chilly streams. (I.263-8)

Hyperion seeks to preempt the appointed sunrise by “full six dewy hours.” In effect, his impatience would truncate the night and thereby bring an end to his benighted state in which he remains uncertain about his impending doom. Metaphorically speaking, Hyperion hastens the sunrise as an event that precipitates the dawning or awakening of understanding. His is a dark enlightenment that illuminates what Keats goes on to describe as “the misery [Hyperion’s] brilliance had betray’d / To the most hateful seeing of itself” (II.369-70). While there is no hope that the Titans can regain power, Hyperion nevertheless looks ahead to the daybreak as the moment when he can realize the full extent of his approaching ruin.

In this respect, Hyperion directs his vehement emotions toward the production of light – and by extension, sense and understanding – out of total darkness. True to his name, “Blazing Hyperion” does violence to gates of his palace by taking “the sleepy portals” and “burst[ing] them wide” with his “fierce breath” – an action suggestive of the
intense or fiery nature of his passion (I.166, 266-7). The resulting display nevertheless makes a spectacle out of his precarious condition:

The planet orb of fire, whereon he rode
Each day from east to west the heavens through,
Spun round in sable curtaining clouds;
Not therefore veiled quite, blindfold, and hid,
But even and anon the glancing spheres,
Circles, and arcs, and broad-belting colure,
Glow’d through, and wrought upon the muffling dark
Sweet-shaped lightnings from the nadir deep
Up to the zenith. (I.270-77)

For all its solar intensity, the only thing that Hyperion’s passion reveals is that the sun serves as a highly erratic source of illumination. Partially obscured by the “sable curtaining clouds,” Hyperion’s sun is cast in shadows, “blindfold and hid.” The verbs imply that the sun is both shrouded in shadow and blind to itself. In this respect, the pre-dawn sun serves as a figure for incomplete comprehension that makes darkness visible in the form of “circles, and arcs, and broad-belting colure.” Keats envisions a sublime light-show, of sorts, in which the sun “glow[s] through” with its irregular patterns of light that are cast onto a screen of “muffling dark.” Keats’s “sweet-shaped lightnings” are not only lightning bolts that streak across the sky from the “nadir deep / Up to the zenith,” echoes of the might that Saturn used to wield; they are also an image of the sky light(eng)ing or (en)lightened with the dim and somewhat inconsistent streaks of understanding. Yet for all this, Hyperion finds himself stymied in his attempt to manipulate the sun according to his designs. He ignites the sun with an excess of passion only to confront his ineffectuality. Hyperion’s inability to perform his version of Genesis I, “let there be light,” underscores his precarious state. For all his desire to shed light on
the Titans’ fall, the only thing Hyperion’s impatience illuminates is his lack of clarity about the future.

In all these ways, Keats’s treatment of Hyperion supports Terada’s emphasis on the vagaries of emotion that “hypothesize uncertainty, deny their own hypotheses, and then repeat the process” (51, 52). The latter movement towards resolving epistemological instability takes shape in the moment when Keats transforms Hyperion’s celestial display of emotion into

—hieroglyphics old,
Which sages and keen-eyed astrologers
Then living on the earth, with labouring thought
Won from the gaze of many centuries:
Now lost, save what we find on remnants huge
Of stone, or marble swart; their import gone,
Their wisdom long since fled.— (1.277-83)

With only a set of dashes to signal the change in perspective, Keats transforms the solar spectacle of Hyperion’s passion into “hieroglyphics old.” Accordingly, the “glow” of Hyperion’s ardor becomes “remnants huge / Of stone, or marble swart,” inert and crumbling – the symbolic concretization of his affective state. The orientation of Keats’s discussion has undergone a 180 degree temporal reorientation. Where the preceding lines describe the signs of Hyperion’s desire to anticipate his fall, Keats abruptly shifts into a retrospective mode in which “we” look back on the recorded traces of the astrological anomaly that Hyperion had instigated long ago. Keats repositions Hyperion’s effort to prematurely awaken the new day as an event of the far-distant past, effectively converting Hyperion’s sense of anticipation into a retrospective reflection. With the time out of joint, Saturn’s passion solidifies into what Ferris describes as the condition of the remnant: namely, an “inert bit of the past retrieved by the present, activated by acts of
cognition and imagination, and so refigured and reincorporated into present thought as signs of what no longer is” (“Time of the Remnant” 478).

Ostensibly, Keats’s temporal shift would complete the trajectory of a downfall that Hyperion’s is himself unable to foresee. Yet if anything, Keats’s proleptic turn from Hyperion’s solar splendor to the remnants of “hieroglyphics old” plays out as a legacy of disfiguration. By setting off the passage with dash marks, Keats indicates the specifically written (or printed) quality of his proleptic turn. The metamorphosis of Hyperion’s passion into hieroglyphics emphasizes the textual nature of the spectacle whose cryptic and enigmatic markings have lost their legibility. If Hyperion must wait for the new day to clarify his fate, subsequent “sages and keen-eyed astrologers” struggle for centuries to tease out the solar anomaly “with labouring thought.” The transcription of Hyperion’s celestial ardor into writing only amplifies the period of uncertainty; the “six dewy hours” he spent try to prematurely awaken the dawn expands into an effort that takes hundreds of years. The indecipherability of Hyperion’s affective experience extends all the way to Keats, who asserts that “their import [was] gone / Their wisdom long since dead.”

The indeterminacy of Hyperion’s moment continues to reverberate in Keats’s seemingly offhand remark that “the operations of the dawn / Stay’d in their birth, even as here ‘tis told” (I.294-5). In effect, Keats breaks the frame of his poetic narrative by introducing “the world in which one tells,” as Gérard Genette observes more generally, into “the world of which one tells.” Genette goes on to explain that the shift entails a “transition from one narrative level to another… consist[ing] precisely of introducing into one situation, by means of a discourse, the knowledge of another situation.”37 The move
implicates the reader in the diegetic universe of the poem. Much as Hyperion finds himself stymied in his effort to bring about the premature “birth” of a new day, Keats indicates his struggle to move forward with the composition of Hyperion. Keats hereby locates Hyperion’s struggle within a still ongoing history of failures to achieve closure.

