

Apologia pro Semanalyse: Kristeva and Wordsworth's Maternal Sublime

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A thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty of Middle Tennessee State University in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English

May 2016

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To my grandmother, Mary Margaret Marley:

“Mica, Mica, parva stella; / Miror quaenam sis tam bella.”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Reading great word-craft—finding comfort and strength there—has inspired me to write compositions that could do the same for others. Middle Tennessee State University’s Graduate Studies in English program has affirmed my commitment as a writer and taught me lessons that will be essential in continuing my work. One of the most prominent lessons has been that one does not improve as a writer alone. Upon reaching this milestone, I would like to recognize the foremost contributors to my progress thus far.

My committee has earned my deepest respect and gratitude. My director, Dr. Marion Hollings, has given selflessly of her time and energy. She first encouraged me to research Kristeva and since has offered, time and again, wise council. My reader, Dr. Michael Neth, has been extraordinarily generous with his critique. The opportunity to learn from him has been both humbling and enlightening.

Dr. James Comas and Dr. Scott McEathron, additionally, should be acknowledged for recommending key texts which have advanced my study.

My cohort included many bright people whose collegiality and discussion have helped me explore and develop my ideas. Most prominently, Katherine Estes, Matthew Byrge, and Jacquelyn Hayek have become valued peers and friends. It has been an honor to walk through the fire with them.

I have had the privilege of working with many remarkable students, particularly the young people in Students Active for Feminism and Equality. Their commitment to creating a more just world reinvigorates my optimism and lends me perseverance.

My parents, Joe and Elizabeth Marley, have given me models of professional integrity and encourage my aspirations. One of my most treasured memories will always be the day my father told me that he was convinced I would succeed as a professional academic. My mother taught me how to read and was the first person to find promise in my writing. She has set for me an example of active femininity with her artistry, work ethic, and brilliance.

Finally, the love and moral support of my partner and husband, Charles Latham, has made all the difference.

ABSTRACT

Julia Kristeva's critical approach to poetic revolution reclaims hitherto neglected feminine elements of the sublime. Her process of "semanalysis"—which combines semiotics and psychoanalysis—presents a gendered dynamic in psycholinguistics. Semanalysis exposes the artificiality of communication to unsettle any illusion of fundamental order in language. Wordsworth's *Prelude*, in its interminable coming-into-being, exposes the speaking subject as constituted fluidly in "spots of time." Wordsworth's "speaking subject" feels continuous in time but also dissolute within his universe. Driven by a desire to embody and inscribe his moments, the speaking subject of *The Prelude* struggles against the limits of language in meaning-making.

The critical approach of semanalysis reveals repressed feminine processes and drives underpinning creative language acts. Such repressed expressions enact a process similar to the sublimation of feminine psycholinguistic tendencies in the Symbolic order. Thus, semanalysis offers an intellectual practice uniquely able to make evident feminine creative constituencies in the Symbolic order even in a masculine-identified speaking subject like Wordsworth's. Wordsworth's recurrent "revisitings" of moments of time memorialized in his verse—apparent in the overwhelming accumulation of drafting artifacts that is *The Prelude*—reveal a poetic subject veiling and counter-veiling his attraction to the maternal sublime under the auspices of an idealized, impossible-to-embodiment *Recluse*, a figure—spectrally textual—beckoning the poet with the promise of a position in monumental time.

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INTRODUCTION

The Feminine in the Sublime:

Truth and Time, Meaning and Signification

Must every piece of writing begin with some invocation of muses no one really believes in, not literally, not now, perhaps never, but a necessary gesture nonetheless, because one must start somewhere in the middle, knowing one never began anything? Shooting through this thing, not solid nor liquid nor nothing, some “magisterial” reconstitution forms, and

strikes the ear of the semiotician psychoanalyst who tries to articulate an utterance of truth (one should say a style) without censoring what has been learned over a period of two thousand years, but without being confined to it either. Without censoring: for there is language there, and devices dependent on scientific thought can describe it more or less masterfully. But without being confined to it: for there is more than a language object in the heterogeneous process of significance. The conjunction of those two propositions has a dramatic impact on thought and, more generally, on the speaking subject. Analytic discourse, by holding to it, is perhaps the only one capable of addressing this untenable place where our speaking species resides, threatened by madness beneath the emptiness of heaven. (*Desire in Language* xi)

To hear truth requires that the analyst account for but also exceed history and situation. Denotation, etymology, grammars, and context offer insight into elements of the

meaning-making process. However, when Kristeva writes that meaning is heterogeneous to signification, she points to the limits of positivism—not rejecting scientific thought but noting that in the communicative act more obscure—even gendered—forces are at work. To distinguish meaning as heterogeneous to signification creates a theoretical gap, a space where analysis can intercede and consider the fleeting nature of being, as a person might find expression in one moment and find that expression inadequate in the next, having become something different than before.

Some texts commune with something tremendous, without apparent historical or cultural connection—or at least nothing empirically traceable. One could call that ephemeral, ethereal connective intuition “untimely.” Foucault has described the untimely as “the errors, the false appraisals and faulty [calculations that] help us to search in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history—in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts” (139). The untimely reading summons an intimacy “without history” between reader and author more intense than any relationship with a physical person encountered before in the lived life of either: an encounter with something resembling what literary criticism has called “the sublime.” This “sublime sensation” is not masculine in nature. In fact, the supposed masculinity of the sublime experience limits and misrepresents communication of perceptions of the “untimely” truths of poetic utterance.

The neglected femininity of the sublime must be restored in order to establish the full significance of poetic revolution. A reevaluation of the sublime, even with its traditionally masculine inscription, reveals elements that resist reduction. The sublime

must be separated from its gendered application. Thus, I propose to reappropriate the sublime for poetics and to reclaim the neglected feminine elements of sublimity through the critical approach of Julia Kristeva.

Kristeva writes that poetic language psychologically—and then socially—disrupts consciousness structured by language in a given place and time. Yet, “poetic language” exists atemporally—in the choric space where truth and time meet before forming the compromises necessary to make speech possible. Once uttered, the Symbolic—the law of the father—pulverizes the poetic.¹ However, traces of poetic revolution may be read through breaks in style and convention, or in bodies of audiences by whom the lines of poems are read or heard—a process of reading which Kristeva has called “*semanalyse*” and which translates as “semanalysis.” Semanalysis offers a practice through which readers can glimpse sublimity and achieve a poetic sensibility. This poetic sensibility, open to sublime experience, offers a way of being able to resist the forces of political conformity and automatization—an arrested psychic state in which a subject becomes caught in systemization and uniformity, a consciousness plaguing postmodern culture.

One benefits from such a reading of William Wordsworth’s sublime, poetically revolutionary text *The Prelude: or, Growth of a Poet’s Mind; An Autobiographical Poem* (1798-1850). Wordsworth’s *Prelude* suits the semanalytic approach. One of the great poems of the Romantic literary movement—a movement particularly concerned with the sublime—the work is so textually fragmented that Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams,

¹ Capitalization specifies Lacanian usage of “Symbolic” to mean the mental structure imposed and activated by entry into usage of sign systems; see glossary for further explanation of how the term is to be understood in this text.

and Stephen Gill claim, “No literary masterpiece has a more complicated textual history . . .” (ix). Never formally titled, drafted numerous times, and published posthumously with unauthorized editorial changes, *The Prelude* stands as testimony to experience which defies definitive form. In his “revisiting” process, Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, in its interminable coming-into-being, exposes the struggle of a speaking subject. Sensitive to “spots of time” when and where the sublime experience peaks and driven by a desire to embody those moments, Wordsworth struggles against the limits of text in meaning-making.

“*Semanalyse*” or “semanalysis” is a Kristevan neologism combining “semiotics” and “psychoanalysis.” By combining these two disciplines, semanalysis makes it apparent that speaking subjects, even as they become caught in chains of signification, dissolve signs in order to make new meaning—particularly through use of poetic language. That the constituent forces at work in poetic utterance play out a gendered dynamic is likewise made apparent. Kristeva’s discussion of time and truth as well as semanalysis and poetic language offer the materials necessary to develop a more “truthful” reading of sublime poetic work like Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, offering a materialist and objective analytical model able to describe intersections of gender, signification, and psychology. Kristeva’s semanalysis accounts for the dynamics of feminine and masculine impulses in the gap between what is meant and what is communicated. Exposing the artificiality of communication and unsettling any sense of fundamental order in language or in being, and the semanalytic process makes all things theoretically possible in an argument for total, terrifyingly sublime intellectual freedom.

An overview of the thought of Longinus, Edmund Burke, and Immanuel Kant offer a means by which to provisionally conceptualize sublimity as an aesthetic expression of experiences which overwhelm systems of signification. Those expressions nevertheless indicate meaning in excess of the formal constraints of language. Both the date and precise identity of authorship for Longinus's *On Sublimity* remain shrouded in mystery, yet the text's reputation and influence endures, seemingly in keeping with the spirit of its content. In a letter to John Fletcher, dated 6 April 1825, Wordsworth challenges the supposition that Longinus's sublime of Greek tragedies and epics should be thought of as an etymological predecessor to the English Romantic sublime, favoring instead a sublime born from the language of Hebraic prophets. Wordsworth's challenge demonstrates that his notion of sublime art has religious qualities beyond Longinus's "animated, impassioned, energetic or if you will, elevated writing" (194). Despite Wordsworth's objection, Longinus's *On Sublimity* is nonetheless entrenched in discussions of the sublime during and after the Romantic literary period ("Longinus" 135).

Longinus described sublimity as "a kind of eminence or excellence of discourse" and adds that it "is the source of the distinction of the very greatest poets and prose writers and the means by which they have given eternal life to their own fame" (137). He describes five qualities of sublimity: inspiration, emotion, figures, diction, and arrangement (138-139). A sublime utterance requires natural greatness and is a product of thoughts and habits weighty, admirable, and worthy of eternity. Inspiration, as well as the powerful emotion moving it—a prophetic and phantasmic feeling comparable to

madness, occurs naturally. The three remaining artificial qualities of figures of thought and speech, noble diction (including word choice and metaphor), and “dignified and elevated word arrangement” constitute the more technical processes facilitating the communication of sublime perceptions. However, in Longinus’s digression on the nature of genius, he clarifies that by itself impeccable form in composition cannot create sublimity. Longinus writes,

[When] we come to great geniuses in literature . . . we have to conclude that such men, for all their faults, tower far above mortal stature. Other literary qualities prove their users to be human; sublimity raises us towards the spiritual greatness of god . . . every one of those great men redeems all his mistakes many times over by a single sublime stroke . . . [and] if you picked out and put together all the mistakes in Homer, Demosthenes, Plato, and all the other really great men, the total would be a minute fraction of the successes which those heroic figures have to their credit. (151)

In fact, forced and bizarre language use—an eruption of the feminine within the poetic as Kristeva will put it—appears essential to the effect of sublimity. A transcendent experience in the audience of such poems most fully characterizes Longinus’s sense of the sublime.

The manner in which Wordsworth resists Longinus’s sublime as a relative to his own reveals a repression of feminine elements of signification in his literary theory. Longinus’s sublime includes the desiring feminine verse of Sappho which Wordsworth

finds to lack affinity with the writing of Homer or Aeschylus (written “Eschylus” in his letter), other sublime authors referenced by Longinus. Wordsworth finds even less affinity between Sappho’s verse and that of Ezekiel or Isaiah, authors of verse which he would include as examples of sublime writing (“6 April 1825 to Jacob Fletcher” 194). While the verse of these poets and prophets may have different tones and qualities from that of Sappho, that difference may not necessarily be that of the sublime—even as the sublime as described by philosophers with whom Wordsworth finds himself in agreement.

Edmund Burke was one of the philosophers most important to Wordsworth’s intellectual, artistic development. Burke’s 1757 essay *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* contrasts the profundity of sublimity and beauty with the fleeting, pleasurable stimulation of novelty. Novelty satisfies curiosity, but the “agreeable affect” which results from satisfied curiosity becomes exhausted quickly, and mature minds require powers and passions beyond the novel to inspire “other sensations than those of loathing and weariness” (454). Burke establishes an order of affections, finding pleasure and pain to be entirely independent sensations; however, he recognizes a pleasing quality to the cessation of pain. He finds that, because the cessation of pain should not be classified as pleasure (as it arises from a “positive cause”) but something different and lacking a name, he must—self-consciously and cautiously—appropriate the word “delight” for his more specialized meaning (456-457). In the experience of grief, for instance, the mind keeps

its object perpetually in its eye, to present it in its most pleasurable views, to repeat all the circumstances that attend it, even to the last minuteness; to go back to every particular enjoyment, to dwell upon each, and to find a thousand new perfections in all, that were not sufficiently understood before; in grief, the *pleasure* is still uppermost (458)

A loss of pleasure leaves a residue melancholy, bittersweet in nature. The positive quality of the bittersweet sensation should be called “delight” rather than “pleasure.” Conversely, the delight felt when pain modifies lacks the delicacy of melancholy, being of “solid, strong, and severe nature,” so the experience of delight might be separated into sensations originating in either mind or body (458). Having distinguished pleasure and pain from delight and melancholy, the sensation of sublimity should be understood as a response to pain because sensations of pain have the most profound effect.

Burke organizes the ideas which affect the mind most powerfully into self-preservation and society. Sensations related to self-preservation, pain, danger, and terror produce the strongest emotions, and, of these most powerful catalysts, death is “king of terrors”; indeed, the quality of pain is “more painful” as it is “emissary” of death (459). Thus, as the most profound type of experience, sublime encounters involve apprehensions of death. In contrast, Burke offers two sorts of society: “the society of sexes” and “*general society*.” However, the distinction he makes does not seem to imply that these categories are mutually exclusive. To explain, he describes how, in the social order, forsaken lovers dwell on the lost object of their love, engrossed in the idea of that object and the “negative” pain its loss inspires (459). The love object might be a beloved

woman, but “[any] idea is sufficient for the purpose” (460). One observes that the structure of emotional response to loss of a love object offers a faded imitation of the emotional response to loss of life, forecasting the Freudian hypothesis that the sex drive springs from the death drive as the most powerful impulse of the human unconscious.

Burke’s description of sublimity emphasizes sublime sensation as painful, dangerous, and terrible—in short, deadly. Thus, the sublime, as “the strongest emotion of which the mind is capable of feeling,” must be regarded “at certain distances, and with certain modifications” in order to inspire aesthetic delight. Burke’s sublime contrasts with aesthetic beauty in the cause of each: the sublime arises from pain and beauty from pleasure (459). As in the delight felt in grief and heartache, however, the mind returns to overwrite the memory of the sublime experience, altering the sensation in recollection in a process which confuses pain with pleasure in an illusion of mastery—mastery of death, that is. However, this process remains an illusion, as the initial ideas, though they may be blended and soften, warrant distinction if their power on emotion is to be understood even though—or perhaps especially because—comprehension might be troubling.

When one compares the Burkean sublime to Wordsworth’s sublime described in “Tintern Abbey,” one notices how Wordsworth also emphasizes the sublime as an experience in which the sense of the physical body falls away and how that falling away has the quality of a removal of pain. Wordsworth’s sublime is a “blessed mood,”

In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,

Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood,
 In which the affections gently lead us on,—
 Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
 And even the motion of our human blood
 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
 In body, and become a living soul . . . (37-46).

However, if the sublime experience is to be described as a sense of removal from a suffering physicality, that suffering physicality must be acknowledged as catalyst. Sappho writes, “To me he seems a peer of the gods, the man who sits facing you and hears your sweet voice / . . . my eyes cannot see, my ears hum . . .” (qtd. in Longinus 140). She imagines the lover in the presence of her beloved to be elevated above the human world and imagines herself, were she to be in that presence, so fulfilled that her senses would be overwhelmed. Thus, Sappho’s speaking subject experiences a desire that surpasses physicality. The difference between Wordsworth’s sublime and Sappho’s is that Sappho’s is more obviously feminine—which is not to say Sappho’s sublime is feminine because Sappho is a woman. Her verse is feminine because it explicitly describes bodily desire as elemental in the experience of the poetic subject’s divine elevation. As Kristeva will show, desire oriented in and at the body has been associated in the Western imagination with the “vulgarity” of the embodied feminine. Finally in regard to the Fletcher letter, Wordsworth further supports his argument that Longinus’s sublime lacks connection to the Romantic sublime by pointing out an error in translation mistaken for etymology. Wordsworth’s critique of Longinus’s reception might be viewed

as an emphasis on sign—what might be called the word of the father—above meaning. To observe a repression of the feminine at work in Wordsworth’s argument against a heritage between Longinus’s *On Sublimity* and the Romantic sublime is not to deny the value or validity of his argument. The point is that the mechanisms by which Wordsworth’s argument is made stem from repression of feminine-coded desires and feminine aspects of signification that contribute to bodily sensations resembling sublime experience.

Deeply influenced by Burke’s thought, Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (1790) likewise finds that the aesthetic experience of the sublime challenges the sense that the universe harmonizes with individual people. Such an experience of the sublime as dissonant suggests a recognition that the universe in which people live is ordered by limitation and death. While Kant’s *Observations on the Feeling of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1761) argues for a subjective basis for feelings in response to art, *Critique of the Power of Judgement* attempts to reverse that position so as to bridge what Kant perceived to be a gap between two aspects of human nature as beings capable of “pure reason” but also subject to “practical reason” (“Immanuel Kant” 406). The gap between the two kinds of reason parallels a gap between two “worlds” (which might also be thought of as realms of experience): a “sensible” or physical world and a “supersensible” or nonphysical (as in ideal or philosophical) world (406). Pure reason organizes sensible objects into forms and categories while, in acts of practical reason, a mind develops laws to direct its own conduct. As a result, humans find freedom in reason

but also experience limits to their freedom when they encounter physical limits, leading to the question of whether limited freedom can be truly called freedom.