Keats’s engagement with such moments of irresolution makes his resulting treatment of Hyperion’s emotion an exception to Terada’s thesis that “emotions hypothesize uncertainty by fleeing it, their flight acknowledging an unwanted indefiniteness” (63). After all, Keats December 1817 letter to his brothers famously defines his poetics as a negative capability “of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason” (I:193). The comment suggests that Keats lingers in what Stuart Sperry describes as a “state of perpetual indeterminacy,” rather than flees it. This “reluctance of positive affirmation,” as Jacques Khalip describes it more recently, informs – among other things – Keats’s misgivings about “reaching after” (22). The specifically temporal orientation of the phrase suggests that Keats resists anticipating the acquisition of “fact & reason” that will retrospectively settle his present uncertainties. Tellingly, Keats calls attention to the belatedness of knowledge production by characterizing the proleptic maneuver as an indication of irritability, or what the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines as a tendency to become “readily excited to anger or impatience” by an excessive sensitivity to stimulus.

So what, then, would it feel like to exist “without any irritable reaching after fact & reason?” Subsequent to his December 1817 discussion of negative capability, Keats’s treatment of Saturn and Hyperion makes it clear that his dissatisfaction with “reaching after” does not mean that he would forego the inclination to look ahead. Rather, Keats
objects to the expectation that the future will redeem the mysteries of present experience. Going “without any irritable reaching after fact & reason” entails doing away with a heightened sensitivity to epistemological instability. In contrast to those who are “incapable of remaining content with half knowledge,” Keats’s openness to uncertainty finds expression in a shift away from discontent and aggravation and towards the more understated registers of emotion (Letters I:194).

Keat’s notion of negative capability raises a question for my reading of Hyperion: namely, how does the inconclusiveness of Hyperion’s temporal condition reshape his affective experience? In Hyperion, Keats’s negative capability takes the form of a “truly temporal perspective,” as de Man describes it more generally: “not… a memory of a unity that never existed, but as the awareness, the remembrance of a precarious condition of falling that has never ceased to prevail” (RCC 88). Against the grain of Hyperion’s desire to wall off his misfortune behind the perfected closure of the past, he confronts the antithetical possibility that his fall will never reach a terminus. At such junctures, Keats’s affecting evocation of the past modulates towards the minimal experience of emotion.

This focus on the waning of feeling supplements a body of New Historicism criticism that privileges the heights and depths of emotion. Alan Liu offers a key insight into New Historicism’s structure of feeling when he suggests that the propensity to “exaggerate the fiction of all-or-nothing, present-versus-absent history” derives from the attempt to “verify the possibility of loss in an otherwise closed, lossless, posthistorical universe” (Local Transcendence 164). True to Terada’s assessment that the emotions flees from uncertainty, Liu admits that New Historicism’s swing from one polar extreme
to another – that is, from mourning to mania, despondency to euphoria – hinges on a fundamental uncertainty about whether to bring the past close or maintain its otherness.

In keeping with Liu’s sense that “romantic New Historicism is primarily a form of elegy,” the criticism vacillates between a compensatory and anti-compensatory posture, between what Kevis Goodman describes as “the impulse to ‘find in loss a gain to match’ (Tennyson) and the antithetical movement which… resists turning loss into gain” (Local Transcendence 163; Goodman 109). On the one hand, New Historicism would revive the past through the production of historical discourse – an endeavor encapsulated in Stephen Greenblatt’s “desire to speak with the dead.”42 Such a project is recognizable in Keats’s effort to reanimate the event of Hyperion’s downfall that has been lost to time. In this regard, the spectacle for Hyperion’s passion testifies to literature’s power to suspend disbelief, as Coleridge has it, and make a mythological past live again in words. On the other hand, New Historicism is disposed towards a melancholia that resigns itself to lamenting an irretrievable past. This contrary perspective comes through in Keats’s insistence that the traces of Hyperion’s passion are “Now lost, save what we find on remnant huge / Of stone, or marble swart; their import gone / Their wisdom long since fled” (I.281-3). In effect, Keats mourns a lost history. Much like the vestiges of Ozymandias’s “frown / And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,” Hyperion’s emotions testify to the effacement of the past. Given that Keats cannot sustain the recovery of Hyperion’s moment, all that’s left is for him to remark on the distance between “now” and “then,” between the present and a past that is wholly other. So if New Historicism tunes its elegy to the major key of “a mourning so existential as to be comparable to melancholia,” its minor key is just as assuredly a mania that embraces the
unlooked for exchange between past and present. Liu puts it nicely: “melancholic regret and jubilant assay are the two faces of a single meditation on loss and history” (165).

To the extent that *Hyperion* articulates a structure of feeling that forms the basis for New Historicist criticism, the poem also gestures toward a register of affectivity that this body of criticism tends to overlook: namely, the zero degree of emotion that shadows romantic historical consciousness. Unlikely as it may seem, Hyperion’s most intense expressions of feeling undergo a countervailing withdrawal and attenuation. Consider the emotions evoked in Hyperion by the prospect of beginning the new day:

> Fain would he have commanded, fain took throne
> And bid the day begin, if but for change.
> He might not:— No, though a primeval God:
> The sacred seasons might not be disturb’d. (I.290-93).

Hyperion’s “fain” disposition is of a piece with his impatience to “bid the new day begin.” The *OED*’s definition of “fain” suggests that Hyperion’s gladness comes of taking “a certain course in default of opportunity for anything better”; he is “glad under the circumstances.” This is to say that the urge to foreclose uncertainty elicits the emotion. Hyperion is delighted to become the master of his fate once again, if only to the limited extent that he can directly confront, rather than avoid, his impending doom.