Kant turns to aesthetics as a means to resolve the contradiction between the freedom of practical reason and the limited potentiality of pure reason. He considers aesthetics because that discipline, by definition, offers a system by which judgement organizes senses and supports his effort to “connect the sensory to the supersensible” (407). Judgements can be determinative, objective, or reflexive. In determinative judgement, things can be organized based on a qualification or, in other words, can be determined to fall in a category based on some acting principle. For example, numbers can be even or odd, determined by whether or not they can be divided by two. In objective judgment, things can be subsumed under a pre-existing general concept. For example, a “chair” might be understood as any object meeting the function of “a raised surface on which one sits.” Reflexive judgements, in contrast, can be made without “a firm rule or standard” (407). For example, a judgement that something is “beautiful” often finds the unique qualities of an object pleasing and, furthermore, tends to prompt disagreement. Kant attributes disagreement in reflexive judgments of beauty to differences in “taste.” In an attempt to avoid concluding that taste is a culturally relative matter—a conclusion which would not support a unified account of pure and practical reason which would prove the possibility of freedom—Kant established the beautiful as a distinct quality from the “agreeable” or “good.”

Tasteful beauty mingles sensible and supersensible perceptions; judgments of beauty do not involve desire, so Kant calls them “disinterested.” One might find the taste

of a given food pleasing because of “idiosyncratic, physiological appetites,” but one finds a field of flowers, though they have no concrete purpose and fill no physical need, pleasing based most on formal rather than material or physical properties (408). The formal, supersensible principles which guide taste in making judgments concerning beauty suggest that beautiful art should not be “tainted” by worldly concerns and that art ought to have “purposiveness without purpose” (qtd. in 408). Thus, in appreciating beauty, a human mind escapes the “physical world of causal determination” and harmonizes sensory immersion in physical reality with free play in the ideal realm as the mind brings abstract forms into embodiment in beautiful art objects (408). Encounters with beauty suggest that the ideal products of human reason correspond to nature in an “intelligible” universe (409).

Sublime encounters reveal discord between mind and world. “Mathematical sublime” encounters reveal discrepancy in the scope of imagination and the scale of the universe, and “dynamic sublime” encounters inspire fear and respect before overwhelmingly powerful forces (409). The sublime, like the beautiful, establishes the supremacy of the supersensible but, as opposed to suggesting harmony, exposes the discordance between ideal and material experience. Therefore, to support his larger philosophical goal, Kant is motivated to contain the discordance of the sublime experience in his aesthetic theory and asserts that the beautiful is more “important and rich” (409). For instance, in communication, expressions of extravagant genius must be clipped, made to behave, and be polished so as to introduce “clarity and order” and make

the genius ideas “tenable” (410). Thus, he might be said to propose that truth must be sublimated in order to take form.

Julia Kristeva contemplates intersections between time, truth, language, sex, gender, and subjectivity and comments on the sublimation of women within these constructs and their subsequently sublimated truths. In doing so, she brings poststructural theory to bear upon themes such as the nature of aesthetic experiences of excess meaning, impetuses to power as they function in language and are spurred by the death drive, and the possibility of horrifying, violently anarchic freedom in the realm of the mind. Such themes intersect in her characterization of poetic utterance. Although she may not emphasize the term “sublime,” Kristeva’s “poetic utterance” resembles the established characterizations of sublime text with a foregrounding of feminine qualities. According to Kristeva, poetic utterances form within psycho-linguistic orders associated with both the maternal and paternal.

The verbal, paternal Symbolic order is also temporal because the Symbolic order organizes concepts not only into signs but also establishes how those signs can be related to each other. In referencing established ideas to create a statement which projects some idea to be made later, the Symbolic order establishes an objective point of reference—“by defining a past, a present, and a future.” An utterance establishes the subjectivity which is the “point of reference” from which signification arises—a subjectivity which ceases to exist once the utterance has been made. Thus, in the moment of speech, the signifying utterance contains “all possibilities of measurement” (“Outside Time” 34).² Kristeva

² “Outside Time” was first published in one of Kristeva’s less popular, less frequently cited *Des Chinoises* (1974), translated by Anita Barrows as *About Chinese Women* (1977).

refers to the notion of the “speaking subject” that she expands on more fully in other texts, notably her thesis *Séméiotiké: Recherches pour une sémalyse* (1969): the “I” exists in the moment of articulation, in the instant of communication.³ Thus, in speaking, one is present; the moment of speech is the only time when subjectivity is present (or when “I” am present). This present has its familial before and after (“my” ancestors, “my” progeny) into which “I” insert “myself.” The insertion, if done to support order in the bifurcation of order/chaos (related to motion/stagnation, conscious/unconscious, phallus/womb), requires repressions governed by common taboos and inhibitions. If the insertion breaks taboo and is uninhibited, then that insertion revolts against the Symbolic order, rising from an “underlying causality,” the “social contradictions that a given society can provisionally gag in order to constitute itself as such” (“Outside Time” 34).

Revolutionary projection stems from the unconscious territory without which no speech, interpersonal relationship, production, or reproduction would be possible. The unconscious contains the social contradictions one is acculturated to disregard. No reference point—no past, present, or future—no verity inhabits this territory wherein Western artists imagine a “truth” outside what can be conceived in time and sign. The truth outside time and sign often takes the figure of a woman: “what the father doesn’t say about the unconscious, what sign and time repress in the impulses, appears as their *truth* (if there is no absolute, what is truth, if not the unspoken of the spoken?) and . . .

³ Unfortunately, no full English language translation of *Séméiotiké* has been completed. Selected portions have been made available in *Desire in Language* (1980) and *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984). A revised and full translation would be noble task and make a significant contribution to English language scholarly discourse at large. Both translations will be referred to later in this text.

this truth can be imagined only as a woman” (35). Derrida made a similar observation in *Women in the Beehive: A Seminar with Jacques Derrida* when he says that

in our situation, in this cultural and historical situation, the terms “Man” and “Woman” are not at all the same. This is not an eternal or universal situation. This could change. But in Western countries, in phallogocentric cultures and so on, the situation implies that there is a difference. In our language, when one says “Man” with a capital M and Woman with a capital W . . . it’s not the same, not at all, because “Man” with a capital M means “mankind.” Woman with a capital W means . . . “Truth” or things like that, but doesn’t mean mankind or womankind. (147-148)

The capitalization Derrida symbolically designated the Imaginary figures—the unconscious images—of the masculine and the feminine in the Western unconscious. That the unconscious image of the feminine—“Woman with a capital W”—signifies “Truth” has two relevant implications. First, in Western subjectivity, truth is associated with something different from, something alternate to, something beyond the realm of “mankind.” Second, a “woman” without capitalization, an embodied femininity, corresponds to “nothing” in the Western unconscious.

The sensation of truth as described by Kristeva escapes established structures of human understanding and communication. Such encounters drive the subjects experiencing them to communicate the perceptions of truth nonetheless. Thus, speaking subjects invent new, fractured modes of communication like poetic language, such truthful encounters can also be called “sublime.” Therefore, sublime writing is not limited

to a singularly masculine constitution. By Kristeva's account, feminine speaking subjects might actually be more closely identified with the fracture which speaks to sublime experience.

When a feminine speaking subject enters the paternal Symbolic order in speech, she has to repress more of her identity than masculine speaking subjects. When a feminine speaking subject expresses meaning outside the Symbolic order and dredges the unconscious, she "evolves into this 'truth'" ("Outside Time" 35). To evolve into truth is to embody that which the Symbolic order cannot represent. Such an embodiment radically surpasses the system that sublimated much of her identity into either ephemera or negativity—an unsettling act with Symbolically negative connotation. This poetic feminine speaking subject is "a specialist in the unconscious, a witch, a bacchanalian, taking her *jouissance* in an anti-Apollonian, Dionysian orgy" ("Outside Time" 35). Her speech is marginal to science, philosophy, religion, even poetry (as conceived popularly) and pregnant in that this speech leaves the day-to-day and "monthly cycles"; she falls into the body. Kristeva writes that there is a myth that in the womb time is objective and cosmic until birth when one senses time subjectively as a human. This myth supports the common concept of time in which the child, evidence of *jouissance* and marginality, appears to challenge the Symbolic. Truth and time pass through women in *jouissance*, pregnancy, and marginal speech.

Western artists believe they express “unverified, atemporal truth.” These oedipal artists symbolize truth in the fetishized female body, as in Tiepolo’s painting *Time Unveiling Truth* (see fig. 1).⁴



Fig. 1. Tiepolo, Giovanni Battista. 1745-50. “Time Unveiling Truth.” *ARTstor Digital Library*, EBSCOhost. Web, 15 Jan. 2014.

⁴ While Kristeva (or Anita Barrows, her English translator for *About Chinese Women*) cites the painting as “Time Disrobing Truth,” EBSCO lists it as “Time Unveiling Truth” in what is most likely a consequence of mistranslation. In fact, the (correctly) translated title offered by EBSCO, describing Time’s act as “unveiling” more precisely communicates the nature of the act. To “disrobe” has a more limited and vulgar scope of meaning. The robe is removed. There is a sexual suggestion, and that is all. To “unveil,” however, has layers of significance ranging from metaphorical to religious. Kristeva would, in fact, continue to write essays considering the symbolic function of veils, for instance in her *Lettre ouverte à Harlem Désir* (1990) translated by Leon S. Roudiez as *Nations without Nationalism* (1993).

Whether the painting depicts a scene of rape, love, or lust is indecipherable. This indeterminacy is foregrounded by Kristeva. Truth “has a right leg where the left leg should be” and that leg “is thrust forward, between herself and the genitals of Time” (“Outside Time” 36). The ambiguity might have purpose. The infant and parakeet watch Time and Truth’s exchanged looks—“his pain and her air of majesty.” The mask and arrows “indicate the indirect methods by which ‘Truth’, so armed, can not only trample the earth, but steal its ‘false’ from Time and transform Time into a fallen lord, an angry servant.” However, Truth takes the place of the phallus as “priestess of the absolute.” Truth bared and presented loses herself in “transcendental divinity.” Such presentations of women and their relationship with or, better yet, embodiment of truth trap feminism by cutting women from their ties to unconscious truth.

Kristeva observes that the form of woman is made to stand for truth: “the ‘truth’ of the unconscious passes into the symbolic order, it even overshadows it, as fundamental fetish, phallus-substitute, support for all transcendental divinity.” She adds that this passage of the “choric” stage of invention into the Symbolic order builds a “double bind” for the feminine. In the “double bind” femininity is associated with both the unrepresentable ideal truth while living feminine bodies, if they speak, desecrate their true form. Consequently, the feminine is divine in theory and profane in practice. Indeed, embodying unverified atemporal truth as feminine is

[a] crude but enormously effective trap for feminism: to acknowledge us, to make us into the truth of the temporal order, so as to keep us from

functioning as its unconscious ‘truth’, formless beyond true, and false, beyond present-past-future.

When women identify as the disembodied “truth of the temporal order” (as opposed to the truth of the unconscious), they identify with a power within the patriarchal order of sign and time. Thus, feminism becomes contained within the system it ostensibly resists. However, the political containment which results from the double binding of the feminine results more from the underlying gendered nature of Western psycholinguistic structure.

Kristeva observes,

It seems to me that, far from being simply a matter of ‘others’ stubbornly refusing the specificity of women, this double bind, which has always succeeded in the West, arises from a profound structural mechanism concerning the casting of sexual differences and even of speech in the West. (37)

Time is understood as masculine and timeless truths are understood as feminine. Western artistic representations of time cast time as a sign system in itself. Such a sign system overwrites femininity.⁵ For example, women must identify with masculine values in order to engage in politics, as politics transpire in a temporal realm. “[By] playing supermen,” some women “overthrow the socio-historic order,” a role enjoyed by active, effective, and gay women but also resulting in “eternal sulk” punctuated by hysteria in the mother-identified woman. The available identities for women who challenge the

⁵“Sign system” refers to a body of signs—that is, sound-images which represent concepts. “Sign systems refer to languages but also to more general system of representation, such as bureaucratic modes of organization. Refer to the glossary for a further definition of “sign system.”

historically passive political stance prescribed to them require rebellions which do not go unpunished, even in psychic territory. The casting of sexual difference drives nonconforming women into depressive and manic phases as they navigate between resisting the social order and over-correction, unable to maintain balance between the oppressively patriarchal social order and the deathly silent, enormous void of their maternally-associated unconscious.

Yet, Kristeva dreams. Her sentences in the paragraph following her discussion of time and truth are fragments. She imagines a writer from the borderland between the territories of the Symbolic and the unconscious. She cannot say it whole, so she does not write whole sentences:

But how? By listening; by recognizing the unspoken in speech, even revolutionary speech; by calling attention at all times to whatever remains unsatisfied, repressed, new, eccentric, incomprehensible, disturbing to the *status quo*.

A constant alteration between time and its “truth,” identity and its loss, history and the timeless, signless extra-phenomenal things that produce it. An impossible dialectic: a permanent alteration: never one without the other. It is not certain that anyone here and now is capable of it. An analyst conscious of history and politics? A politician tuned into the unconscious? A woman perhaps (38)

Kristeva dreams of a woman who writes, who rehabilitates the notion of the ideal, supreme truth and the sublime moment where one subject encounters the overwhelming

force of unconscious truth. Carrying that unconscious truth with her, a woman enters the community of persons. Not subsumed beneath some patriarchal sign system or contained through institutionalization, unconscious truth claws at the barrier between mind and Lacanian Real. Revolutionary poetic language accesses unconscious truths. To understand how revolutionary poetic language taps into unconscious truths, one should develop revisionary theoretical approaches by which it can be understood.

In order to establish Kristeva's theoretical position regarding what is ethical within the treatment of language as a psychologically transformative—or generative—process, one might first examine her essay, "The Ethics of Linguistics."⁶ Notably, for Kristeva "ethics" is less a systemized morality than a social construct. Likewise, linguistics attempts to master logical process, an illusory mastery which can be undermined by irony, bringing to mind travesty language, parody, and carnivalization. Kristeva finds in such linguistics a need to assert a "speaking subject" understood as a site of both structured language "and its regulated transformation" and the "loss" and "outlay" of that language (24). Subjects speaking poetic language operate with fewer social constraints than when speaking "ordinary language" (25).

Kristeva differentiates poetic language from poetry. Poetic language intimately connects to the body as it taps into "rhythm, death, and future" (27). A poetic utterance is a site of destabilization and destruction even as it draws upon feelings, thought-before-thought (more on this to come), and generates new ways of making meaning. Kristeva writes, "No longer will it be possible to read any treatise on phonology without

⁶ First published in French in *Critique* 322 (March, 1974), vol. XXX; reprinted in *Polylogue* (Paris: Seuil, 1977); first English translation in *Desire in Language* (1980).

deciphering within every phoneme the statement, 'Here lies a poet.' The linguistics professor doesn't know this, and that is another problem, allowing him blithely to put forward his models, never to invent any new notion of language, and to preserve the sterility of theory" (27). Who can read "here lies the poet" and not envision an epitaph, a tombstone? To consider language as some fixed structure, without body or desire to impel it forward, is to bury poetics. She writes, "The term 'poetry' has meaning only insofar as it makes this kind of studies acceptable to various educational and cultural institutions" (25).

Kristeva models a semanalysis rather than a semiotic analysis, of some lines by Vladimir Mayakovski's *How Verses are Made?* and *Electric Jack*. Semanalysis questions both meaning and structure, recognizing the speaking subject, and considers art as the object used to discover the limits of positivist (scientific) knowledge of language ("Preface" vii-viii). This form of analysis would increasingly incorporate psychoanalytic language to describe the symbolic elements and bodily drives beyond the limits of science.

Kristeva's treatment of the Russian poet Mayakovski establishes a recurrent topic in her work: an ego, negotiating between a Symbolic, oppressive, father-figure and the rhythmic, pulsating desire oriented at the mother-figure. Rhythm in language, for Kristeva, taps into the infantile pleasure in babbling, a pleasure associated with the mother who introduces the child to this delight. The press of meaning is compared to the Sun, a father-image, which requires that the babble be restrained by meaning—structured meaning. The recognized power of this Sun/father figure inspires in the poet, a speaking

subject, both fear and jealousy, desire to have that same power over others. The maternal association with desire for “meaningless” babble frames mother-figures and, by extension, femininity as subversive and marginal (28-29).

The struggle for speaking subjects to navigate between structured language and the bodily pleasures of speech plays out, in Mayakovski’s poems especially, like a Chinese finger trap in which resistance to the “Sun” makes the sun burn more intensely, attempting to destroy poetic language (31). Kristeva asserts, “[Any] society may be stabilized if it excludes poetic language” (31). Because of the repression of the “sun,” the speaking subject of poetic expression cannot exist in the moment of utterance. Instead, the subject of that expression exists in an eternal temporality. Kristeva concludes that to conduct linguistic analysis ethically, linguists must understand the historical power structures which have shaped language to make space for new meanings (32-33).

Kristeva’s revision and expansion of the semiotic project, named here as *semanalysis*, aims to account for lost and repressed meaning by assessing the repressed desires which underpin revolutionary poetic utterance. When one defines revolutionary poetics as attempts to destabilize established language structures—and understands those attempts to be products of a fear of powerlessness—then one perceives that such utterances react to sublime encounters. Powerlessness is associated with death or dissolution in a return to an infantile merging with the mother. Yet, in merging with the maternal mother, a poetic subject temporarily escapes the Symbolic order. In their dissolution, subjects of poetic utterance likewise dissolve signs and can gather the now fragmented portions of those signs in new configurations. This process by which subjects

of poetic utterance create meanings beyond the Symbolic order is called “signifiante.” Kristeva’s account of the power of signifiante suggests that any exclusively masculine notion of the sublime enacts a repression and proceeds from misunderstood or incomplete grounds.