Having said this, the conditional structure of Keats’s formulation immediately retracts the modicum of gladness that Hyperion derives from the circumstances. Notice the hypothetical status of Hyperion’s delight: “Fain would he have commanded… And bid the day begin, if but for change.” Hyperion’s relative happiness is predicated on a premise that runs contrary to the laws governing the sunrise. Keats elaborates: “No, though a primeval God: / The sacred seasons might not be disturb’d.” In effect, Hyperion’s prospective pleasure advances under the sign of its cancellation. To
paraphrase, Hyperion would have been glad to make the sun rise early, if only it were possible to do so. Even a “primeval God” does not have the power to disturb the “sacred seasons” of day of night; his joy at the prospect of resolving his circumstances is in vain. Thus held under erasure, Hyperion’s dissipated emotions lingers in their provisionality rather than making what Terada describes as a flight from uncertainty.

With the collapse of Hyperion’s hopes for an early sunrise, his emotions turn from the heights of joy to the depths of sorrow. The movement is not, however, reducible to the polar extremes that have come to define New Historicism’s structure of feeling. Left unaccounted for is Keats’s attention to the middle ground between these antitheses. The extremity of Hyperion’s passion initially makes itself felt in the moment when his “fain” hopes fade into their opposite: “And the bright Titan, phrenzied with new woes, / Unus’d to bend, by hard compulsion bent / His spirit to the sorrow of the time” (I.299-301).

Finding himself returned to the inconclusiveness he sought to overcome, Hyperion suffers “new woes”; his fury blazes up with the recognition that there is no escape from his liminal state. Terada’s more general remarks also suggest another possibility: namely, that “emotion sallies forth as though to resolve the issue by force” (62). In this regard, Hyperion confronts his situation with a nearly uncontrolled rage whose intent is to settle the crisis with the sheer force of his passion. Yet for all his vehemence, Hyperion’s frenzy only reacquaints him with his misery, thereby refuting the possibility that his passions can ever overpower the indeterminacy that generates their fire.

It is at the juncture where fury meets exhaustion that Hyperion’s high passions are “bent” or forcibly tempered to the deepest “sorrow of the time.” Yet there is more to the shift than its resemblance to New Historicism’s mood swings. What my reading of Keats
adds to the conversation is an attention to the degree zero of emotion that critics tend to bypasses on their way from mania to mourning and back again. A more understated register of feeling manifests itself in the time Hyperion spent “stretch’d… in grief and radiance faint” (I.304). Forced to tarry in an unduly protracted present, Hyperion finds that his blazing emotions diffuse into “radiance faint”; his intense passion dissipates with the recognition that time has come to a standstill. Hyperion accesses his intervallic moment through the attenuation of feeling.

“Sad sign of ruin, sudden dismay, and fall!”

Keats nevertheless feels the pull of the centrifugal forces that have carried New Historicism towards what Thomas Pfau describes as an “extreme form of affect” (9). Although Hyperion may sink into “radiance faint,” this waning of feeling remains susceptible to re-aggravation. Keats makes this point when the sky god, Coelus, steps in to re-magnetize Hyperion’s affective experience around the heights and depths of emotion. Yet Keats does not leave it at that. Keats’s configuration of affect differs from that of his New Historicist interpreters to the extent that his stratification of feeling remains open to a countervailing waning of emotion.

Coelus’s response to Hyperion’s plight rearticulates the disjunction between a reflection on the past and the anticipation of what Smith terms the “awful futurity which awaits.” “Art thou, too, near such doom?” Coelus asks (I.327). In an echo of the adverb “too” that disrupts Hyperion’s burning question, “am I too to fall,” Coelus looks to Saturn as a touchstone for understanding Hyperion’s fate. Whereas Coelus “saw [Saturn] fall, I say my first-born tumbled from his throne” (I.322-3), Hyperion only “near[s] such doom.” Tellingly, the only way for Coelus to articulate his proleptic thinking is in the
form of a question. As with Keats’s other characters, Coelus falters in his attempt to arrive at some future time in which he will be able to reflect on the Titans’s doom with the benefit of hindsight.

The disarticulation of Coelus’s rhetoric moves him to respond on an emotional level. I quote a length:

Art thou, too, near such doom? vague fear there is:
For I have seen my sons most unlike Gods.
Divine ye were created, and divine
In sad demeanor, solemn, undisturb’d,
Unruffled, like high Gods, ye liv’d and ruled.
Now I behold in you fear, hope, and wrath;
Actions of rage and passion; even as
I see them, on the mortal world beneath,
In men who die.—This is the grief, O son!
Sad sign of ruin, sudden dismay, and fall! (I.327-36)

As the etymology of the word “vague” would suggest, Coelus’s emotions wander between “fear, hope, and wrath; / Actions of rage and passion.” His is an indeterminate feeling of pain or uneasiness caused by the apprehension of the future (OED). Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that Coelus’s apprehension of the future manifests itself in his indeterminate feelings. Either way, the fluctuation does not last long. Coelus quickly consolidates the vagaries of affective experience into a linear narrative. Where the Titans previously evinced a “sad demeanour, solemn, undisturb’d, / Unruffled, like high Gods,” Coelus can now “behold in you fear, hope, and wrath.” His before-and-after diagnosis of the Titans’s changed demeanor (“For I have seen… Now I behold”), distinguishes their former gravitas from their present state of disquiet, agitation, and violent feeling. Coelus’s use of the negative prefix “un” makes this point in miniature. In an attempt to explain that the Titans “were created” with an “undisturb’d / Unruffled” character that only divinity can possess, Coelus reinforces his view that the Titans’s
recently disturbed and ruffled behavior has made them “most unlike Gods.” Coelus’s reading of Hyperion’s emotions plots a narrative structure or temporal sequence for his provisional moment, thus minimizing its elusiveness. To recall Terada’s formulation, Coelus’s “vague fear” announces his uncertainty only to flee this unwanted indefiniteness for the assurances that more structured emotions can provide (63).