Ideas of the sublime resist inscription—a sublime encounter challenges a subject’s worldview and forces splits in signifying practices if it is to be (partially, never completely) communicated. Instead, artistic representation of the sublime attempt to capture it from the distance (the gap) inherent between signifier and signified so as to find delight following the terror of sublime experience. The sublimation of feminine people and the feminine within people, depicted as Truth in Tiepolo’s painting, undergoes a similar structural repression in modes of representation, most significantly for this argument, in the structures of language. In an experience of the sublime, the subject opens and is absorbed into the world and infinite. Such an experience could also be understood as the experience of a subject in between time and truth, outside of both and so able to perceive the artifice in each—and not necessarily in a “harmonious” manner. Such moments wherein the subject stutters to express something heterogeneous to signification—something unconscious, imaginary, and bodily—result in poetic revolution. Revolutionary poetic utterances offer artifacts which can be analyzed to understand this creative, generative, and occasionally “genius” space which is otherwise inaccessible. The next chapter will review various Lacanian analyses of one such artifact—William Wordsworth’s sublime text, *The Prelude*. The purpose of this

assessment will be to consider first what signification the text has before indicating what meaning hitherto inarticulate might be approached through semanalysis.

CHAPTER ONE

Setting the Psychoanalytic Stage:

Criticism of *The Prelude* in Lacan's Wake

Currents of psychoanalytic, Marxist, and linguistic thought and intellectual tradition merged in Paris to form the structuralist wave which then washed across Europe and finally broke on the shores of America with Derrida's deconstruction of Lévi-Strauss and Lacanian theory at Johns Hopkins (1966). However, a post-structuralism arose in its wake, and French theoretical influence would seem inescapable in British and American English departments for the next forty years, eventually flooding to all domains and disciplines before gradually receding from a forever-altered academic shore. Even now, given the tendency of many academics to swim against the tide, structuralism and poststructuralism's recession as theoretical approaches might be more attributable to a certain popular circulation than to exhaustion of their analytic potential.

The Prelude offers fertile depths for psychoanalytic reading. Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill describe *The Prelude* as "the account of the growth of an individual mind to artistic maturity, and of the sources of its creative powers" (ix). Wordsworth's *magnum opus* has thus been understood as being psychological in nature by his most influential readers. Indeed, prior to the French theory flood, numerous studies of Wordsworth had examined his epic poem in a Freudian psychological and psychoanalytic frame. However, structuralist and post-structuralist methodologies have offered reincarnation of psychoanalytic readings with particular attention to language's potential as a means of ideological revolution. Thus, structuralist

methods suit literary criticism with increased precision, particularly when reading a text composed by a man who believed poetry might be the only means by which men could experience transcendent truth and communicate their enlightenment for the edification of others.

While pre-structuralist studies of Wordsworth are well worth considering, they will not be discussed in the present chapter. Instead, a brief review of poststructural psychoanalytic approaches to the poem will summarize recent contributions made to new understandings of *The Prelude*. Limitations of such approaches, including Mary Jacobus' "Wordsworth and the Language of the Dream" (1979), J. Douglas Kneale's "Wordsworth's Images of Language: Voice and Letter in *The Prelude*" (1986), William H. Galperin's "Authority and Deconstruction in Book V of *The Prelude*" (1986), Lawrence Kramer's "Gender and Sexuality in *The Prelude*: The Question of Book Seven" (1987), Joseph C. Sitterson, Jr.'s "Oedipus in the Stolen Boat: Psychoanalysis and Subjectivity in 'The Prelude'" (1989), David P. Haney's "'Rents and Openings in the Ideal World': Eye and Ear in Wordsworth" (1997), and Joel Faflak's chapter "Analysis Terminable in Wordsworth" from *Romantic Psychoanalysis: The Burden of the Mystery* (2008) readily make evident Kristeva's usefulness to an expanded understanding of the sublime psycholinguistics at work in Wordsworth's poem. Some scattered psychoanalytic readings appear between 1998 and 2007, such as Megan Becker-Leckrone's "'Sole Author I, Sole Cause': Wordsworth and the Poetics of Importance" (1998), Beth Lau's "Wordsworth and Current Memory Research" (2002), and Daniel W. Ross's "In Search of Enabling Light: Heaney, Wordsworth, and The Poetry of Trauma" (2006). Becker-

Leckrone, Lau, and Ross's scattered readings mark a shift in critical discourse wherein structuralist, poststructuralist, and psychoanalytic approaches become dislocated from the situations where (and when) they were developed—the stuff of anthologies, memorialized and entombed within a past historical era. The gap can be understood as a consequence of trends in scholarship.

Although the influence of poststructuralism in these studies requires inference, as they often lack citation or explicit references to recognizable poststructuralist theorists, when read in the context of the intellectual milieu surrounding their composition, the mark of Lacan and his contemporaries becomes unmistakably apparent. Those theorists who are cited or whose ideas are emphasized tend to follow a predictable (masculine) genealogy: Lacan, Foucault, and Derrida. Yet Wordsworthian scholarship of the age of theory gives little consideration to the relevance of Kristeva's contributions. Kristeva's project of semanalysis offers a useful stance to assume when reading a text such as Wordsworth's—troubled by the problems of a subject speaking poetic revolution and psychologically questing while burdened with increasing concern for the sociological consequences of paradigm shifts.⁷ Wordsworth's desire to express his encounters with the

⁷ One paradigm shift to unsettle Wordsworth's speaking subject would begin with the swell of democratic optimism accompanying the advent of the French Revolution, inspiring Wordsworth's letter to the Bishop of Llandaff (1793), *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* (1795), and "The Ruined Cottage" (1797). However, the horrors of the Reign of Terror and the rise of Napoleon challenged even the most idealistic would-be reformer, prompting a collective reconsideration of how human rights should be asserted and protected. One sees the effects of the paradigm shift following the violence of the French Revolution on Wordsworth's ideological stance in his poetry. For instance, Mary and Percy Shelley had revered the "Poet of Nature" for his *Lyric Ballads* (1798), but, after reading *The Excursion* (1814), Mary Shelley wrote that they were "much disappointed. He is a slave" (qtd. in *William Wordsworth* 320). Wordsworth's increasing conservatism was correlative to an interest in voicing more orthodox Christian beliefs—although that interest often conflicted with the most powerful poetic forces in his early work. However, the increasing orthodoxy of Wordsworth's spiritual expression should not be taken to imply a lack of belief at the time of earlier drafts. Gill writes, "in short, *The Prelude* is a religious poem" (239).

sublime and his fear of the consequences of that embodiment can be understood through the practice of semanalysis. The author is a subject using poetic language to work through (but not overcome) an unconscious attraction to maternal horror and suppression of that desire as it filters through the Symbolic (language) order.

In “Wordsworth and the Language of the Dream” (1979), Mary Jacobus questions Wordsworth’s choice in Book Fifth to take the “odd tack” of dream language as the vehicle through which he explores his “nostalgia for an original or apocalyptic plenitude in language (the word made Logos)” (618). The anxious bookishness of Wordsworth’s Arab Quixote’s dream vitalizes the “time- and text- defying quest” of the *Prelude* to strain “language to the limits of its own fullness.” The estranging and transfiguring power of poetic utterance indicates the self of the poet “lodged in the inter-text, midway between life and books” (620-621). Thus, Book Fifth faces the limits of representation—“between life and books”—inherent in poetic autobiography. The representational problems never resolve as the verse winds through anxiety, motion, specter, spectacle, and dream in a creative, unsettling and unsolvable maze.

The dream of Book Fifth communicates an ambivalence toward authorship. Word-smiths know their inability to summon the forms they would communicate and resent the limitations of the poor tools with which they must make do, all the while still knowing those tools produce their livelihood. In the dream—product of reading and thought—books transform into a stone and shell as an “obliterating pentecostal harmony that makes all books redundant” in an apocalyptic blast, seductive even as that “siren-music” voids all need for the work of poets (622). However, as Wordsworth saw Mary of

Buttermere in Book Seventh transformed from fallen women to innocent upon returning to her homeland, likewise he wants to believe that books (his own), like Mary's bastard child, will bear legitimacy in the end. Even while perceiving an insufficiency in language's ability to capture experiences in time, Wordsworth hopes that books might be beatified as notes played by the poet-as-prophet, the Imaginary harbinger of inconceivable meaning.⁸

Acts of speech build upon captured images of the past and project meaning into the future, carrying forward sin even while reaching for salvation; in other words, the motion away from what-has-been carries traces of "primitive animism" as much as "visionary power." Jacobus writes, "if all language is dead metaphor, then a movement towards the literal . . . may, in reminding us of that originating death, summon ghostly presences" (628). Speech functions as a "Dark Interpreter," possessed of the uncanny presence of the reality that defied expression, and so Wordsworth's Book of Books conjures specters of inexpressible reality in it. Yet, these specters subsume the vision of spectacle, preserving them from a different corruption, one of hollow materiality—a flesh without soul—through the uncanny presence of the past. The spectacle envisioned in the dream moves through spectral past, present anxiety, and foreclosed future in Wordsworth's attempt to create an interspace where sublime perception emerges, communicable if the reader can find her way to that same interspace. Such an

⁸ Just as the Symbolic has a specialized meaning in the Lacanian tradition, so does the Imaginary. The Symbolic is an order of human experience through which a subjects communicates an understanding of the world organized by systems of signs—that is, organized by "sound-images" that take the place of ideas. The Imaginary is an order of human experience in which the image of object are confused in the mind of the subject with the thing that the image represents. Lacanian usage will be indicated by capitalization. See the glossary for further definitions of these terms.

“interspace” resembles the creative chora described by Kristeva, a concept which deepens Jacobus’s interpretation.⁹

J. Douglas Kneale’s “Wordsworth’s Images of Language: Voice and Letter in *The Prelude*” (1986), in contrast to Jacobus’s unacknowledged intercourse with French post-structuralism, cites Lacan, Derrida, and Foucault. Like Jacobus, Kneale discusses the relation between language and consciousness in *The Prelude*. Instead of discussing the language of the dream, however, Kneale argues that images of spoken and written voice in Wordsworth’s treatment “enjoy an ‘interchangeable supremacy,’ both being inhabited by the same linguistic difference” (351). The “same linguistic difference” he describes most likely refers to the difference between signifier and signified, a threshold Saussurean construct. In his *Course in General Linguistics*, Ferdinand de Saussure explains that signs can be thought of as the joining of a “concept” to a “sound-image”—a “signified” to a “signifier” (852-853). The relationship between signified and signifier is arbitrary, and, as Lacan would discuss, the signifier lacks complete conveyance of the meaning of the signified. Kristeva’s discussion of the heterogeneousness of meaning to signification and her neologism “signifiance”—a meaning beyond what “representative and communicative speech” can express—focus on the arbitrariness and lack at work in language (Roudiez 18).¹⁰ Thus, Kristeva’s heterogeneous meaning beyond images of spoken and written offer more precise language to discuss the linguistic difference which Kneale proposes to study.

⁹ A more comprehensive discussion of the chora is included in Chapter 2; additionally, an entry for the term is included in the glossary.

¹⁰ For a brief explanation of the difference between signifier and signified, see the entry on signification in the glossary. The glossary also offers an entry on “signifiance.”

In contrast to Jacobus's study, which makes no direct reference to critical theorists, Kneale invokes Saussure, Chomsky, Lacan, de Man, and Galileo in the first two pages.¹¹ The full relevance of these theorists to Wordsworth seem compromised, however, by a certain lack of context in terms of intellectual history.

Kneale observes that nature often "speaks" to Wordsworth but that the poet rarely shares what nature has said. These sorts of "unsayable" or "unsaid" (Kristeva's *nondit*) gaps in *The Prelude* would be deepened through recourse to Kristeva's work. Furthermore, what few of nature's statements Wordsworth shares carry imperative, epitaphic qualities. Kneale builds upon Paul de Man's *Rhetoric of Romanticism* (1984), which describes "the voice of epitaphs" as "the fiction of the voice-from-beyond-the-grave" (qtd. in Kneale 353; Man 77). Nature's voice thematically and rhetorically can also be read with elegiac inflections. Furthermore, the "stream" of Wordsworth's infantile imagination mingles with the music of the River Derwent whose murmurs likewise meet and overpower his nurse's song.

The sounds of nature appear most often in childhood scenes, and Kneale suggests that the correspondence between aural descriptions and youth indicate a waning of bodily perception similar to the dimming of the "visionary gleam" of infancy from the *Intimations Ode*. The "fleshly ear" over time struggles to hear the "almost inaudible world" to which the imaginative, poetic "ear within" listens. Geoffrey Hartman writes,

¹¹ Kneale's density of references extends further to W.G. Fraser and to a curious interpretation of Book Fifth by J. Hillis Miller, claiming that Wordsworth "felt that a poem only comes into existence in a satisfactory form when it has not only been written down but inscribed permanently on the perdurable substance of a rock" (qtd. in Kneale 351). One wonders at the futility of such inscription and considers the possibility that Wordsworth, rather than literally believing that stone inscription leads to immortality, instead illustrated an impossible drive within poetic impulse to insure an eternal *momentum*—as opposed to *monumentality*.

“In the imagination of Wordsworth everything tends to the image and sound of universal waters” (qtd. in Kneale 354; *The Unmediated Vision* 43). Kneale adds, “In the language of Wordsworth the sound of waters tends to the image of voice” (354). A “speaking [yet unspeaking] monument,” nature haunts and possesses Wordsworth, yet he attempts to commemorate nature’s living voice in a passage through dead letters, still carrying the vestigial presence of speech.

As signifiers stand a distance away from their signifieds, so do artificial cityscapes, like the urban space of London, appear at a remove from the unsayable power of meaning present in natural landscapes. In Book Seventh, Wordsworth enters London, full of “signs, letters, characters, and symbols,” fallen and perverted mockeries of “the true voice of feeling” (355). To make London accessible and meaningful even in its removal from his beloved pastures, Wordsworth personifies and *textualizes* the city: a house front resembles a “title page / With letters huge inscribed from top to toe . . .” (7.60-61; qtd. in Kneale 355).¹² In a parody of names carved (sacrilegiously) into tree trunks, ballads hang tacked to building walls: epitaphs or dead letters on dead walls. In the corrupt urban space, writing, a corrupted mode of communion, attempts to summon a ghost—or specter—of meaning in the miasmatic cacophony.

Likewise, human figures people the cityscape, written words attached to their bodies—words whose signification undermines their meaning in a manner comparable to the splitting of the self experienced by a speaking subject. For example, to show that a stage actor’s character has become invisible, the production shows the change by making

¹² Kneale quotes from the 1850 edition in *The Prelude: A Parallel Text* edited by J. C. Maxwell.

his clothing black and literalizing his invisibility: “Decision bold! And how can it be wrought? / The garb he wears is black as death, the word / ‘*Invisible*’ flames forth upon his chest” (*The Prelude* 7.285-287; qtd. in Kneale 356). The visible word “invisible” shows that a stage actor’s character cannot be seen—an image of language’s elusive (and allusive) conjuring of nature. Another figure in the city, the blind, unspeaking beggar, his story pinned to his chest, could be read as the written word (Symbolic order) inscribed upon a muted subject’s body. The mute beggar and the story affixed to his body are comparable to “the meeting of autobiographer and autobiographer” in “a figural foregrounding that repeats language’s own self-encounter” (359). The signified of the self is obscured by the signifier of the self, revealing the “allegory” of the abyss in such an instance. Kneale sums up, “The poem attempts to narrate the life of an actual person but finds itself instead narrating the semiological problems of that narration” (360). *The Prelude* becomes as much about graphing the growth of the poet’s mind—the structural elaboration of the site where sign systems organize sensations into lyric and narrative—as it is about graphing the sensations themselves. Kristeva’s work is deeply relevant to our understanding of these problems of semiology and narration.

Pervaded by theories of linguistics, Kneale’s reading writes around a version of misanthropy in Wordsworth. An abhorrence of humanity as a throng, a mass of fermenting life and death, continuously reminds the observing subject speaking of his own mortality. Wordsworth eschews narrative encounters with natives of London and instead retreats to reflection on Mary of Buttermere (a country girl done wrong by the big city) and panoramas of graffitied figures. His focus on the pastoral singular subject enacts

a rejection of London's display of infinite other subjectivities to challenge the transcendent poetic ego he imagines for himself.

Wordsworth's hostility towards others in Book Seventh could be read as similar to Céline's—described by Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* (1984). Céline, unlike Wordsworth, could not retreat to wilderness (being a survivor of both great wars). For him, the country recalled the landscape of Europe in World War I especially, where at any moment enemy or friendly fire could shoot through the trees and end life. Alternately but still traumatically horrific, uncultivated land could raise for Céline the specter of his time as a colonial overseer for the Sangha-Oubangui company in the Cameroons from 1916-17—a memory of the unlivable, collective murder of the jungle and men's corresponding violence against each other when they feel themselves to be beyond the reach of civilization. Like Wordsworth, however, society represented to Céline also forces drawing one away from oneself towards a corrupting and potentially fatal consequence. Foolhardy political enthusiasm and carnival debauchery threaten an atomic fissure of poetic being—though Céline welcomes the dissolution of his horrible self into stylistic artistry and Wordsworth alternately seeks to master stylistic artistry so as to reconstitute an immortal self. Such speculation contrasting Wordsworth's speaking subjectivity to Céline's, though, is my own, not Kneale's.

Kneale's reference to "allegory" would benefit from expansion. While Kneale specifically cites *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (1979) and *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (1984), Paul de Man's earlier "Semiology and Rhetoric" (1973) offers a succinct outline of his deconstructive practice.

“Semiology and Rhetoric” advances the argument that determinate interpretation falls apart if a reader scrutinizes rhetorical and figurative language. As a result, “texts become allegories of their own interpretive difficulties” (“Paul de Man” 1361). Passages where readers find textual meaning indeterminate point to the nature of language as a system which, by its very nature, deploys figures with hidden meanings—allegories. Kneale’s study demonstrates the influence and prevalence of analyses shaped by deconstruction.

William H. Galperin’s “Authority and Deconstruction in *The Prelude*” (1986), likewise, contributes to the body of deconstructive readings utilizing de Man and Derrida’s commentary on allegory as means with which to approach Book Fifth. Galperin focuses on Book Fifth as a “pivotal book” with “special prominence,” vexing readers who read *The Prelude* as “faithful to its announced expectations” in a “*mélange* of invective, reverie, memory, and allusion” (613). Book Fifth’s self-conscious object of interest (books), following de Man’s account of language as constitutionally indeterminate, invites a reading of that Book as evidence of faithlessness to pure, distilled meaning.

Galperin recounts readings of Book Fifth by Geoffrey Hartman, J. Hillis Miller, Michael Jaye, and Cynthia Chase before offering his own interpretation that Wordsworth abdicates authority of *The Prelude* to an “other Wordsworth” and to his readers. In *Wordsworth’s Poetry, 1787-1814* (1964), Hartman divides Book Fifth into two sections: the first half describes a humanist apocalyptic vision, while the second tethers the human imagination (the “book of Man”) to Nature (the “book of God”) (613). Hartman argues that Wordsworth shifts his emphasis from apocalypse (perhaps the self-deconstruction

enacted by the sign) to meaning in Nature in order to escape the ideological problem of granting primacy to Man over God. By binding the two “books” together and giving Nature, the “book of God,” the last word, Wordsworth implies that a divine version of signification will transcend and excuse the limitations of human signification. In “The Stone and the Shell: The Problem of Poetic Form in Wordsworth’s *Dream of the Arab*” (1972), Miller reads the perplexing collage of scenes in Book V. He finds that their disjointed combination accidentally illustrates of the impossibility of poetic meaning. Jaye’s “The Artifice of Disjunction: Book V of *The Prelude*” (1978) argues that the bizarre, discordant scenes of Book Fifth express failure inherent in poetic utterance and serve as transition in the larger context of the poem. The studies of Book Fifth offered by Hartman, Miller, and Jaye all present Book Fifth as a fractured text for ideological and semiotic reasons.

Galperin finds in Hartman’s, Miller’s, and Jaye’s studies an unwillingness to question the authority of the poet and a failure to account for gestures where Wordsworth abdicates authorial privilege. When he creates a frame narrative for the dream of the Arab as a memory shared with him by a friend, Wordsworth diffuses his authority in collaborative imagination. While the anecdote may well be true (the friend likely being Coleridge), by situating the dream in the imagination of a different subjectivity, the Wordsworthian speaking subject mitigates its part in authorship of the vision. Thus, Galperin attempts to establish that prior studies have overestimated Wordsworth’s desire for authorship of Book Fifth.¹³ Galperin finds that Cynthia Chase avoids an

¹³ Biographical evidence of Wordsworth’s harassing communications with his publishers and later-life habit of meticulous and ongoing revisionary projects would undermine Galperin’s argument that Wordsworth

overestimation of authority in “The Accidents of Disfiguration: Limits to Literal and Rhetorical Reading in Book V of *The Prelude*” (1979). According to Chase, in the decay of re-presentation, poetry self-corrupts—both corrupts itself as poetry and corrupts the poet’s subjectivity as a “self.” Books reproduce language, but language decays and abuses figures. The books Wordsworth read as a boy prepared him for encounters with the horror of “real” death—the boy of Winander and the drowned man. The “self” of the poet, mediated through the language of poetry, defers authority to the poem itself, whose language can neither sustain nor justify credibility.

In contrast to the works of Jaye or Chase, Galperin’s study finds that Wordsworth “relinquishes his authority in Book V” (618). Wordsworth’s speaking subject delegates authority “in part to the reader and partly to some other Wordsworth by essentially reconstituting [the poet and reader’s] hermeneutical relationship, by forcing us to derive meaning through allegory rather than through what is customarily assumed (even by Chase and Jaye) to be naïve, unmediated, expression” (618). Galperin’s *Prelude*, blend of *Bildungsroman*, *Künstlerroman* (a narrative about an artist’s coming to maturity), epic, and Christian autobiography, likewise mixes notions of authority. In Galperin’s reading, *The Prelude* deconstructs itself while maintaining logocentricity by operating both allegorically and symbolically. The blended authorship, genre, and figural structure reflects a consciousness both synchronic and diachronic. Caught between retrogression or analepsis (the Winander Boy) and prolepsis (the Drowned Man), the Quixotic Arab dreamed by the poet’s friend parodies the antiheroic journey that Wordsworth (whose

had a desire to abdicate his authorship were one not willing to grant that all subjects have conflicting and ambiguous desires.

subjectivity is projected to some degree into all three figures) has undertaken in the composition of *The Prelude*. Through fragmentation, Wordsworth counter-intuitively empowers himself to transition between identities. The speaking subject of the poem transcends any single figure and, in so doing, reclaims an authority by acknowledging situatedness regarding mythic fiction. Wordsworth's subject of poetic utterance concedes "his own vassalage as a prelude to self-inscription" (627). Following Galperin's reading, one might find Wordsworth's speaking subject to model the self-destructive and self-generative gestures underpinning the Kristeva's subject speaking poetic revolution.

One could posit Kristeva's notion of "intertextuality" as a metaphor for the passage of textual subjectivities into one another, weaving minds and consciousness over time, space, and structure of language. Kristeva calls "*intertextualité*" that (mis)recognition and shaping of the self and subjectivity in the book that a reader feels when reading words that might have been spoken from her own heart.¹⁴ A Kristevan reading aptly accounts for the not-quite disjunctive oppositions Galperin finds in Wordsworth's poetic authority. Wordsworth's subjectivity speaks even while aware of the limitations of language—still confident that a resonance can carry over the void, the gap of significance, perhaps even trusting that the reader might sense these vibrations and reconstruct an approximation of his Truth. Such communion through but also above and within books/texts carries the poetic spirit which authorizes imagination: his, mine, and

¹⁴ One should not confuse the "speaking subject" with the "ego"—the former emerging as a result of entry into sign systems specifically whereas the latter phenomena occurs as a result of more explicitly psychological circumstances not necessarily limited to issues of signification. Nonetheless, through reference to Hegel and Heidegger, phenomenology influences Kristeva's work—though not without critique on her part.

yours. Poetic imagination communicates truth, transcendent not oppressive, unutterable but always on the tip of the tongue (or pen).

Kristeva's blend of semiotics and psychoanalysis in *semanalysis* makes apparent various opportunities for deepened consideration of *The Prelude* in studies which skew towards one or the other of the two disciplines. Kneale's and Galperin's readings of *The Prelude* tend towards the semiotics whereas Lawrence Kramer's "Gender and Sexuality in *The Prelude*: The Question of Book Seven" (1987) and Joseph C. Sitterson, Jr.'s "Oedipus in the Stolen Boat: Psychoanalysis and Subjectivity in *The Prelude*" (1989) refer more to psychoanalysis. Kramer references Richard Onorato's *The Character of the Poet: Wordsworth in The Prelude* (1971), Barbara Schapiro's *The Romantic Mother: Narcissistic Patterns in Romantic Poetry* (1983), and Neil Hertz's *Psychoanalysis and the Question of the Text: Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1976-1977* as well as scholarship from Melanie Klein and Freud.¹⁵ Sitterson references Onorato as well, along with Terry Eagleton, Lacan, and Foucault. Unsurprisingly, literary criticism by men dominates Wordsworthian psychoanalytic discourse even while becoming increasingly aware of sex/gender politics (and poetics).¹⁶

Kramer rightly observes that Wordsworth's "infantile sexuality is almost too much with us" and that pre-Oedipal interpretations resulting from the absence of the poet's mother have received "critical acknowledgement" even if such observations have

¹⁵ Kramer also references Jacobus, whose name justly recurs in both studies of Romanticism and critical theory bibliographies.

¹⁶ My discussion of cited scholars emphasizes contributions with heavy inflections of European critical theory and does not list the more "American" Wordsworth critics (W.H. Auden, Geoffrey H. Hartman, Melvin Rader, Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill), although a list of American Romanticism scholars has even fewer women. Harold Bloom has some presence as well, although mainly in tangential notes and never at length.

“become fairly routine” (619). However, more mature “gendered and genital sexuality” and “sexual difference” can best be understood through their repression in *The Prelude* which “traces out a group of vexed relationships between gendered sexuality and the creative imagination, between sexual difference and the idealized process of representation on which Wordsworth’s emerging identity finds itself” (619). Notably, Wordsworth’s repressed “sex/gender complex” would be edited out between the 1805 and 1850 drafts. Wordsworth’s editing choices present evidence of a discomfort that London’s sensual appeal registered in his language (619). Kramer cites edits like those made to the passage concerning the spectacle of London (624). Wordsworth’s initial attraction to the “phantasmorgia” of the city is expressed in 1805 in the following lush phrases,

And first, the look and aspect of the place
 The broad highway appearance, as it strikes
 On strangers of all ages, the quick dance
 Of colours, lights, and forms, the Babel din,
 The endless stream of men and moving things. (7.154-58, qtd. in Kramer
 624)

While he compares the city to Babel, the speaking subject finds excitement in the sites, sounds, and people of London. Those same lines would be revised by 1850 to read: “Rise up, thou monstrous ant-hill on the plain / Of a too-busy world! Before me flow, / Thou endless stream of men and moving things!” (7.149-51, qtd. in Kramer 624). Sensual and sexual content remain—such as the pulsing and liquid imagery evoked by the rising,

flowing, and streaming movement of the city and populace—but any versified reveling in fancy fades into stern admonition (624). More strikingly still, Kramer suggests that in the story of Vaudracour and Julia “it may be . . . persuasive to regard Vaudracour . . . as a sexual scapegoat, a debased alter ego who suffers the fate from which Wordsworth's sexual ego ideal, Mary Robinson, remains exempt” (636). As in Tiepolo's *Time Unveiling Truth*, the feminine figure represents a purified, disembodied counter-point to the active, desiring masculine figure.

Kramer argues that Wordsworth identifies with Mary Robinson, the Maid of Buttermere, in Book Seventh as an external, idealized representation of his own gendered sexuality. Her function in verse enables him to defend creative imagination from that same desiring sexuality. A bigamist imposter deceived, falsely married, and impregnated Mary Robinson, who is a historical person whom Wordsworth and Coleridge had met in 1799. Sadler's Wells performed a popular melodrama, *The Maid of Buttermere*, in 1803 based on her story. Mary Robinson's vestigial presence is summoned to be followed with comparison to the image of a prostitute with a “rosy babe” seen in a London theater. Wordsworth connects to images, supposing Robinson and her dead infant free from “contamination” and so “happy” in contrast to the prostitute mother who may well as not have been as her image is “fading out of memory” and the prostitute's babe who, Wordsworth imagines in a cry addressed to Mary Robinson, “. . . may now have lived till he could look / With envy on thy nameless babe that sleeps” (7.322; 7.328; 7.366; 7.379-7.380). The “narrative illogic” of these paired mothers and their infants appear Book

Seventh with “lack of convincing transitions” and “jumbling of ostensible topics” in a manner “extreme even for Wordsworth” (620).

While Wordsworth’s Romantic subjectivity embraces dissemination across time, it cannot tolerate dissolution in space. As the speaking subject of *The Prelude* slides between objects, images, and signs, it orients itself against a landscape background, ideally mountainous. London’s cityscape confounds the subject’s orientation, and so the sense of self erodes, the imagination becomes impotent in a place of fancy, adulterating and corrupt, subordinate to the power of imagination, “true or pure re-presentation” (622). Fancy tends toward human passions and “promiscuous play.” In recollection, Wordsworth’s experience of the city decays from immature pleasure to revulsion. In revision between 1805 and 1850, Wordsworth removes reminiscences of initial delight in shifts ranging from “inconspicuous” to “distressingly priggish” (623-624). Such revisions reflect a shift in creative as well as sexual perspective: 1805 Wordsworth would risk contamination for chance at pleasure as (Kramer claims Wordsworth would think) a patron would when seduced by a prostitute.

Mary Robinson serves as an alter-ego for Wordsworth—“For we were nursed—as almost might be said— / On the same mountains . . .” (7.242-3, qtd. in Kramer 625). Through an idea of her Wordsworth’s speaking subject thrusts himself into the romance and fancy of London and emerges unstained, able to retreat to the purity of pastoral convention. Robinson, “forever a maid and an Imaginary [sic] virgin” even though misrepresented first in false marriage and again exhumed in theater, “projects an idealized image of Wordsworth’s own ability to withstand, and hence to enjoy, the

systematic and erotically charged misrepresentation that constitutes creative activity in London” (625). Wordsworth and Robinson’s nursing hills allude to a line from Milton’s “Lycidas.” Mary Robinson, though “not a brother poet,” almost personifies Wordsworth’s poetic identity, feminine in its tendency to corruption by the objects of its desire. Thus, the figure of Mary Robinson is protected from a fall from its ideal form by being “fantasmatically” situated in an infantile landscape, and thus preserved in an “ungendered latency-period sexuality” (626). Wordsworth’s allusion to “Lycidas” is followed by an allusion to Proserpina, possibly attempting (and failing) “to locate Mary in the movement, eternally arrested, before Proserpina’s seizure by Dis, the act of trespass that turns both identity and sexuality into effects of difference” (626). Meanwhile, Robinson’s child in his death “escapes both the seductions of life and the abandonment of death,” testament to the purity of Robinson’s mind (627).

Robinson’s “obverse, perhaps even the very condition, of Mary’s visible purity” appears in the image of a prostitute mother whose infant, although “treated” and “caressed” by the “soiled” crowd, still retains his purity “[like] one of those who walked with hair unsinged / Amid the fiery furnace” (7.398-9; qtd. in Kramer 628). Meanwhile, the face of his prostitute mother is mentioned, then mentioned again as unremembered, so that “Wordsworth literally renders her contaminated sexuality invisible” and thus “recovers the underworld face of Mary as Proserpina” (629). In this imaginary “logic,” to be ideal, mothers should be childless, children motherless.

The purity imagined in such severance of creative process from creative product cannot be sustained. Wordsworth imagines the adult living child of prostitution envying

the “pensive death” of Robinson’s boy (629). His speculation precedes an imagined splitting of the human race, cut in two when hearing the “voice of woman utter blasphemy” (7.418; qtd. in Kramer 630). For the purpose of this reading, the “voice of woman” ought to be read as the voice of Woman imagined as embodiment of Truth—which explains why the blasphemy provokes such horror in Wordsworth. The woman herself blasphemes and exposes her infant son to blasphemy. The figure of the prostitute’s blasphemous voice exposes the opposition between womanhood—sexuality itself, as Simone de Beauvoir would argue much later—and the sublime, transcendent, divine.¹⁷ Deformity and dismemberment recurs in Wordsworth’s London: blind and legless beggars and a crippled boyhood friend sent to London to return uncured. These male characters along with the haunting inscriptions (the “dead letters” discussed by Kneale) express a Lacanian (pace Freud and Derrida) fear of castration: the slice cutting off the son’s Symbolic loss of place in patriarchal systems of meaning and power. Kramer finds here “a sort of Derridian allegory” in which the “women degrade speech while the men degrade writing” (631).

Kramer attests, nonetheless, that the “abyss of selfhood” in Wordsworth’s Romantic poetic subjectivity, through the lens of poststructuralist criticism, could be viewed as “an Imaginary reserve of presence which is not implicated in language” but more accurately compares to “the Freudian unconscious” (632). In other words, Wordsworth’s anxiety is less linguistic and more phenomenological, an anxiety “that the

¹⁷ De Beauvoir advances the arguments that “[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, woman” (283). Woman is a state of sexual difference from man. Man is a being of agency, capable of transcendence. Woman is a being defined by her sexuality—as an object to gratify sexual desire or as a means for procreation—and, as such, is limited to a state of immanence.

imagination may be no more than a disguised form of fancy—and hence, in the present context, more libidinal than it thinks” (632). Wordsworth fears that if creative genius springs from material, bodily origins, then poetic utterance is as subject to death as all other organic matter.

At the apex of the city’s horror, Bartholomew’s Fair, the image of sexual carnival (in a Bakhtinian sense) “represents London climactically as both a nightmare of a devouring mother and a travesty of a nurturing one” (633).¹⁸ Then, Wordsworth transfers his identification from Mary Robinson to an identification with the maternal phallic mountains which nurtured her and him as well.¹⁹ Robinson’s image allowed Wordsworth to process the trauma of contaminated motherhood before shifting allegiance to a sort of “imaginary father.” Wordsworth’s speaking subject escapes the imaginary castration of the mother-identified son, a condition Kramer describes as a “muteness and blankness, a solitude without memory, an ‘imbecile mind’” (636). “Imaginary father” is a Kristevan (not Freudian nor Lacanian) concept unmentioned in Kramer’s article but accurate in representing Kramer’s drift. Possibly also understood as a “phallic mother,” the figure nurtures while still holding power. After the primal scene, in Freud, the mother’s power (phallus) is transferred to a child rather than being imposed upon it (from the child’s perspective). Identification with a phallic mother enables the poet’s power of utterance,

¹⁸ In *Rabelais and His World* (1965), Mikhail M. Bakhtin first introduced “the *carnavalesque*” as a term to describe how laughter, parody, and “grotesque realism” is used in forms like the novel—as well as other forms of unofficial culture—to undercut official culture, political oppression, and totalitarianism (“Mikhail M. Bakhtin” 1073).

¹⁹ Kristeva’s phallic mother develops Freud’s notion of the “phallic woman”—which is a woman with a phallus, the image which stands for power in the imagination. The phallic mother dominates the imagination because, in the Imaginary order, the maternal body is the original creative space and the maternal presence either fulfills or denies desire.

the power to create new sign systems not necessarily dependent on the paternal, Symbolic order.