Keats encapsulates these dynamics in Coelus’s culminating remark that “This is the grief, O son! / Sad sign of ruin, sudden dismay, and fall” (I.335-6)! Given that the referent of the pronoun, “this,” is strategically indeterminate, the formulation raises a question about the source of Coelus’s emotion. Coelus’s grief could stem from the emotions he now observes in the Titans (“Now I behold in you fear, hope, and wrath”); it could derive from his assessment that the Titans’s display of emotion has made them all too human; or perhaps Coelus’s grief springs from the confluence of these observations. The ambiguity is constitutive of emotion, not its byproduct. As Marc Redfield argues, affect “derives… from the effacement of undecidability that produces the possibility of literal meaning” and “manifests itself as a dimension of a referential imperative in flight from its own impossibility.” However diffuse the source of Coelus’s response, he gives it a single name: grief. In this respect, his grief is constituted by an oscillation between an acknowledgement of referential undecidability and the effacement of such recognition.

The resulting contours of Coelus’s affective experience produce a version of the antipodal structure that has become the hallmark of New Historicism’s critical sensibility, but only up to a point. If the contradictoriness of Coelus’s “vague fear” is any indication, he is liable to call upon a modulation of feeling to deflect the referential instability of his grief. Hence the key change: the Titans’s “fear, hope, and wrath; / Actions of rage and
passion” becomes one source of Coelus’s grief. In effect, Coelus processes the Titans’s intense emotions as an experience of negativity or loss.

The drop from the heights to the depths of feeling is brought into focus by Coelus’s assessment that his grief indicates a “Sad sign of ruin, sudden dismay, and fall!” While it might seem self-evident that Coelus’s comment elaborates on the “sad” or sorrowful nature of his grief, such a reading is complicated by the fact that only six lines before, he uses an older sense of the same adjective, “sad,” to connote the absence of pathos. Recall Coelus’s characterization of the Titans’s “sad demeanour, solemn, undistrurb’d, / Unruffled.” The grammatically and semantically overdetermined status of Coelus’s grief is exactly what makes it a “sign.” The emotions are “sad sign of ruin, sudden dismay, and fall!” to the extent that they enter into the play of difference. In this sense, Coelus reads the Titans’s “fear, hope, and wrath” as a “sign” that the emotions are fundamentally illegible. To reprise a distinction from my second chapter, the pathos of ruin collapses into the ruin of pathos. The forcefulness of Coelus’s declaration, replete with an exclamation point, lapses into the “sudden dismay and fall” that defines the textuality of emotion. In this regard, Coelus’s pivot from the heights to the depths of emotion passes through “dismay”: that “faintness of heart from terror or from feeling of inability to cope with peril or calamity” (OED). According to Keats’s highly condensed formulation, “sudden dismay and fall” have become synonyms. Dismay names the trace of affectivity that lingers in the gaps between “fall” (verb) and “falling,” “fall” (noun) and “fallen.”

To return to the overarching argument, my reading of Keats’s Hyperion both participates in and complicates the contemporary turn to affect. On the one hand, Keats
models a version of the turn to affect by exploring the turning or troping that destabilizes the construct of emotion. On the other hand, Keats’s rhetorical or textual configuration of affect prompts me to reconsider one of the core tenets of affect studies: namely, Brian Massumi’s premise that affective experience takes shape as an incipient intensity that is only subsequently consolidated into an identifiable emotion. Mary Favret articulates what has become the consensus view that “affect is identifiable only as it enters (is ‘dampened’ down into) what [Massumi] calls linearization, causal explanation, or accounts of before and after: the chronology of clock time.” Yet if her formulation is any indication, affect studies does not make a complete break from the “chronology of clock time.” After all, Favret’s spatial metaphor (affect “enters…into” linear time from the outside, as it were) has a temporal corollary: the indeterminacy of affect precedes or exists prior to the implementation of an “account of before and after.”45 Favret creates an implicit time-line for a phenomenon that supposedly resists chronological arrangement. The inconsistency provides an indication that there is room to reevaluate Favret’s follow-on assessment that the “wayward power” of affect “often eludes the usual models for organizing time such as linearity, punctuality, and periodicity; it eludes as well the usual models for organizing history” (11). By contrast, my reading suggests that Keats’s configuration of affect does not elude, evade, or flee from “the usual models for organizing history” so much as linger in an exploration of their inconsistencies.

“My voice is not a bellows unto ire”

To make this case, I offer a concluding assessment of Keats’s affective engagement with Enlightenment historiography. Within the context of *Hyperion: A Fragment*, Oceanus’s address to his fellow Titans is particularly relevant given that
“critics have repeatedly returned to Oceanus’s view in order to compare it to Keats’s own sense of history in the wake of the French Revolution,” as Katy Castellano notes (34). To set the scene, *Hyperion*’s second book stages a conclave of the Titans, in which they gather to make sense of their misfortune. Oceanus, the god of the sea, steps forward to assert that the Titans can take comfort from the knowledge that their ruin was inevitable. Just as the Titans were “fairer far / Than Chaos and blank Darkness,” which previously held sway, the Titans are themselves displaced by “A power more strong in beauty, born of us / And fated to excel us” (II.213-14). Keats’s Oceanus gives voice to the Enlightenment proposition that history unfolds as a progression towards ever-greater heights of aesthetic perfection. “For ‘tis the eternal law,” Oceanus explains, “That first in beauty should be first in might” (II.228-9). By understanding the grand trajectory of history, the Titans can assuage their distress. “Receive the truth,” Oceanus declares, “and let it be your balm” (II.243).

Recent attention to the historiographical source materials informing Oceanus’s speech has led critics to suggest that Keats explores contending modes of historical understanding. For Greg Kucich, *Hyperion* “maps out the very structures of linear contrariety [i.e. rise and fall] in those eighteenth-century historical writings that so profoundly influenced Keats,” on the one hand, and “discloses a new preoccupation with the plight of the individual subject rather than the sublime trajectories of universal progress and decline,” on the other.46 More recently, Porscha Fermanis has agreed that “Keats’s simultaneously stadial and sympathetic depiction of the Titans” derives from his engagement with the contradictoriness of Enlightenment historiography.47 While critics have convincingly demonstrated that Keats’s characterization of the Titans relies on the
historiographical procedures of Voltaire, Robertson, and Wollstonecraft, I would suggest that Keats’s complementary interest in transforming these models is not solely concerned with producing what Kucich describes as a sentimental “history of the suffering subject.” Rather, Keats’s attention to the fallibility of Oceanus’s rhetorical performance unworks the emotions that critics would positively identify. To the extent that Oceanus’s rhetoric undercuts his ostensible statement about the constancy of historical change, his speech cannot “give consolation in this woe extreme” as he hopes (II.242). Instead, Oceanus gestures towards the inuring or withdrawal of feeling that comes with an awareness of the instability of historical understanding.

As if oblivious to the rhetorical instability that undermines Hyperion’s attempt to forecast the outcome of his downfall, Oceanus invokes the power of analogy to legitimate his self-described “proof” that “we fall be course of Nature’s law” (II.177, 181):

As Heaven and Earth are fairer, fairer far
Than Chaos and blank Darkness, though once chiefs;
And as we show beyond that Heaven and Earth
In form and shape compact and beautiful,

So on our heels a fresh perfection treads,
A power more strong in beauty, born of us
And fated to excel us, as we pass
In glory that old Darkness: nor are we
Thereby more conquer’d, than by us the rule
Of shapeless Chaos. (II.206-9, 212-17)

Paradoxically, Oceanus locates the constancy of “nature’s law” in the inevitability of change. His logic runs as follow: just as the Titans superseded Heaven and Earth, so the Olympians have arisen “more strong in beauty” to conquer the Titans. Signaled by the “as…so” structure of his remarks, Oceanus uses a series of analogies to bring the different epochs of mythic history into relation. The Titans’s “form and shape” is
superior to the Heaven and Earth that preceded them just as the Olympians exhibit “A power more strong in beauty” than the Titans. Following this pattern, each regime finds that on its “heels a fresh perfection treads… born of us / And fated to excel us.” Every age eventually falls prey to the rising tide of history that lifted it to power. Accordingly, Oceanus finds a common basis for comparison between each successive epoch, noting “nor are we / Thereby more conquer’d, than by us the rule / Of shapeless Chaos.” While the “signs of purer life” may evolve, Oceanus can establish order in the analogical relationship between the conquering and the conquered (II.211).

In a move that ignores the inconclusiveness of Hyperion’s efforts to proleptically anticipate his present from a future point-of-view, Oceanus calls upon the power of rhetoric underwrite his prognostication of the future. Espousing what he deems “the eternal law / That first in beauty should be first in might,” Oceanus confidently predicts that “by that law, another race may drive / Our conquerors to mourn as we do now” (II.228-32). As beauty reaches ever-new heights, so too will power continue to change hands. The “eternal law” says as much about the inevitability of change as it does about the power of analogy to regulate that mutability. In Oceanus’s hands, flux comes under the control of a rhetorical principle that enables him to extrapolate the future from past occurrences. Hence he claims that the Olympians will come to mourn the loss of their newly acquired eminence in the same way that the Titans have. The assumption, which Emily Rohrbach also identifies in the stadial imagination of Anna Barbauld’s “Eighteen Hundred and Eleven,” is that “the future will bring nothing essentially new.” Oceanus plots out the future based on a survey of the past; “what's past is prologue,” as Antonio observes in Shakespeare’s Tempest.49
True to Keats’s description of Oceanus as “sophist and sage,” Oceanus’s account of historical progress unfolds as nothing less than a rhetorical *tour de force* (II.168):

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Say, doth the dull soil
Quarrel with the proud forest it hath fed,
And feedeth still, more comely than itself?
Can it deny the chiefdom of green groves?
Or shall the tree be envious of the dove
Because it cooeth, and hath snowy wings
To wander wherewithal and find its joys?
We are such forest-trees, and our fair boughs
Have bred forth, not pale solitary doves,
But eagles golden-feather’d, who do tower
Above us in their beauty, and must reign
In right thereof. (II.217-28)
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To illustrate his otherwise abstract conception of a stadial progression from “Chaos and parental Darkness” (II.191), to primeval “Heaven and Earth” (II.206), to the Titans, to their Olympian successors and beyond, Oceanus compares his epochal history with a forest ecosystem. Consider the following sets of analogies as a provisional schema for the elaborate correspondences that Oceanus puts in place:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Series 1. primeval Heaven and Earth: Titans: Olympians AS</th>
<th>Series 2. soil: forests: dove</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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For all the rhetorical extravagance of Oceanus’s efforts, his rage for order impels him towards a moment of self-revision. At the hinge where Oceanus moves to establish a parallel between the forest scene (series 2) and his underlying narrative of historical progress (series 1), his formulation undergoes a qualification. “We are such forest-trees,” he asserts, only to recognize that the metaphor requires modification: “our fair boughs / Have bred forth, not pale solitary doves, / But eagles golden-feather’d.” By rewriting doves as eagles, Oceanus’s figuration does violence to itself, effectively perpetrating its own disfiguration.
It turns out that the efficacy of Oceanus’s rhetoric is far from certain. If anything, it is the stringency of Oceanus’s commitment to the power of rhetorical substitution that brings him to the brink of the figural instability besetting Hyperion. The precariousness of Oceanus’s rhetoric becomes apparent on following his premises to their logical extreme. Case in point, his prominent assertion that “another race may drive / Our conquerors [the Olympians] to mourn as we [the Titans] do now,” invites a question: what form will this new race take (II.228-32)? Although Oceanus sets up a progression from “dull soil” to “forest-trees” to “pale solitary doves” to “eagles golden-feather’d,” he does not delineate a figure that would supersede the eagles, “who do tower / Above us in their beauty.” Following the pattern that Oceanus has set up, the figure for the Olympian’s successor – implied by the language, but never named – would have to be the sun, which turns the Olympian’s eagle feathers a golden color. It is by the light of the sun that the “pale solitary doves” are elevated out of their forest habitat and into broad daylight. Analogously, the sun rises to a height that the Olympian eagles can never reach. Moreover, the sun qualifies as “a power more strong in beauty” – if for no other reason than the fact that all other beauty is apprehended by its light. Thus Oceanus finds himself “enforc’d… to bid sad farewell / To all my empire” when he observes the “glow of beauty” in the eyes of his successor, Poseidon (II.237-39). His sense is that the Olympians convey their preeminence through the intimation of sunlight.