The drive to speak—to shapes subjectivity through verbal expression—propels *The Prelude*. Kramer demonstrates an interplay of sexualities in the mind of Wordsworth in which the highest stake is the continuation of poetic composition. For the poetic subject, the worst suffering and consequence of sin—transgression against the Symbolic order—is silence. Silence dissolves evidence of speaking subjectivity. Without utterance as proof of its being, the speaking subject is not only powerless. In silence, the speaking subject is neither being born nor dying—it ceases to be entirely. Reflexively, one can extrapolate that literary critics share a similar compulsion to generate ongoing discourse (nurse from the “self-same hills”). Critical discourse sometimes archives the meaning of literary texts but also cultivates that meaning, ensuring its continuation in cultural consciousness. Meaning requires mindfulness (presence, attention), as it lives phenomenologically in the active state of transfer from one mind to the next. Thus, the frustrating tension between text and theory—the question of which construct masters the other—generates reiterations of the “true meaning.” Joseph C. Sitterson, Jr. identifies his purpose in “Oedipus in the Stolen Boat: Psychoanalysis and Subjectivity in *The Prelude*” (1989) to demonstrate the incapacity of psychoanalytic theory to fully uncover a text’s subjective truth. He aims “to show plainly just how far [psychoanalytic] theory does and does not go down the text’s own path towards the origin of meaning and interpretation” (96). Sitterson states an implied agenda in all criticism: an anxious, self-justifying gesture fairly common among theorists.

By establishing the topic of acceptable limitations in discourse, Sitterson's introductory self-justification foregrounds his thesis that continuity exists between the stolen boat passage in Book First, the Simplon Pass lines in Book Sixth, and the Snowdon episodes from Book Fourteenth wherein the narrator gains in understanding in each incident but also accepts the limits of that understanding (97).²⁰ Sitterson's concern with the problematics of theory-heavy literary readings of Wordsworth expresses a concern increasingly common in the wake of French theory that poststructural criticism tends to manipulate literature to further philosophical or political agendas to the denigration of literature itself. Prior psychoanalytic critics of Wordsworth like Onorato, Rader, Hartman, Thomas Weiskel, and Jerome J. McGann mistakenly conflate the Romantic subject with the ego. Sitterson finds that readings which treat Wordsworth's speaking subject as being essentially the same as an ego note a consequent self-deception of mastery over self-knowledge and imagination. Thus, Sitterson's critique of psychoanalytic treatments of the speaking subject of *The Prelude* has similarity to Galperin's deconstructive critique of studies concerning structure and authorship in Book Fifth by Hartman, Miller, and Jaye. Sitterson argues instead that *The Prelude* actually presents such mastery as an "attractive phantasy" (98). Onorato, for instance, describes the "strikingly Oedipal" quality of Wordsworth's stolen boat passage and characterizes the process Wordsworth undergoes as "unconscious" (98). Sitterson's argument hinges on a peculiar, solipsistic critique of psychoanalytic criticism's language as unable to account for "limits beyond which interpretation cannot go." He offers a critique of Freud

²⁰ Sitterson, for the most part, cited passages from Wordsworth's 1805 *The Prelude*.

and Lacan which makes the same assumption that both theorists proceed unconscious of the representative nature of their interpretive method, an erroneous assumption inherited by their intellectual descendants (100). Freudian language, for Sitterson, approaches infantile experience with adult words. Sitterson notes that “a child’s idea of being ‘dead’ has nothing much in common with ours apart from the word,” and “the child has learnt [only] one thing by experience [so far]—namely that ‘dead’ people . . . are always away and never come back” (Freud 254; Freud 258; *qtd.* in Sitterson 100).²¹

The problem Sitterson finds in representing subjectivity over time resembles the conflict between past self and present/writing self which David P. Haney explores in “The Emergence of the Autobiographical Figure in *The Prelude*, Book I” (1981). Haney reads Wordsworth’s speaking autobiographical subject as one struggling to articulate a past self who is no more, making the subject of the poem, the speaker himself, specular. The “figural” nature of the “I” of *The Prelude* re-creates the problems which autobiography resolves, the autobiographical problems being that birth predates the consciousness of the poet and that his death can only be projected (36). Haney finds that, in meshing lyric and narrative genres, Wordsworth successfully constructs an autobiographical figure in the first 300 lines of Book First—an emergent figure of the self, an othered identity. Haney reads Wordsworth as wrestling with problems of autobiographical articulation expressed in the imagery of breezes of the first fifty lines. The speaking subject of those first lines is a past self, created past tense. That speaking subject then becomes resurrected in the present moment of utterance, washing the

²¹ Ellipses and brackets are Sitterson’s.

narrative timeline. Following the collapse of narrative time, the speaking subject finds recourse in discursive lyric with phantasmic imagery. Angst over appropriate subject matter expresses an identity crisis and leads the troubled subject to invoke sun-imagery to exteriorize its self-consciousness. The subject masks its identity crisis as tension between the genres of narrative and discourse and so falls, after becoming, into a Symbolic grave. The interruptive demonstrative line, “Was it for this,” bridges this tormented *invocatio*’s discursive identifications and the necessary “otherness” demanded by narrative. The emergent *figure* of an “I,” both representing the Wordsworth writing and the Wordsworth that was, forms as speaking subject encompassing past and present so as to demand future. The figure of Wordsworth’s speaking subjectivity, his “I” buries the gaps between these situations in the relatively superficial distinctions—his “this”—between poetic genres. In implying the insufficiency of “this,” the speaking subject demands its own rebirth in more sublime forms of utterance.

Sitterson insists upon the word “figure” as the most appropriate terminology to describe the nature of “mother” and “father” in Oedipal conflict (as opposed to “imagos” which he argues lacks metaphoric depth and reduces the “infant’s internal world [to] . . . images only”) (100). Infants alternately desire and feel aggression towards both “figures” based upon their relationship, “mother figure” as source of satisfaction and “father figure” as interruption of that “symbiosis.”²² Lacan, Sitterson explains, applies the “father figure” as a relation identified with the Law. Sitterson explains that the phrase “Name of the Father” is “a metaphor that stands for something in the nature of the world which the

²² One questions how accurate “symbiosis” is in describing a relationship in which one subject’s sole function is to appease the desires of the other.

infant does not have and wants—the power to be at one with the world symbiotically”—thus the “Name of the Father” is a metonym for an obstacle to infantile gratification (101). Sitterson finds that Lacan has awareness of the metaphorical nature of the “father figure,” but at times “stops short of this metaphoric awareness, and in doing so implies a premature end to interpretation” (101). One supposes that Sitterson means to suggest that Lacan does not often enough explicitly state that words and phrases like “father,” “mother,” “Law of the Father,” and “Imaginary Realm” function metaphorically, and, in so doing, reifies these notions. Such suggestion would miss the performative nature of Lacan’s presentations, which demanded the audience be attentive to play within the sign system and might indicate that Sitterson has missed the spirit in which Lacan worked.

To demonstrate the limits of Freudian and Lacanian metaphorical awareness, Sitterson examines Freud’s “fort-da” game and Lacan’s subsequent interpretation as they relate to Wordsworth’s stolen boat passage. Freud describes a child throwing a spool and retrieving it while saying “fort” (gone) and “da” (there)—a solitary, symbolic “peek-a-boo”: Freud argues that the spool metaphorically represents the child’s absent mother. The game enacts a compulsion wherein the child recreates a troubling situation in order to control it. The “situation” is the original loss of the mother. Temporarily, the mother leaves to run errands, but also represented in the game is an attempt to master the more permanent severances from the mother which occur at birth, weaning, and individuation.

Lacan explicates Freud: in the moment when the child uses the spool to represent his absent mother, he expresses “desire.” Desire does not exist without absence (Cupid/Eros is child of Penury): absence of Mother (object A), absence of totality.

Furthermore, any expression of desire requires language which replaces (and displaces—into metaphor, for example) real things with symbols. The substitution of the symbolic for real experience erases or “murders” the real thing (the “mother figure”). Once this obliteration or murder occurs, the child, now a speaking subject, is pleasurably “subjected to . . . the endless metaphoricity of language” (102).

Sitterson finds in these accounts an implication that Freud and Lacan seek “the [recursive] origin of meaning, a progression from passivity to activity, from literal to metaphoric capability” (102). However, to Sitterson, the child’s play indicates that the child already has a metaphoric capability, needing such capability in order to play and that the child by no means achieves mastery. Instead, the game functions as a coping mechanism for trauma and does not imply true mastery, simply acting out a pleasant fantasy (101-103).

Sitterson acknowledges that Freud includes a footnote describing the fort-da infant playing the same game with his mirror image. This note is expanded on by Lacan in his description of ego formation in the mirror stage when the infant plays with the figure of itself represented in the mirror self-image and represses its troubled awareness of aspects of itself which are not represented. The infant’s play with its image in the mirror stage foregrounds its play with self-expression in language, as in use of the word “I.” Such play indicates to Sitterson “proto-metaphoric capability.” “Proto-metaphoric capability” thus (supposedly) confounds Lacan’s argument that the infant confuses its unified, mirror image with its premature, fragmented body. Sitterson’s reading of both Freud and Lacan conflates entrance into the symbolic order with formation of metaphoric

capability—as well as phantasmal play with conscious play. When Freud and Lacan (in their respective versions) describe an infant’s entrance into the symbolic order, they describe events in which a child learns and begins to play with the nature of signs. To do so, the child does not necessarily need to understand the nature of his desires in order to project them into fantasy. Even adults often struggle to make sense of their dreams and fantasies and, in fact, often actively avoid comprehension. For instance, nightmares often mask the death and aggressive drives. Fantasy (in a psychoanalytic, not Wordsworthian frame), like dreams, often gives form to unconscious projections, allowing a subject to play with desires which trouble and disturb with the illusion of distance and mastery. Thus, psychoanalytic fantasy, because pleasure in it depends on distance from the troubling aspects of its object, is a delight comparable to the Burkean (indeed Kantian) notion of the experience of the sublime. Notably, Kristeva’s alternate reading of Freud and Lacan—in which phases like the mirror stage and object permanence should be understood as metaphorical processes experienced bodily by infants but then echoed across adult experiences, particularly through language experience—actually supports a psychoanalytic reading of Wordsworth in alignment with Sitterson’s. Although, in a Kristevan reading of Freud and Lacan, the language of psychoanalysis is vindicated. One must remember when discussing Freud and Lacan that language itself is a sign system, one capable of “a heterogeneousness to meaning and signification,” as Kristeva writes (*Desire in Language* 133).

Issues of consciousness within Sitterson’s argument do not discredit his claim that subjects, even as infants, possess a metaphoric capability that escapes quantification by

psychoanalytic theory (104). If one accepts the possibility of a primary (Kant would call it *a priori*) metaphoric capability, then instead of subjects choosing between “deluded subject-ego identification” or a hollow (bereft) subjectivity “caught in the incessant sliding of signifiers,” one might conceptualize a third, alternate Wordsworthian subjectivity (104). Such a subjectivity even hides in the texts of Lacan and Freud. Sitterson identifies the Wordsworthian subject “as essentially, not peripherally, coming-to-be in time” (114). Sitterson described the Wordsworthian subject as unable to “surrender to the dream of meaning as being—Lacan’s reified ego” (109). Perhaps the issue Sitterson struggles with is confusion of subjectivity with self. Lacan’s subject and ego (after Freud) should not be confused with one another. Nor should either be equated with that mysterious presence haunting the Lacanian subject: that premature self, suffering in the face of evidence that consciousness is not continuous with the universe. If such a presence is the topic under discussion, then Freud and Lacan indeed do not offer the best language. Sitterson in some sense succeeds in making his argument that psychoanalysis does not offer language capable of representing the Real experience of being—but, then again, no analytic language ever could, a fact of which Freud and Lacan had all possible awareness.

In his review of Sitterson’s book on *Romantic Poems, Poets, and Narrators* (2000),” John H. Jones identifies Sitterson’s underlying agenda as a reflective review of critical approaches to Romantic poetry over “the past twenty years” (with a particularly sharp eye cast on New Historicism).²³ Sitterson insists upon the distinction between poet

²³ John H. Jones, a Romantic scholar concentrated on William Blake, should not be confused with John Jones, author of *The Egotistical Sublime: A History of Wordsworth’s Imagination* (1954). *Romantic Poems*,

and poetic narrator, a distinction he finds often missing in psychoanalytic readings of Romantic poetry. While Sitterson may well have grounds for such a critique, his argument appears largely backward-gazing, betraying a nostalgia for classical humanism which fails to account for the *largely political* critiques launched at post-Enlightenment philosophy by poststructuralist criticism (beginning with the Frankfurt school). The thinking, desiring being in Books First and Second matures over the epic poem into the sublime speaking subject at the end of Book Fourteenth, who proclaims, even knowing the limitations of language, a hope that, through this rude instrument, he might cultivate in his readers sensitivity for aspects of reality which escape representation. Wordsworth's speaking subject hopes to "instruct" readers

. . . how the mind of man becomes
 A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
 On which he dwells, above this frame of things
 (Which, 'mid all revolutions in the hopes
 And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)
 In beauty exalted, as it is itself
 Of quality and fabric more divine. (14.450-456)

Wordsworth claims a self-made (or poet-made) transcendence, all the more blasphemous for its human origin: the breadth of his mind is an imaginary landscape on the grounds of Babel. In more modern language, the Wordsworthian "ego" resembles the Husserlean "transcendental ego," which totalizes human experience and desires the erasure of

Poets, and Narrators contains chapters on Wordsworth that are clearly revised and edited versions of "Oedipus in the Stolen Boat."

alterity. In doing so, the radical poetics of *The Prelude* replaces a universal God (as source of all meaning) with a universal subjectivity, and reinstates the dialectics of oppression in doing so. The operative logic in such reasoning is more explicitly and fully elaborated in Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *The Dialectics of Enlightenment*. However, the labor of revising Enlightenment philosophy and theory has left a trail of exasperated and exhausted scholars, wanting only to go back to "straight" literary criticism.²⁴

Within such nostalgia, one finds a sense of exhaustion, a desire to return or retreat to a prior mode of criticism—as well as a tendency toward uninspired pedantry. In "Function and Field of Speech and Language" (1953), Lacan renounces "the rules that are observed between augers [sic] by which meticulousness of detail is passed off as rigour, and rule confused with certainty" (31). Sitterson finds that many critics believe theory to be "conceptually more advanced" than literary texts, but he does not acknowledge that critical theory in the past century has altered in agenda, at times becoming a creative discourse in its own right (96). Perhaps in creative aspiration, such theorists place their work in competition with the literary authors they discuss, but they also join the ranks of poetic revolutionaries unbounded from genre.

According to her translator, Leon S. Roudiez (1984), Kristeva defines poetic language as "without the preoccupations [that traditional notions of 'literature' and 'poetry'] usually carry" and as that which "stands for the infinite possibilities of language" (2). The generative, disruptive potential of such writing resists an oppressive

²⁴ If this phrase implies there is something "queer" about poststructuralist literary criticism, then that may be because there is, in fact. However, that point is for another paper entirely.

element of the Symbolic, asserting that unrepresentable atom within the speaking subject which will not be dominated. If Roudiez is right in his reading of Kristeva's thought, perhaps the Wordsworthian ego which Sitterson believed beyond psychoanalytic description might in fact be indicated by Kristeva, especially as she acknowledges the straining of self within the bounds of linguistic structure.

David P. Haney's "'Rents and Openings in the Ideal World': Eye and Ear in Wordsworth" (1997) offers a more judicious treatment of French theory as applied to Wordsworth studies while sharing Sitterson's concern that contemporary critical practices might lead to limited or wholly inaccurate receptions of literary texts. Haney's essay benefits from greater focus on deconstructive studies of Wordsworth's language representing sight and sound. Instead of criticizing an entire discipline, Haney challenges a tendency in "French thinkers" of the twentieth century to critique sight as a sense whose structure constitutes and perpetuates ideology—as in the attention given to "visual culture." Such critique of vision tends to ignore hearing as a potential "alternative to specular (sic) structures" (174).

Deconstructive readings following the critique of vision additionally tend to conflate the eye/ear relation with the speech/writing relation and, in doing so, fail to consider "hermeneutic functions of the senses" beyond a visual notion of representation. In exchange for a theoretical attempt to transcend production of "meanings," discursive forms (like speech and writing) become strictly defined, and, according to W. J. T. Mitchell, senses collapse into "categories of power and value, ways of enlisting nature in our causes and crusades" (119; qtd. in Haney 174). To clarify, one problem with

“production of meanings” is the unmediated mechanization implied in the term “production.” Ideology contains systems of ideas and meanings which tend to be accepted and transmitted with surprisingly little questioning or divergence. An overemphasis of “meaning” can preclude or minimize other elements of discourse like communion or feeling (marginalized and misunderstood processes Kristeva emphasizes in her practice of semanalysis). Strictly theoretical definitions of discursive forms (after Freud and Lacan) applied anachronistically to Wordsworth can lead to distorted accounts of his language.

Geoffrey Hartman manages to avoid the discursive slide into a positivist misapplication of Freud and Lacan’s thought, largely in consequence of his training in German hermeneutics and Judaism which “explicitly privilege the ear over the eye” (177). While Wordsworthian scholars esteem and value Hartman’s analysis, their scholarship fails to assimilate his contributions. Haney attributes this failure to a resistance within “dominant theoretical models” to Hartman’s “flexible, performative approach” to literary scholarship (177). In a footnote, Haney quotes Hartman responding to criticism that he practiced untrained, unauthorized deconstruction by stating, proudly, that he lacks affinity “to a special interpretive system like psychoanalysis” (177). Haney’s discussion of Hartman’s reception in Wordsworth scholarship illustrates a perceived political pressure by the end of the twentieth century to identify and “metanalyze” one’s method of analysis.²⁵

²⁵ When Haney writes “metanalyze,” he most likely names a gesture increasingly common in literary criticism (not least this paper itself) to reflect self-consciously on which modes of analysis are being applied to a text and to what ends.