Ultimately, Oceanus’s rhetoric cannot make the sun rise any more than Hyperion can. Instead, Oceanus figures forth the sun only indirectly as a medium that colors the perception of everything else. Much as the “dazzling globe maintain’d eclipse” for Hyperion (I.288), Oceanus articulates his historical narrative by the light of a solar
eclipse. This is to say that the sun is observable only in adjectival form and never as a proper noun. Oceanus is no more able than Hyperion to clear away figuration’s “sable curtaining of clouds” (I.271). What differentiates Oceanus from Hyperion, however, is Oceanus’s unquestioning belief in the power of his rhetoric to phenomenalize “nature’s law.” It is through the exercise of this rhetorical power that Oceanus delivers himself into the hands of the problematic that defines Hyperion’s condition: namely, the absence of the sun – or more generally, enlightenment – in the moment when it is most needed.

In this respect, Oceanus’s rhetoric functions as a heliotrope (from the Latin, helio sun + tropium turning, to turn); its network of figuration turns toward the sun, and it is under the sun that Oceanus envisions each successive generation rising to new heights of beauty. Yet as Derrida points out, “heliotropic metaphors are always imperfect metaphors. They provide us with too little knowledge, because one of the terms directly or indirectly implied in the substitution (the sensory sun) cannot be know in what is proper to it.” While Oceanus’s language implies the presence of the sun, he cannot name the prime mover of his figurative endeavors. In this respect, the sun “eclipses itself, ellipses itself,” as Derrida puts it; the sun becomes the constitutive absence subtending the play of figuration. Hence the sun always appears as something other than itself: “dull soil,” “forest-trees,” “pale solitary doves,” “eagles golden-feather’d,” “glow of beauty,” etc. Each term is caught up in a chain of substitution that arcs toward the sun without ever returning to the proper ground of non-figural “truth” that Oceanus claims to provide. By implicitly calling on the sun to serve as what Derrida goes on to describes as the “unique, irreplaceable, natural referent, around which everything must turn, and toward which everything must turn,” Oceanus’s language gestures toward the realization that the
sun is a metaphor for the “truth” of the “eternal law” he expounds and only that – a cipher
presiding over an endless chain of rhetorical substitution (“White Mythology” 250-1).

The waywardness of Oceanus’s figuration redefines the balm of truth he would
offer the crestfallen Titans (II.243). Oceanus has this to say about the salve that his
historiography will provide:

O ye, whom wrath consumes! who, passion-stung,
Writhe at defeat, and nurse your agonies!
Shut up your senses, stifle up your ears,
My voice is not a bellows unto ire. (II.173-76)

At one and the same time, Oceanus diagnoses the Titans’s condition and recommends a
cure for those who would heed his words. In response to Saturn’s demand that someone
“tell me, all ye brethren Gods, / How we can war, how engine our great wrath,” Oceanus
emphasizes the self-perpetuating nature of the Titans’s anger (II.160-1). His criticizes the
Titans for “nurs[ing their] agonies,” nurturing or cultivating it by means of careful
attention, harboring the sting of their defeat to better animate their revenge.

To counteract the Titans’s wrath, Oceanus declares that “my voice is not a
bellows unto ire.” Strikingly, Oceanus’s declared refusal to serve as a metaphorical
“bellows unto ire” invokes the fiery nature of the passions through a defacement of the
letter. “Ire” is, after all, a truncated version of the word “fire,” with the hissing sound of
the letter “f” conspicuously absent. Oceanus formulation would soothe the Titans’s
inflamed passions by literally obliterating the aspirated “f” whose voicing suggests the
noise of forced air moving through a bellows. In effect, Oceanus lets the metaphorical
fire of Saturn’s bellicosity burn itself out. His paradoxical suggestion is that an excess of
rhetorical heat will eventually exhaust the (f)ire that consumes his fellow Titans.50
Conversely, for those who only have a mind for revenge, Oceanus commands them to
“Shut up your senses, stifle up your ears.” Apparently, all is not lost if his words fall on deaf ears. Whereas Saturn decries the powerlessness he felt on being “smother’d up, / And buried from all godlike exercise,” Oceanus recommends exactly this kind of sensory deprivation as a backdoor strategy for allowing the Titans’s fiery passions to consume the metaphorical air (read: sensation) it needs to continue burning (I.106-7).

So when Oceanus’s concludes by declaring that the Titans should “Receive the truth, and let it be your balm,” his claim requires qualification. The problem with this formulation is that Oceanus’s rhetorical performance cannot sustain the “truth” of his historical “proof.” Consequently, Oceanus’s speech never produces the “balm” that he intends to deliver. In attempting to “give consolation in this woe extreme,” Oceanus’s sympathies enact their own undoing (II.242). The result is a modulation toward the lowest threshold of affective experience.