Like Sitterson's critique of psychoanalytic literary studies, Haney successfully makes his argument that Wordsworth's treatment of sight and sound in poetry manipulates representations of those senses in order to communicate supersensible feeling. More significantly for the purpose of this literature review of psychological and psychoanalytically influenced postmodernist approaches to Wordsworth, Haney's treatment of both theory and literature demonstrates more fluidity, consequently representing both discourses to better effect and producing a more nuanced study. Haney finds that Wordsworth's earlier writing indicates a belief that synesthesia "undoes the tyranny of the eye." Wordsworth uses synesthesia less frequently than many of his Romantic contemporaries. Instead, Wordsworth's poetry tended to shift from one sense to the other in a descriptive impasse. Haney attributes Wordsworth's apparent privileging of ear above eye in later years to the poet's increasingly orthodox theology. Haney argues that the significance of vision to Wordsworth's poetry has altered in the paradigmatic shifts of the last century (178-82). Wordsworth's vacillation between the senses, the challenge posed to sight by sound, as written about by Hans Blumberg in "Light as a Metaphor for Truth: At the Preliminary Stage of Philosophical Concept Formation" (1993), communicates that "the impossibility of beholding God is absolute and not merely temporary" (46-47; qtd. in Haney 178). Wordsworth's increasingly hierarchical treatment of eye and ear also suggests a gradual shift over time from an interest in "the self-conscious subject who remembers the 'how'" to a subject "more interested in presenting the 'what' of a trans-personal ethical and hermeneutic world" (185-6). Thus, Haney's demonstration along with its superior confidence in his current understanding of

poststructuralism, also benefits from lessons learned through New Historicism, operating within both synchronic and diachronic awareness—conscious of historical realities and shifts in Wordsworth’s lifetime as well as alterations influencing the reception of his work since.

The performative approach Haney finds praise-worthy in Hartman, (although Hartman himself identifies his analytical style as a practice which might be called theoretically “eclectic-agnostic”), may well return to Freud as Lacan called his students to do. In *Romantic Psychoanalysis: The Burden of the Mystery* (2008), Joel Faflak suggests that psychoanalysis’s greatest and most incisive power emerges from its basis in literature and an unacknowledged origin in Romantic poetry. Faflak’s interpretations of certain elements of both Kristeva and Wordsworth differ from those deployed in this project, but his call for less mechanical and rigid modes of analysis in favor of reading practices no less rigorous but with a fluid presence in time more in tune with the personal in the poetic situation—approaches *semanalyse*.

CHAPTER TWO

The Speaking Subject of *Semanalyse*

Toril Moi's work on Kristeva may well be the most lucid in English language scholarship, and her book *The Kristeva Reader* (1986) offers an introduction to the theorist's work which remains useful—perhaps essential—for entry into Kristeva's *oeuvre* even thirty years after its first publication. Of course, Kristeva has continued to publish widely in the intervening years, and an updated critical biography, emphasizing the macroscopic nature of her practice as Moi's book does, would contribute enormously to academic discourse at large—and, in fact, Alice Jardine has begun just such a project. A discussion of semanalysis, however, does not necessarily require such an approach, because Kristeva coined the term in her doctoral thesis in 1969, and furthermore, semanalysis has not been examined widely in English language scholarship (much less literary criticism) since the exception of Suzanne Guerlac's "The Sublime in Theory" (1991). Thus, a discussion of semanalysis limited, for the most part, to the first "movement" of her theoretical work does not constitute a misrepresentation.

Rather than claiming that Kristeva has "abandoned" the notion of semanalysis, one finds in the idea an articulation of Kristeva's ongoing practice (indeed her "project" as de Beauvoir might use the term); other factors might account for the paucity of explicit elaboration on the concept in her later books. In 2013, in a conversation with Jules Law at the Chicago Humanities Festival, "On Julia Kristeva's Couch," Kristeva described her role as a "public intellectual" and explained that she finds the intellectual exercise of problematizing one's experiences and beliefs to be a means by which social blights like

fundamentalism and terrorism might be countered. Her position rests on the enabling assumption that intellectual practice can and should be used to benefit the public.

Kristeva finds that a publication like *Tel Quel*—a politically engaged literary and cultural arts magazine (which ran from 1960-82)—would not be successful in contemporary society. Changes in information technology, Kristeva implies, dictate that intellectuals must (at least, from time to time) engage in discursive forms capable of reaching audiences beyond the academy. In France in the late 1960s, the French public at large became intensely interested in linguistics (the preoccupation found its North American counterpart in the rise of Noam Chomsky's rise to public prominence). At that moment, Kristeva's formulation of semanalysis responded to perceived rigidity in semiotic applications engaged to issues both academic (intellectual) and popular. Thus, Kristeva's consequent shift away from explicit discussions of the phenomenon of reading as experiential most likely corresponds to a public indifferent that had eventually grown toward the subject, rather than a sense of finality in terms of any theoretical potential therein. Furthermore, one can easily imagine Kristeva saying that she felt she had explained herself well enough in her *Séméiotikè: Recherches pour une semanalyse* (1969).

However, certain issues of the current moment in American political discourse invite a recollection of semanalytic practice, particularly in the field of public education. The U.S. and various State Departments of Education seem to be bracing for a restructuring (or abandonment, one dares to dream) of the model of a nationally standardized curriculum which will require, among other clarifications, an operational

definition of critical thought and conceptualization of how such thought functions in the practice of reading.²⁶ The potential contributions Kristeva's work might offer the exasperating *ouroboros* that is the reform of U.S. public educational warrants additional consideration in future research but only has been mentioned here to forecast an example of the relevance of semanalysis to current situations: one relevance among many, really (another neglected relevance might explore semanalysis as a means by which to re-evaluate medical ethics, as suggested by Melinda Hall in her 2014 presentation "Kristeva and the Medical Humanities: Alternatives for Clinical Ethics").

For the purpose of a reconceptualization of the sublime as encompassing feminine (especially maternal) as well as masculine forces (the project at hand), Kristeva's semanalysis offers a practice capable of observing the psychic operations which produce the sublime effect. Toril Moi's introduction to *The Kristeva Reader* provides deft contextualization of Kristeva's challenge to political, social, and academic discursive power structures. In his 1974 review of *Revolution in Poetic Language*, "Revolutionary Semiotics," Phillip E. Lewis described Kristeva as taking a "superdisciplinary" position challenging "the most fundamental philosophical questions of intelligibility" (28).

Kristeva's "The System and the Speaking Subject" explains that semanalysis expands

²⁶ Like the potential of semanalysis as a practice able to address the "madness" threatening "our speaking species," Kristeva has spoken perceptively on the subject of pedagogy. Kristeva has made unique theoretical contributions relevant to pedagogy, including her account of the organization (and lack thereof) of choric invention, her characterization of writers as analysands, and semanalysis as an approach useful to teachers. Practical application of her theoretical work on pedagogy has been done in France. In an interview with Suzanne Clark and Kathleen Hulley in *Discourse* (1990), Kristeva briefly described a program she had launched a teacher training program called *Diplome de recherches approfondies en psychopathologie et semiologie* or Diploma of Advanced Research in Psychopathology and Semiology (DRAPS). More research on DRAPS would likely be fruitful. My presentation to the Kristeva Circle, "Kristeva and Education: Choric Invention, Writer-As-Analysand, the Diploma of Advanced Research in Psychopathology and Semiology (DRAPS), and Paradox in the University System" (2014) proposes such a study.

Lacan's semiotics to include repressed desires which influence the process of signification and undermine the possibility of either a systematic unity of meaning or an anarchic mode of individual expression through her emphasis of a Lacanian return to Freud.

Kristeva's description of the chora as a creative space—containing gendered drives but still primarily maternal in nature and consequently abjected—establishes that “sublime” inspiration should not be thought of as a singularly masculine terror. The womblike theoretical “space” of the chora as a site of creativity also suggests the ongoing destruction which requires creativity, as regeneration suggests passage and return through death, sovereign of terrors. Consider as figurative reference, for instance, that Persephone (Proserpina), goddess of spring (renewal, rebirth), spends half her year in the underworld as its queen. Hysteric speaking subjects identify with excessively creativity. The creative site is, metaphorically, the choric womb—a theoretical “space” between inspiration and embodiment, both creative and destructive. Psychoanalysts observe a tendency to consider oneself as occupying a time which contains death. Hysterics engaged in projects involving signification (as subjects of poetic utterance) tend to view themselves as existing in what Kristeva calls “monumental time.” Semanalysis offers a mode of analysis which exposes repressed (feminine) processes and drives underpinning creative language acts. Those repressions correspond to the abjection of maternity (often as womb and tomb) and unconsciously influence a subject's experience of signification and temporality. Thus, semanalysis presents itself as an intellectual practice uniquely able to

observe feminine constituencies in even a hyper-masculine-identified speaking subject—like Wordsworth’s.

Kristeva’s political stance in the 1960s and 1970s grounded itself in materialist intellectualism. Moi observes that Kristeva brought with her to France from her Eastern European upbringing a thorough training in Marxist theory (tempered by an objective, critical eye), fluent Russian, knowledge of Russian Formalists, familiarity with Mikhail Bakhtin, and an appreciation for Hegel (Moi 2). Although the intellectuals of Paris embraced Kristeva, she was still a foreigner and a woman and would always occupy an exiled and marginalized status with them. However, the position of the Eastern European stranger gave her intellectual work a unique edge of resistance and restless energy, so that her writing which engaged with Maoism and feminism (popular topics in 1960s radical Parisian political discourse) carries traces of equivocation, a hesitation fully to endorse any organized political movement and developed into a retreat from overt political activity by the 1980s. Kristeva writes, “[P]ersonally from the point of view of my own development I thought that it would be more honest for me not to engage politically but to try to be helpful or useful in a narrow field, where individual life is concerned, and where I can do something more objective and maybe more sharp, and more independent of different political pressures” (qtd. in Moi 7). Kristeva’s work has, regardless, carried political implication, and as early as the 1990s, returned to more explicitly politically engaged topics such as analytical observations on the theoretical construction of nationality and nations as well as the significance of globalization.²⁷ Kristeva tends,

²⁷ The books referred to here are *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (1991) translated by Leon S. Roudiez as *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991), *Lettre ouverte à Harlem Désir* (1990) translated by Roudiez as *Nations*

however, to observe the functions of certain social and cultural elements and comment on their likely consequences as opposed to levying judgment. She rarely advocates any particular organization, with the exception of cultural educational groups, as in her 2011 essay “A European in China” where she endorses the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

After publishing *Séméiotikè*, Kristeva’s interests took an increasingly psychoanalytic turn, following her sharpened focus on the individual. However, even though her professed commitment as an analyst—a commitment which carries into her academic work—would be articulated after her linguistic phase, those commitments appear to emerge from the same philosophical approach and resemble her sense of ethical responsibility on the part of linguistic theorists. Moi writes, “The analyst is after all engaged in the task of healing her patients, and has therefore to provide them with some kind of ‘identity’ which will enable them to live in the world . . .” (14). In order to live in the world, Kristeva finds, for instance in “borderline cases,” that the analysand should not end treatment with “yet another ‘false self’” but instead as a subject in process capable of expression, as in speaking or writing. In short, Moi summarizes, “[O]ne could argue that some concept of agency (of a *subject of action*) is essential to any political theory worthy of the name” (15). Thus, semanalysis as a practice contrasts with Derrida’s deconstruction, as Kristeva finds in endless *différance* a positivization of negativity: “in its desire to bar thethetic and put (logically or chronologically) previous energy transfers in its place, the grammatological deluge of meaning gives up on the subject and must

without Nationalism (1993), and *Crisis of the European Subject* (2000), a collection of four essays originally published in French then translated by Susan Fairfield.

remain ignorant not only of his functioning as social practice, but also of his chances for experiencing jouissance or being put to death” (qtd. in Moi 16).²⁸ Deconstruction, she finds, is fundamentally incapable of accounting for “the subject and the splitting (the *coupure* of thethetic) which produces it,” and so cannot account for the heterogeneousness of meaning and signification (16). The deconstructive relativized idea of truth “cannot account for the experience of truth in analysis” in which a patient is cured or not by a correct or mistaken intervention (17). Thus, in Kristeva’s ethics of psychoanalysis (also an ethics of love), the analyst should not play freely in the realm of signification but should work to cultivate “subjects who are free to construct imaginary fantasies (or works of art), to produce a new language, precisely because they are able to situate themselves in relation to the Law” (18). Similarly, Kristeva’s semanalytic process observes breaks in signification, not to prove that meaning is an illusion but that meaning exists beyond language—not in the form of a transcendental ego but a Real psychic space which, despite and, in fact, consequent of its Reality, defies representation.²⁹ Furthermore, its purpose is ethical in nature.

In *The Kristeva Reader*, Moi includes Kristeva’s essay, “The System and the Speaking Subject.” Kristeva’s writing, particularly between the mid-1960s and early 1980s, tends to explore themes like semanalysis, subjectivity, and the heterogeneousness of meaning and signification; this text in particular offers a useful survey of those ideas.

²⁸ Kristeva’s use of the word “thetic” can be understood as a state in which a thesis is formed in a language system. “Thesis” is understood as the overarching proposition supplied by that language system from which a subjective articulation is developed. A further definition is available in the glossary.

²⁹ As in earlier capitalization of “Symbolic” and “Imaginary” to indicate a Lacanian usage, capitalization of “Real” indicates a specialized meaning. The “Real” is the order of human experience that includes everything that cannot be represented and, thus, cannot be imagined or communicated. The “Real” is briefly explained in a glossary entry.

Moi clarifies, “Distinguishing between ‘semiology’ or ‘structuralism’ on the one hand and ‘semiotics’ or ‘semanalysis’ on the other, Kristeva maintains that structuralism, by focusing on the ‘thetic’ or static phase of language, posits it as a homogeneous structure, whereas semiotics, by studying language as a discourse enunciated by a speaking subject, grasps its fundamentally heterogeneous nature” (24). Moi summarizes, “For semanalysis language is a *signifying process*, not simply a static system.” Moi encourages readers to consider “The System and the Speaking Subject” in light of “The Ethics of Linguistics” (1980).

Kristeva finds that, like the unconscious, social practices or “general social laws” function like a language. Like the zones of the human psyche (conscious and unconscious), the social sphere contains ordering dimensions—in a word, the Symbolic. Importantly, social practices express laws of the Symbolic order. One philosophical consequence of this semiotic discovery challenges the claims of idealist philosophers to superordinance above meaning as well as the claims of materialists who subsume meaning within the overdetermination of superstructures. Kristeva’s semanalysis, Moi explains,

outmodes those debates . . . between philosophers, where one side argues for a transcendence with an immanent ‘human’ causality while the other argues for an ‘ideology’ whose cause is external and therefore transcendent; but where neither shows any awareness of the linguistic and, at a more general level, semiotic logic of the sociality in which the

(speaking, historical) subject is embedded. (“The System and the Speaking Subject” 25-26)

As opposed to locating the meaning in speech and text in a force external to the subject of speech or writing (either in an individual “soul” or *zeitgeist*), Kristeva looks at the precise situation of that subject—a point where established systems of thought, material needs, and language practices intersect and create a site of invention in which meaning appears as something distinct from all its constitutive elements.

Kristeva finds value in structuralist analysis but also need for expansion of Lacanian semiotics. Lacan’s semiotics had, Kristeva finds, overemphasized “the systemic, systemizing or informational aspect of signifying practices” and requires greater consideration for “areas of transgression and pleasure . . . of ‘art’, of ritual, of certain aspects of myths . . .” (26). She observes that whenever the “science of linguistics” encounters a part of language “which belongs not with the social contract but with play, pleasure or desire . . . it is forced to infringe its epistemological purity and call itself by such names as stylistics, rhetoric, poetics: aleatory forms of discourse which have no empirical status” (26). However, if semiotic research should have a reason for being, then that reason would be to specify and characterize that which falls outside the systemic constraints of each and any signifying practice, and so semioticians cannot continue to elaborate models which present systems of communication as the totality of expression.

A theory of the speaking subject predicates a semiotics capable of charting such new territory. Kristeva turns here to the subject as developed in generative grammar,

shown by Jakobson and Kuroda to be a reiteration of the Husserlian transcendental ego. She finds such a conception to be inadequate to the task of the semiotics she proposes: ultimately, this Cartesian reiteration of the transcendental ego erases some elements of subjective experience by suggesting that the essential subjectivity is “cut off from its body, its unconscious, and also its history” (28). Instead, Kristeva proposes *semanalysis*, a theory of meaning and subjectivity that posits the speaking subject as divided between influences by forces beyond the logic of sign systems: bodily drives and social pressure. She writes that

the speaking subject [is] a divided subject (conscious/unconscious) and [she goes] on to attempt to specify the types of operation characteristic of the two sides of this split, thereby exposing them to those forces extraneous to the logic of the systematic; exposing them, that is to say, on the one hand, to bio-physiological processes (themselves already inescapably part of signifying processes, what Freud labelled ‘drives’); and, on the other hand, to social constraints (family structures, modes of production, etc.). (28)

The speaking subject is not cut off but cut (*compure*), occupying at least two positions between which meaning is conceived as a signifying process. The texts created by the split speaking subject bear traces of *genotext* (the socio-historical production process of the text) and *phenotext* (the physical production process of the text), indicated by the semiotic disposition of those texts.

The semiotic disposition includes grammatical deviations such as uses of words to create pleasing sounds, lexemic dissolution, irregular syntax, and ambiguous sources for statements. Such deviations can be described as metonymy and metaphor (notably by structuralists “following Freud”), repetitions, and any other language function which supposes “a *frontier* . . . and the transgression of that frontier” (29). The semiotic disposition of a text reveals “the shift in the speaking subject, his capacity for renewing the order in which he is inescapably caught up . . . that capacity is, for the *subject*, the capacity for enjoyment” (29). In the shift in which the speaking subject dies and is reborn, “waste” of meaning escapes signification, regardless of which sign system has been used—a release experienced as both pleasure and pain, Kristeva’s notion of *jouissance*.

Semiotic research must develop metalanguage beyond what the discipline which is the object of that metalanguage predetermines or else “declare intellectual bankruptcy” (30). In semanalysis,

[i]t is only now, and only on the basis of a theory of the speaking subject as subject of a heterogeneous process, that semiotics can show that what lies outside its metalinguistic mode of operation—the ‘remainder’, the ‘waste’—is what, in the process of the speaking subject, represents the moment in which it is set in action, put on trial, put to death: a heterogeneity with respect to system, operating within the practice and which is liable, if not seen for what it is, to be reified into a transcendence.

(30-31)

The nature of this transcendence, particularly as it relates to Wordsworth, will be expanded upon in Chapter 3; however, Kristeva's driving purpose is to deny the analyst recourse to any mysticism. Mysticism denies and distorts that in humanity which is incommensurate with humanism—the subaltern, the *Muselman*, or the *homo sacer* (*pace* Agamben). Following Hegel, semanalysis considers the negativity “at work beneath all rationality” not as “subordinated to ultimate knowledge” or—as Marxists had—“a merely economic externality”—but rather as “genuinely materialist,” recognizing the negativity beneath rationality as that which is heterogeneous to signification (31). Such negativity, to clarify, refers to the elements of experience which cannot be formally represented in language and which language systems consequently repress.

Semanalysis offers an analytical method which might develop a “*historical typology of signifying practices*” and “the possibility of a new perspective on history” (32). Kristeva's proposed reconsideration of how history might be represented challenges what she calls “monumental time” in “Women's Time” (1981). The history of men marking events that are associated with masculine achievement is a history exposed as a front for a carnival of horrors, subject to violent eruptions from the abjected maternal site of creation in *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (1980).³⁰

Kristeva writes that new meanings emerge from the “chora,” her term recuperated from Plato, for the seat of invention. Thomas Rickert explains the significance of the term from a rhetorical perspective, framing communication first in the contemporary context

³⁰ Originally published as “*Le temp de femmes*” in *Cahiers de recherche de S. T. D. (Sciences des textes et documents)* 34/44.5 in 1979 and translated into English by Alice Jardine for *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 7.1 in 1981, “Women's Time” is Kristeva's most widely anthologized essay.

and then in the historical. Information technology has drawn attention to the degree to which the human mind extends beyond the physical shell of the skull, blending in with the physical environment in the sense that people's understanding of who they are as subjects appears to be at least in some ways predicated upon biologically external social structures. Subjective expression gives evidence of those aspects of subjectivity influence by biological and social systems.

Although also situated easily in the context of modern technologies (such as the internet), roots of the conceptual "chora" stretch as far back as Plato's exploration of *chōra* in *Timaeus*, an exploration developed by Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, and Gregory Ulmer (Rickert 251-253). The significant rhetorical implications of the connection, to date minimally explored, has to do with the influence of *chōra* upon invention, beginnings, and rhetorical space. The boundaries of speaker/writer, audience/reader, and rhetorical situation/context are really constructions with arbitrary boundaries. Rickert explains that the rhetorical tradition has neglected the concept since, following Plato, Aristotle categorized *chōra* within the *topos*. *Topoi* literally translates as "places" and came to mean "positions" and then, in rhetoric, would describe common themes and formulas. Since the term *chōra* would be associated with space and matter following Aristotle's classification of it within the *topos*, psychic implications of the word that Rickert discusses in Kristeva's appropriation of the word (and certain usages within the *Timaeus* itself) would be subsequently neglected.

Aristotle's usage is not without justification. Etymologically, *chōra* before Plato was used synonymously with *topos* and *kenon*. *Kenon* translates as "void," and so *chōra*

straddles the signification of both “place” and “void”: a voided place or the place of void. *Chōra* as a word appears to pre-date *topos*, usually conceptually tied to ecological and political geography but also indicating social rank or position. Nonetheless, the term is typically used in a geographical sense by Plato (254-255). The very structure of *Timaeus* illuminates what the term meant for Plato: the text begins the day following the dialogue from *The Republic* with an emphasis on the interlocutors being the same minus one. The emergent theme is that the ideal described in *The Republic*, as any ideal, cannot be actually achieved, implying that all beginnings exist non-autonomously in a matrix of beginning, shaded by memory and *anagkē* (necessity).

The conditional nature of beginning appears to be tied to the imperfect nature of creation. Epics so often “begin” *in medias res* not only dramatically to “start the action,” but because beginning (as such) is inconceivable. Linguistically, such “mediations” are relevant to poststructuralists in the implications this “imperfection” has on signification. Consider, for example, *cogito ergo sum*. But, *when* did thinking begin, though? *How* did it begin? Did it begin with the introduction of signs which represented it, or did signs give rise to cogitation itself? If signs are the only evidence of thought, then might they just as well be thought? If so, is the “I” that thinks, and therefore “is,” merely the sign for “I”? Thus, is the only “truth” proven by *cogito ergo sum* that signs operate and exist, leaving the existence of the being who might utter such a statement still a matter of faith? These are the lines of questioning both Wordsworth and Kristeva confront. Semanalysis examines the feelings of poetic speaking subjects (which Wordsworth’s speaking subject typifies) consequent of existential crisis. Furthermore, semanalysis directs readers to

consider structurally irregular features of language use as expressive of the identifications such feelings of existential insecurity engender. Wordsworth's "revisitings," evidenced in his overwhelming drafting artifacts which constitute *The Prelude*, express a subjectivity consumed by a drive to surpass and encompass the mortality inherent in the choric creative space.

The *chōra* exists *atopos* (without place), neither in the realm of ideal forms nor in the world—the place of being-before-thought. The work of *Timaeus* is to consider how to bring the ideal city into the world, supposedly, for Plato, through *eros* and (for Kristeva) a re-inscription of the maternal (255-263). *Timaeus* examines the *chōra*, where this version of self which *may not be* quivers.

In *Histoires d'amour* (1983), Kristeva defines "semiotic" in relation to "chora."³¹ "Semiotic" indicates bodily, rhythmic drives. The chora is "a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated" (25). Kristeva credits the term to the *Timaeus*, writing that "chora" denotes "an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and ephemeral stases." The chora, as a site of beginning, "precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality, and temporality," and, as such, can be situated only conditionally in time. Ideas, in coming into articulation, remain eternally uncertain,

³¹ *Histoires d'amour* (1983) is a collection of essays translated as *Tales of Love* (1987) by Leon S. Roudiez.

Kristeva's use of the word "semiotic" (*sémiotike*) should be distinguished from its usage by other theorists in the field of "semiotics," where the term refers to the manner of linguistic research critiqued in "The Ethics of Linguistics" and "The System and the Speaking Subject." Heretofore, "chora" should be read as Kristeva's specialized meaning, distinct from the earlier understandings as detailed by Rickert. Both terms have entries in the glossary.

“unfathered,” expressive of a sense that one cannot really say from which site one’s references truly sprang forth (239).

In the chora’s ceaseless reconfigurations, there is some order—although that order is outside Symbolic law and godless. Chora is maternal and bodily, a pre-verbal energetic impulse (26 and 240). The Symbolic imprints upon and sustains itself through the chora through family and social structures. To identify this mediation, consider the subject which has not yet been formed before that “subject” performs language acquisition or even concrete operations.

In this way, signification is a function of the Symbolic order, as Kristeva’s semiotics are functions of the chora. The semiotic meets the Symbolic as the desire for maternal body, still yet an extension of the undifferentiated subject, is restricted—as when the semiotic becomes associated with oral and anal drives (and repressions) in the sensorimotor phase (27). Therefore, the chora, the site where the speaking subject comes into being, throws that “being” into question. The structural, biological, and social influences at work in this generative situation —because they are often in opposition to one another—prove that the subject is never a “unified” being. The subject’s irreconcilable constituent elements create a difference in the subject’s “being”—a “negativity.” Kristeva writes, “the semiotic chora is no more than the place where the subject is both generated and negated, the place where his unity succumbs before the process of charges and stases that produce him. We shall call this process of charges and stases a negativity” (28). Material forms of voice, gesture, and color tend to semioticization where they slip or condense through metonymy and metaphor. Figurative

formulations create a structure in language resembling the trace memory or undifferentiated, oceanic unity with environment born in the mind of all speaking subjects.

One thing is like another or a part of a thing stands for the rest, just as all parts of reality were once continuous in the phantom memory of the womb. Kristeva's semiotic represents a psychosomatic continuum between the unformed subject and the unformed other/object. These semiotic processes and relations occur synchronically with the formation of the speaking subject (29). The chora and the semiotic underline a resistance to any conception of a transcendental subject in language. Since speaking subjects form through dialectic driven by desire—spurred by negativity, an absence of unity with the environment, be it physical or metaphysical—a “transcendent” subject with some eternal, constant form cannot be found in language (30).

Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* provide Kristeva with mythological forms expressing the “negativity” which originates desire. The “winged soul” passage from *Phaedrus* articulates how a human comes into being and how that coming-into-being structures desire. Socrates argues against Lysias's claim that lovers, as madmen, should not be trusted: instead, beautiful boys should choose lustful suitors offering material, social, or political advancement rather than loving suitors offering philosophical cultivation. While lovers might be mad, their madness can be of divine origin, like Pythia, the prophetess of Delphi. Because (according to Socrates in the dialogue) the word *mantikē* (art of prophecy) has etymological roots in *manikē* (art of madness), “the ancients testify that madness coming into being from god is more beautiful than

soundness of mind from among human beings” (Plato 47-48). Therefore, if the lover’s *eros* comes from the gods, that love’s madness must be good.³²

Socrates describes the component parts of the soul as “a winged team and a charioteer” (50). The teams (souls) of gods are thoroughly noble, but those of men have willful parts. “Winged” souls exist in a divine real, but souls within bodies have lost—or at least damaged or compromised—their “wings.”³³ Association with the divine, beautiful, wise, and good fosters feathers on (fledges) the soul’s wings while association with the earthly, ugly, cunning, and bad molts them, hampering their function. Gods parade through the heavens, and other, lesser souls travel with them, although the willful horses in the teams of men pull their chariots off the heavenly route so they crash to the earth. However, these lesser charioteers, once embodied, having glimpsed the divine and, based on those glimpses, recognize embodiments of divinity in the arts—philosophy, music, justice, health, mysticism, poetry, craft, sophism, and tyranny (kingship). If a man pursues traces of the divine on earth, then his team regains its wings and returns to the divine realm (52-54).

Having established a theoretical genealogy of the soul, Socrates examines the soul of the divinely-inspired, mad lover. The soul of a lover raises its own wings to fly at the divine beauty it apprehends, because the beauty of the beloved bears likeness to the sights glimpsed in the divine realm. The divine attraction of the lover is seen by outsiders as manic, as madness. A corrupted soul would shamefully abuse the beloved in this frenzy,

³² Kristeva recuperates the ethics of love in “Ratio Diligendi, or The Triumph of One’s Own. Thomas Aquinas: Natural Love and Love of Self” from *Histoires d’amour* (1983), a text to which this study will return to in its conclusion.

³³ The Greek word for “winged” could translate as “full-fledged,” suggesting “manifested in total form.”

but a soul which has more recollection of the divine (a philosophic soul) feels awe before this divine beauty—still, although, experiencing great inner turmoil due to that soul’s desire and the pulling of his willful horse. Despite base impulses, the lover of a divine nature fosters the divinity he perceives in the beloved: “he is seeing himself in the mirror, in the beloved” (61). The most enlightened lovers would, in fostering this divinity, repair their wings and ascend to the divine realm.

Kristeva interprets the winged soul passage in *Phaedrus* as describing a masculine, narcissistic, homosexual ideal of love of a sadomasochistic and violent nature (“Manic Eros” 59-60). A subject projects and recognizes himself in the love object, so his desire to possess the object is actually desire for self-possession. Furthermore, the desiring, “willful” element of the love drive—the element of the love drive associated with embodiment, death, and vulgar satisfaction—enters into power-struggle with the knowing, “noble” element—the element associated with essence, immortality, and denial (self-abnegation). While Christianity proposes the possibility of love for others (as others rather than as reflections of the self), contemporary Western psyches bear the trace of pederastic love, significantly in a valorization of the essential and ideal over the situational and embodied.

Furthermore, the dual nature of human love into the Western canon retains the valorized essential as masculine. *Eros*, conceived by the Greeks, enacts a homologous desire. The lover perceived something in the beloved which he identifies as sanctioned by an idealized superior (the Symbolic Law of the Father in semiotics). Consider, for instance, the common divinity apprehended in *Phaedrus*. The desire of *Phaedrus* is called

“daemon,” a desire for immortality through ascension to the divine realm (60-61). Desire for immortality is phallic, made clear in the winged, feathery imagery used by Socrates, uniting “Psyche—Eros—Pteros” (63). Considering the immortal soul as phallic may explain the resistance early “Fathers of the Church” may have had in recognizing the souls of women.

The pull between the good and the bad horse in *Phaedrus* underscores a sadomasochism inherent in the “Platonic” conception of love, unable to separate itself from “base” desires, although the passage concludes with an upright resolution that struggle is necessarily part of the process of loving. Education and philosophy guide the soul to judge rhetoric as an art which distracts its practitioners from cultivation of their ideal being: “On the side of domination-love, slavery-love, and allurements-love advocated by Lysias, Plato places a rhetoric that is meant for effect, goes in for seductiveness and spellbinding, neglecting the quest for the essential . . . [In] the Platonic hierarchy, writing, like ineffectual rhetoric, is placed on the side of perversion” (67). Essential truth, the “right” object of philosophy, not only suffers degradation in embodiment but, in the hands of the rhetorician—precursor to the writer—become warped in service of worldly concerns.

Women’s role in a culture in which love is conceived in such a way is explicated in two narratives: Aristophanes’s androgynes and Diotima’s birth of Eros. However, the androgynes, in their unity, in that they are unisexual rather than bisexual, are really “phallus disguised as woman” (71). Alternately, Diotima manifests an idealized version of Socrates himself, for whom love is an act of creation—procreation with a lacking love-

object. Escaping the sadomasochism of *Phaedrus*, probably largely since it is based less upon pleasure, such a love as Socrates posits is a powerful taboo in male psychosexuality (72-73). However, Diotima's love refuses to accept that the suffering of love—made clear in the myth of the birth of Eros, child of Penia (Poverty, Want) and Poros (Necessity)—is germane to it. Creation presupposes a lack, as procreation presupposes a desire for generation, and generation, ultimately, presupposes a desire for immortality. Thus, Diotima is a father-oriented daughter of the sublime, not feminine (maternal) in the psychosexual sense.

For Kristeva, the male libido circles back to homosexual desire in an attempt to sublimate death, to contain the death drive (75-76). Passion for the perceived commonality of idealized divinity within the soul of an other is as much an admiration for the eternal (endless unity with the sacred) as for the abyss, the negation, the source of melancholy and depression (77-78). Christian ideology's attempt to sublimate the soul before an idealized God, likewise feminizes the soul, feminization being the ultimate masochism. The product of such contortions is the "soulosexual": a sexed soul whose spiritual encounters imitate the sexed relational constructs of a time and place's milieu.³⁴ The soulosexual wavers between manic jubilant desire for the ideal Father and depressive

³⁴ Kristeva includes a note, expanding on her pun's reference to "homosexual." She acknowledges that to described Greek sexuality as "homosexual" anachronistically imposes an eroticism based on sexual identity (masculine or feminine) upon a system differentiated by "active or passive postures." She finds that, regardless, both systems condemn passivity (and, consequently sodomy) because of a "primacy of procreation." Kristeva states that she is not attempting to allocate love "to this or that organ or position"—an attempt which she does find as a theoretical limitation in Freud's work. Instead, when she refers to a "homosexual" (following psychoanalytic models), she refers to desire in which a lover forms identification with its love-object "in the shadow of the ideal phallic image"—that is, a formation imitating systems of power. To shed Freud's limiting conceptualization, she recommends the word "soulosexual": "Lacan would write, *amour* [âme = soul]" (sic) (389).

attraction to the abysmal, ideal mother, resolved as passion is gradually replaced by knowledge (78-80). So far, these erotics have been masculine. Feminine erotics still relate to power (the phallus, the father), and homosexuality corresponds more to childhood sensorimotor sensuality which leads to either sadomasochism or identity-dissolution/suicide.

The mythological sublimation and abjection of feminine desire and desire for feminine people intersects with psychoanalytic accounts of subject formation as a process which codes orders of human experience in terms of sexual hierarchy. While many feminist critics—including Judith Butler in “The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva” (1989)—find Kristeva’s discussion of femininity within linguistic and psychoanalytic frames to be essentialist, such criticism mistakes accounts of *what is* for accounts of *what must be*. Kristeva’s theoretical practice recognizes femininity as woven through a subject’s self-image as a consequence of power structures which are experienced before that self-image has even formed. Kristeva emphasizes intellectual contemplation over hubristic action based on subjective self-righteousness.

In *Pouvoirs de l’horreur* (1980), Kristeva says of herself that she will not join the “long march towards idols and truths of all kinds, buttressed with the necessarily righteous faith for wars to come, wars that will necessarily be holy” (210). No, she claims (ironically), rather, the “quiet shore of contemplation” which lays bare “under the cunning, orderly surface of civilization, the nurturing horror that they attend to pushing aside by putrefying, systematizing, and thinking; the horror that they seize on in order to build themselves up and function” (210). In fact, in “Women’s Time” (1981), Kristeva

comments on her fluctuating usage of the terms “mother,” “woman,” and “hysteric”—all words bearing “feminine” coding. Kristeva (after de Beauvoir) observes that she thinks “the apparent coherence which the term ‘woman’ assumes in contemporary ideology, apart from its ‘mass’ or ‘shock’ effect for activist purposes, essentially has the negative effect of effacing the differences among the diverse functions or structures which operate beneath this word” (18). No, Kristeva does not hold up femininity nor the maternal as an essential truth.