My chapter here ends on a note of anti-closure, stopping just short of Keats’s turn to “leave [the Titans] to their woes” and make Apollo “once more the golden theme,” breaking off, that is, right before Keats’s shift from a Miltonic to a sentimental idiom (III.3, 28). If “the entire Hyperion project unfolds in the gap between Books 2 and 3,” as Levinson speculates, this discussion will not fill that gap with explanation. Should my reluctance to read Apollo’s anguished shriek incite an impatient response from critics who knows where the poem is headed, so much the better (III.135). Watching the desire for completion burn itself out is, after all, the preoccupation of Keats’s Hyperion.

NOTES
All citations are given parenthetically after an initial footnote.


7 Roy E. Cain, “David Hume and Adam Smith as Sources of the Concept of Sympathy in Hazlitt,” *Papers on English Language and Literature*, 1.1 (Winter 1965): 140.


11 To be fair, Goode nuances his position with the remark that “Burke may conceive of proper historical consciousness as grounded in Smithian ‘commerce’ of ‘heart’ but that commerce is no more personal or materially embodied than an invisible hand and rather more like a fantasy of disembodiment whereby men project themselves out of their own historical situation” (848). My point is that “grounded” is exactly the wrong word to describe the figuration that informs Burke’s sympathy for the past. Consequently, Goode de-emphasizes the rhetorical instability of romantic historical consciousness with his thesis that “Burke at once grounds historical epistemology in manly feeling while also grounding that manly feeling in what he takes to be a true sense of history” (831).


13 Jacques Derrida makes this point in the course of reading Blanchot’s short story, “The Instant of my Death,” adding that “I cannot, I should not be able to, testify to my own death, only the imminence of my death, to its instance as deferred imminence.” *The Instant of my Death*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000), 46.


31 Edmund Burke observes the dulling effects of custom and habit: “Indeed so far are use and habit from being causes of pleasure, merely as such; that the effect of constant use is to make all things of whatever kind entirely unaffecting. For as use at last takes off the painful effect of many things, it reduces the pleasurable effect of others in the same manner, and brings both to a sort of mediocrity and indifference.” Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990), 94. See Chandler’s *Wordsworth’s Second Nature* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984), 74-81 for an analysis of Burke’s view and the influence it had on Wordsworth.


38 Jack Stillinger indicates that “Keats had [*Hyperion*] in mind for a year or more before he began” it in “the closing months of 1818… and abandoned [it] in or before April 1819.” *The Fall of Hyperion* was subsequently “begun as a revision of *Hyperion*… toward the end of July 1819 and abandoned apparently for good by 21 September” (*John Keats: Complete Poems* 460, 477).


50 My observation echoes Forest Pyle’s account of Keats’s “incendiary poetics” that “exert such a pressure on the claims and assumptions of the aesthetic that we encounter through these works something like autodestruction, something which is reduced to its kindling and leaves as residue nothing but ashes.” See especially Pyle’s comments about the “combustible textual performances which open a hole at the very heart of what we traditionally understand as aesthetic experience.” “Kindling and Ash: Radical Aesthetics in Keats and Shelley,” *Studies in Romanticism* 42.4 (Winter 2003): 427-60.

Postscript
“Pompeii the Exhibit” at Discovery Times Square

For the postscript to my dissertation, I consider “Pompeii the Exhibit: Life and Death in the Shadow of Vesuvius,” whose six-month showing at Discovery Times Square in New York City ends on September 5, 2011. The exhibit, which I unfortunately did not have a chance to visit in person, is on loan from the Soprintendenza Archeologica di Napoli e Pompei to Discovery Times Square, an institution know for its mass-market displays of artifacts associated with King Tut and the Titanic, among other subjects. Seeking to capitalize on the popular fascination with virtual history and historical reenactment, the Discovery Times Square exhibit invites visitors to “experience Pompeii before and after the epic eruption 2,000 years ago. Imagine the moment their world vanished and discover the miraculous artifacts unearthed since. Witness the life and death of those frozen in time by ash.” Pompeii was, of course, the Roman city near Naples, Italy buried by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE, now designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In addition to multimedia displays and more traditional museum-style contextualization of life in Pompeii, the show’s marquee artifacts are plaster forms cast in the hollowed-out molds of rock that were created when volcanic ash buried alive the inhabitants of Pompeii and its vicinity. Reviews of the show make a point of remarking on the emotional power of these human shapes: Edward Rothstein, cultural critic-at-large for the New York Times, describes the objects as “affecting… the fulcrum of an absorbing show”; Newsday finds the exhibit “equal parts fascinating and chilling”; and Time Out New York Kids labels the plaster casts “unnerving” and “unsettling.” Yet even as “Pompeii the Exhibit” gives popular audiences an opportunity to explore an evocative past, the show also reveals the empty emotional content of its visitor’s affective
engagement with history. Comparing the Discovery Times Square display to Felicia Hemans’s 1827 poem, titled “The Image in Lava,” I argue that a significant absence is lodged at the heart of the exhibit’s evocative power.

It is hardly surprising that reviewers would find “Pompeii the Exhibit” particularly gripping. According to Adam Smith, the dead are the preeminent object of sympathetic feeling. “Surely,” Smith remarks, “we can never feel too much for those who have suffered so dreadful a calamity.” Smith’s thinking about the poignancy of the grave, generally speaking, continues to hold true for modern-day audiences who readily commiserate with the victims of an ancient natural disaster. Like Smith’s sympathetic mourner, today’s visitor to Discovery Times Square would attempt to “lodge, if I may be allowed to say so, our own living souls in their inanimated bodies.”3 It would seem, to adapt Smith’s metaphor, that “Pompeii the Exhibit” invites audiences to fill what were once hollowed-out forms with emotional substance. The viewer’s emotional engagement works to embody the past, if not bring it back to life.

Yet even as the exhibit cultivates a sentimental connection to the past, it also undercuts that investment. Unlike the mummified, plasticized, and otherwise preserved bodies that are now touring the world’s museums, the show at Discovery Times Square “is unusual,” Rothstein astutely notes, “because its dead bodies are not really dead, and they are not really bodies” (New York Times, 3/3/11). Although the victims of Vesuvius are long since dead, their petrification records the moment when they were about to die. Likewise, the plaster forms are not bodies so much as a reconstruction of the negative space where a body would have been. By extension, might the exhibit’s attempt to elicit an affective engagement with the past also ring hollow?
Certainly, there is no denying the evocative power of the plaster casts shown at “Pompeii the Exhibit.” Consider Rothstein’s observation that the display “capture[s] a moment when their subjects ceased to be. A man sits crouched, his legs pulled up to his chest, covering his face, as if in despair. A girl desperately thrusts herself at her mother, grasping for comfort. A man, prostrate, begins to pull himself up a staircase but can go no farther. These bodies are writhing, groping, reaching, protecting” (New York Times, 3/3/11). The desperate figures are made all the more affecting by the foreknowledge (or is it hindsight?) that the unfortunate individuals are doomed. To adapt the title of a lyrical meditation by Maurice Blanchot, the forms are held in suspension at the very instant of death.⁴ Almost dead and yet still living, they testify to an imminent death – or more precisely, “to its instance as deferred imminence,” as Derrida explains in a commentary on Blanchot. According to Derrida’s apt formulation, theirs is the “passion of being in abeyance.”⁵ In other words, the casts gesture anachronistically towards an impending death that has already taken place in the far distant past.

So what, then, are these artifacts doing to the viewer’s sentimental historiography? On the one hand, they mobilize an emotional investment in the past. On the other hand, efforts to fill these hollowed-out rocks with emotional substance falter with the realization that the catastrophe of 79 CE has never fully taken place. To apply Derrida’s commentary on Blanchot to a different context, the Discovery Times Square exhibit “seems to deport what has always, from all time, already taken place toward the coming of the to-come” (49). By interrupting the death sentence that was/is/ will be inescapable, the plaster casts expose the negativity of historical experience that cannot fully substantiate our emotional investment in the past.

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By way of comparison, consider Felicia Hemans meditation on Pompeii in an 1827 poem titled, “The Image in Lava.” There Hemans contemplates the imprint of a woman clasping an infant to her chest that had been set in stone when volcanic ash covered the town of Herculaneum near Vesuvius. Hemans’s tribute to the poignant image of mother and child is characteristic of what critics have since come to describe as romanticism’s sentimental engagement with history. In this vein, Hemans’s third to last stanza exclaims:

Oh! I could pass all relics
Left by the pomp of old,
To gaze on this rude monument
Cast in affection’s mold.  

Turning away from the pomp of public history and towards the working of the human heart, Hemans explores the lasting power of affect. Yet this is not to say that Hemans deems Herculaneum’s and Pompeii’s modern visitors capable of filling “affection’s mold.” If anything, the emotions associated with the image in lava are just as susceptible to decay and dissolution as any “rude monument.” Hemans elaborates in the poem’s second stanza:

Temple and tower have mouldered,
Empires from earth have passed,
And woman’s heart hath left a trace
Those glories to outlast! (lines 5-8)

Why the “and” to start line seven? Wouldn’t it make more sense to contrast the enduring vestige of a “woman’s heart” with the “mouldered” ruins of empire? By Ted Underwood’s reading, the “and” is an apt indication that “the text deduces the heart’s immortality from the impression of a woman’s body, a dated relic from a vanished time.” Hence the poem’s opening address to the image in lava as “Thou thing of years
departed” (line 1). Hemans’s ability to imaginatively and sympathetically re-inhabit “affection’s mold” is predicated on the fact that mother and child perished long ago. So if Hemans’s would posit a restitution of feeling to compensate for the destruction of the living bond between mother and child, she also confronts the untoward possibility that “affection’s mold” is itself the ruin of a bygone age, a “print upon the dust” (lines 36, 38). Her engagement with the past wavers between the evacuation of feeling and its posthumous restoration.

The signal difference between Hemans’s treatment of the artifacts recovered from the vicinity of Pompeii and the exhibit at Discovery Times Square is that the latter-day show has literally and figuratively destroyed “affection’s mold.” More than twenty-five years after Hemans wrote her poem, the Italian archeologist and eventual director of the Pompeian excavations, Giuseppe Fiorelli, innovated the method of pouring plaster into the cavities left by decaying organisms.8 Assumedly, the recovery of the shaped plaster would entail its excavation from the rock that encased it. Fiorelli would have to break the mold of hardened ash in order to recover the newly created artifacts that have gone on to become the centerpiece of the Discovery Times Square exhibit.

In one sense, Fiorelli’s procedure marks the culmination of Hemans’s effort to embody the past. Judith Harris, author of *Pompeii Awakened* and consultant for the exhibition, comments that until the moment when Fiorelli first pumped plaster into the husks of ash, “death and the macabre has been conveniently off stage and left to the imagination. Now the people who had died in the violence of the volcano had become visible and recognizable in their extreme agony” (184). Yet Fiorelli’s impulse to fill the hollows also entails a flight from the affective instability that Hemans grapples with.
Where Hemans regarded her historical affections as both a plentitude and an impoverishment, Fiorelli and the subsequent exhibitors of his excavations seem all to eager to substitute a poignant object for what would otherwise function as an empty placeholder for historical feeling. In other words, “Pompeii the Exhibit” risks committing the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, if you will, by attaching the visitor’s historical sentiments to an embodied form that is not really a body and not really dead.

By contrast, my dissertation has explored the interplay between the presence and absence of historical feeling that takes shape at the zero degree of emotion.

NOTES
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