She does, however, recognize a pattern-seeking tendency in the human mind which enmeshes the construct of femininity in linguistic and psychological systems. In linguistic and psychological systems, some processes function analogously—such as metaphor and condensation or metonymy and displacement. Through analogous processes (such as metaphor/condensation and metonymy/displacement), the figurative feminine acquires signifiante. The “winged myth” can be interpreted as a mythological, social articulation analogous to the gendered nature of physical desire as explained in the above discussion of classic Greek and Christian modes of loving. The myth is likewise analogous to the subjective, psychological gendering of desires that are at play in language use, as explained in the tension between Symbolic structures (Law of the Father) and semiotic expressive drives (abjected impulses towards the maternal).

As discussed in “Outside Time,” western art often represents time as similar to sign, a medium by which one teases out truth. Just as signification deploys signs at some distance from meaning, with an illusion of containment, so does monumental time deploy a linear, historical, nonrecurring, and masculine temporal dimension to encompass a

cyclical, genetic, serially returning “woman’s time” (“Woman’s Time” 14). In Tiepolo’s painting (*pace* Kristeva’s analysis), the “outside” and “eternal” nature Truth, a nature which might only be exposed and imperfectly so through the agency of masculine Time, suggests a temporality outside time—that is, the time in which signification occurs.

Human subjectivities must experience this “outside time” in order to have any perception of truth and so can be said to sense multiple temporalities. However, the temporalities cannot be made entirely commensurate, as linear time—“time as departure, progression, and arrival”—“is that of language considered as the enunciation of sentences (noun + verb; topic-comment; beginning-ending)”; furthermore, “this [chronological] time rests on its own stumbling block, which is also the stumbling block of that enunciation—death” (17). The experience of linear time supposes finite points of life and death for the body. Consequently, a hysteric—a subject overly identified with the body—“who suffers from reminiscences” of the choric space, the womb—prefers to consider herself in terms of either cyclical or monumental temporality (17).

While enunciation ends in a figure correspondent to death (the end of the sentence), a return and subsequent revision of that enunciation corresponds to an attempt to encompass within the infinite the death of the sentence. The poet resuscitates the utterance entombed in sign through revision—a “revisitation” to the choric space. In such a model of analysis, Wordsworth’s bursts of creative productivity and intermissions of troubled silence, and his later tendency towards revisionary “revisiting,” as Gill describes his process in *Wordsworth’s Revisitings* (2011)—expose the poet as a subject concerned

with production of meaning and sorting through the “death” of meaning implicit in signifying acts so as to project his mind into the monumental, temporal dimension.

CHAPTER THREE

Semanalyse and Wordsworth's Book of Books

Much has been said of sublimity and the British Romantic poets but not enough of their relationship with the notion of transcendence; however, transcendence has particular relevance in a semanalytic reading of Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. The concept of transcendence would be appropriated to linguistics in the Husserlean "transcendental ego" and then by Kristeva in her model of the speaking subject. These twentieth-century iterations of transcendence follow a commitment to materialist theoretical approaches among academic Marxists especially within the Frankfurt school after World War II. Their commitment leads them to challenge theoretical models in which the origins of transcendent experience are represented as divine, ideal, essential, and outside time.

The concept of transcendence suggests an encompassing unity comparable to the universal, metaphysical harmony which Kant argued to be most ennobling to the human spirit. However, that subjects tend to project their beliefs as transcendental truths could be traced back to their socialization, confusing ideology and *zeitgeist* with divine truth. Such projections require that all outliers to the transcendental totality be disregarded and erased. Such erasures, always violent, might be enacted against objects ranging from meaning "wasted" in signification to human bodies "wasted" in "social progress."³⁵ Despite its association with the eternal, in the view of time the concept of transcendence has altered. One variation worth noting is the "traditional" definition accepted by Jesuit religious studies scholar J. Robert Barth in *Romanticism and Transcendence*:

³⁵ Derrida explores the similar structures of violence in language practices and the violence of the Holocaust in his essay "Shibboleth."

Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Religious Imagination (2003). Barth's "traditional" understanding of transcendence contrasts with existentialist use of the idea by Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Kristeva's application of the Husserlian transcendental ego posits yet another variation of meaning for the term.

To consider *The Prelude* through an altering concept conforms to the construction of Wordsworth's epic. That epic describes the development of Wordsworth's creative mind through (perhaps beyond) time, cast in memory then worked and reworked into various shapes. The drafting artifacts give evidence of an aspiration to indicate an overabundant perception of truth sensed and then considered over time. *The Prelude*, like varying conceptions of transcendence, embraces the limitations of language and trusts that, still, through this rude instrument, it might enlighten other men. The "thousand-fold" beauty of Wordsworth's instruction described at the end of Book Fourteenth takes form in what can seem to be the thousand variations in manuscript and draft of *The Prelude*. Wordsworth, Abrams, and Gill write in their "Preface" to *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850: A Norton Critical Edition* (1979) that in between the initial drafting in 1798 and "the last full-scale revision in 1839" and the final 1850 printer's copy to which Wordsworth's executors made unauthorized changes, seventeen major manuscripts "survive in the Wordsworth Library at Grasmere," and many of those manuscripts "contain several stages of revision" (ix). Additionally, various "isolated drafts" are contained in notebooks (ix). Rather than suggesting that one edition should be considered the true form of the poem, perhaps the approach most concerned with the meaning beyond signification of *The Prelude* would be to imagine all variations as emanations of that meaning, embodied

differently as various moments contained circumstances which required shifts in utterance and consciousness.

With that caveat in mind, all quotes from the *Prelude* will be taken from Wordsworth's 1850 edition—unless indicated otherwise—in uneasy conformity with Barth's opinion, which he supports through a quote taken from Donald Reiman's review of the *Norton Prelude*: "Modern scholars have not fully reconciled themselves to the fact that the author of *The Prelude* is William Wordsworth and that his preference, insofar as that can be determined, counts more than the judgements of all his executors, composers, critics, and editors weighed together" (qtd. in Barth 17). Barth's preference for the 1850 *Prelude* is not innocent. He argues persuasively that the changes between the 1805 and 1850 editions do not constitute as momentous a shift from radical-secular to conservative-religious as critics have typically claimed, which implies that Barth's preference does not necessarily result from his religious perspective as a Jesuit. However, in an era following the death of the author, even allowing Barth's argument for an essentially religious quality to Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, to assert the authority of an author becomes itself a political act.

The most significant point for the purpose of this reading (regarding which edition warrants primary consideration) is that, while the 1850 manuscript may be the most "authoritative," the nature of *The Prelude* is such that the sprawling array of drafts and manuscripts should all be read together. Furthermore, the text's purpose is so multivalent that multiple incarnations—fragmentary and scrawled over—best attest to the meaning beyond signification by presenting various embodiments between which that meaning

might be glimpsed. However, in imagining the impenetrable confusion—“voluminous and indigestible” as Gill describes it in *Wordsworth’s Revisitings* (2011)—that a reading of these parallel but varying forms would provoke, one appreciates the necessity of the violent “signifying cut” (89). Thus, for an expedient and perhaps misleading appearance of clarity, the 1850 edition will be granted privilege in citation. Book Fifth, as the book most explicitly addressing the textuality of the entire composition, presents itself as the section most appropriate for analysis of the nature of Wordsworth as a speaking subject driven to cycle back to the choric site of his creative powers and face death with the hopes of “transcending” it by writing an immortal work to be located in monumental time.

Barth connects unity to transcendent perception: “[As in the Incarnation of the Word of God in Christ] . . . Logos—the Word of God—enters human life and history. Transcendent reality becomes immanent” (6). Like light filtering through a stained glass window, divinity illuminates earthly spaces, and, through the divine light of transcendence, all parts of earth are unified with each other and with the heavenly realm (10). Barth’s light metaphor applies to text as well as physical form: thematic and symbolic unity imitate the unity of God with man. For instance, Barth finds Book Seventh “one of the most successfully unified books, the whole book being a preparation for three moments of illumination” (48). Likewise, he argues that themes of death and immortality unify Book Fifth. Barth’s reading of Book Fifth as a unified structure contrasts strikingly with readings like that of Galperin in “Authority and Deconstruction in *The Prelude*” (discussed in Chapter 1). Galperin finds that, through fragmentation,

Wordsworth empowers himself to transition between identities and thus transcends any single figure and, in so doing, reclaims his authority by acknowledging his situatedness regarding mythic fiction, conceding “his own vassalage as a prelude to self-inscription” (627). Notably, both readings find in the text a form of transcendence: Barth’s being a unified, explicitly religious form and Galperin’s being one deconstructed and textual (with the implications of secularism attendant upon poststructural criticisms).

Barth (like most other Wordsworth scholars) identifies three primary episodes in Book Fifth: the Dream of the Arab, the Boy of Winander, and the Drowned Man. Barth finds in each episode a striving to transcend death and attain immortality. Barth reads the dream as primarily unified by the framing device, the book the poet reads before falling asleep. The stone and the shell carried by the Arab in the dream represent “poetry and geometric truth”—both valuable, but poetic truth more so. Both disciplines emerge from nature which then rises in the form of an apocalyptic ocean threatening “to reclaim what humanity has learned from it” (33). The dream expresses fear of death of the self and destruction of all monuments to that self, and Barth finds that, in waking, the poem suggests that, like a sleeper who had mistaken dream for reality, after death the soul will shake off the illusions of life on earth to continue in immortality. As Wordsworth describes in the Intimations Ode, “Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting” (59). Likewise, although he dies, because the Boy of Winander has “communed so deeply with the ‘beautiful and permanent forms of nature,’ his spirit is at one with the spirit of nature, and thereby in some way partakes of nature’s immortality” (34).³⁶ While the fear of death

³⁶ If one is struck by the non-Christian if still religious quality to Barth’s interpretation, one should note that Barth distinguishes his reading of Wordsworth as “imaginatively—a deeply religious but pre-Christian

is thus eased in the Boy of Winander episode, that fear is absent in the Drowned Man episode. Barth accounts for the subject of Book Fifth's childhood memory in which the boy sees a dead body and feels no fear. Barth explains, "The boy has seen such sights before, in books, dignified by imaginative vision—and so he is not afraid . . . The eternity of nature—in the Boy of Winander—is here matched by the eternity of art, and it is death that reveals them both" (36). Both Nature and books intimate immortality, but only "the Spirit that quickens them can confer immortality itself" (38). Of the nature of this Spirit and immortality, it "might be argued that nothing very specific has been asserted . . ." (40), yet they offer the hope needed to sooth the poet faced with inevitable death.

The unity inherent in Barth's understanding of divine transcendence offers a level of certainty and comfort contrary to less ideologically religious readings. Further, one could yet offer a religious reading which does not result in so peaceful a resolution. For instance, one might consider the concept of religious sacrifice: a gift to the divine in exchange for supernatural reprieve. The sacrifice ought to be something of value, something which will be missed. Wordsworth writes:

. . . Thou also! Man! hast wrought,
 For commerce of thy nature with herself,
 Things that aspire to unconquerable life;

poet. That is to say, he was rather 'Hebraic' than Christian in the bent of his imagination" (28). However, even granting this frame, the divinity described by Wordsworth more closely resembles some variation of paganism than something from a specifically Judeo-Christian tradition.

While Barth argues that the revisions of *The Prelude* do not constitute as radical a shift towards Christian spirituality as has often been argued, the weight of evidence provided in Stephen Gill's *William Wordsworth: A Life* (1989) and *Wordsworth's Revisitings* (2011) demonstrate Wordsworth's intention to make his verse more explicitly Christian. However, some lines, nonetheless, even in his 1850 draft, betray the influence of alternate and occasionally incommensurate spiritualities.

And yet we feel—we cannot choose but feel—
 That they must perish. Tremblings of the heart
 It gives, to think that our immortal being
 No more shall need such garments; and yet man,
 As long as he shall be the child of earth,
 Might also ‘weep to have’ what he may lose (5.18-26)

Within such a frame, the dream of an apocalypse prompts mourning for the most precious accomplishments of living people, the Boy of Winander represents the death of what one once was in order to become the present self, and the Drowned Man represents how the true face of death becomes overwritten by signs (narratives) and so becomes obscured to sooth the bodily horror one feels when faced with death. The practice of sacrifice should not be understood as unproblematic or untroubled because the thing burned or otherwise destroyed had tremendous value. Something precious is truly, irrevocably lost. To suffer in sacrifice, then, is expected and right, and to gloss over that suffering as Barth does is a disservice to the depth of emotion and structural complexity present in Book Fifth.

Light illuminates but also blinds, and this has been the critique most responsible for secularization in postmodern literary theory. That which does not conform to the divine, unified notion of transcendence logically follows as scorned flesh—whether the deviant be abstract, as in artistic or philosophical discordances, or material, as in a nonconforming person’s way of being or even that person’s “irregular” body. In consequence, descriptions of the “transcendent” experience as not necessarily divine in

origin and not necessarily unified have proliferated, as in an existentialist view of transcendence or in post-structural notions of the transcendental subject.

Existentialists describe transcendence as an act of projection. A person is born into culture with natural properties and the combination of these circumstances is understood as one's facticity. That person's existence—the manner of being that person is—can be understood through his or her relationship with his or her facticity. Will a person's facticity limit what is possible? Certain ways of being have immanent possibility, as can be understood through Simone de Beauvoir. De Beauvoir describes the various circumstances a woman might occupy—wife, mother, or prostitute—and how each position narrows the woman to immanence: a state limited to experience and severed from the creative profundity of transcendence. For women to achieve liberation, de Beauvoir writes, they must do so through *projects*—activities designed to expand the future self to something greater than what one is currently. Existentialist transcendence occurs when a person chooses to begin a project, to work towards doing or being something that may not already exist. It is the ultimate creative act, to summon some new possibility where none was immanent.

Barth challenges M. H. Abrams on the grounds of the terms “immanent” and “transcendent.” He writes that “Abrams takes, implicitly but clearly, a dichotomous view of immanent and transcendent, as if reality had to be either one or the other, and sees Wordsworth making what had traditionally been transcendent, the deity, totally immanent—and therefore totally ‘secular’” (26). Barth's reading of Abrams may not be entirely fair, but a salient assumption operating in Barth's critical approach becomes

apparent: that transcendence, by definition, can only be of divine origin and cannot arise from immanence. Existentialist philosophy takes an atheistic stance and so Wordsworth, with his numerous references to some form of divinity, should not be read as an existentialist poet. However, to speak of Wordsworth's transcendence as being purely divine obscures his most radical poetic accomplishment.

Barth correctly asserts the presence of religious feeling in *The Prelude*. However, the transcendence of Wordsworth's poetic mind has shades of autochthony, a state of being made from the fabric of the mind of the poet—not God. His mind becomes his own creation, which is in itself divine in imitation of the creative power of God—no less than a Tower of Babel erecting what should not be possible by its own power. In this radical elevation of and by the self, Wordsworth's transcendence is unique and might be understood even more as bold than an existentialist notion of transcendence. The existentialist pursuing transcendence may worry that he or she might fail and collapse into immanent existence, but the Wordsworthian poet pursuing transcendence imitates—and, in so doing, might be said to challenge—a present, active God.

In her essay, translated as “From One Identity to An Other” or, alternately, “Castle to Castle” in *Desire in Language* (1974), Kristeva describes poetic language as a linguistic practice. Poetic language offers, she demonstrates, a potential for communication of experience which defies the supposed limitations of language and carries over the gap between sign and signifier a meaning which ought to be lost (according to all the then-dominant theories of language). In her theory of poetic language, one finds a description of the evolution of the poetic imagination recounted in

The Prelude. Significantly, Kristeva's description of the function of poetic language does not explicitly preclude the possibility of God although, like de Beauvoir, Kristeva is an atheist.

To situate her argument, Kristeva references three linguistic movements, beginning with Ernest Renan's philology which she compares to the myth of the tower of Babel. Renan assumes that language practices stem from an historical subject—unified and unchanging: a tower attaining the realm of divinity. Since subjective language practices vary, their difference demonstrates that people and individuals pervert universal language: the dispersion of peoples and consequent motion away from heaven. Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics challenges the historical nature of Renan's subject, observing the arbitrariness of the connection between sign and signifier and so dismissing the divinity of some mythic original source of language. Structural linguists replace Renan's historical subject with a postmodern speaking subject: the specular-I described in Lacan's lecture on the mirror stage. Yet, Edmund Husserl's generative grammar proposed a transcendental subjectivity which replaces the structural-linguistic speaking subject, the social-I described in "Mirror Stage." Socially, each interlocutor assumes in others a subjectivity "like" his own and within himself something "like" others: a transcendental subjectivity, not unified or singular yet still held in common (125-132).³⁷

Kristeva finds in poetic language a "*heterogeneousness* to meaning and signification" (133). Poetic language carries excess of meaning beyond what it signifies (trade in signs). Poetic language expresses desire in language, observed in an infant's

³⁷ Here one encounters a third notion of "transcendence" as a socially normative sense of self, a "common humanity."

“babble”—not intended as much to communicate any specific idea but play sensually in the sign-scape. The abundance of meaning in poetic language suggests that its speaker is a “subject-in-process” (*sujet-en-proces*) moving through language from its body to Husserlean transcendental subjectivity. The final lines of *The Prelude*, concerning how poetry might show the “thousand-fold” beauty which a mind might create, express a desire to “instruct” other men. The pedagogical dream at the end of Book Fourteenth is reminiscent of Wordsworth’s famous description of what true poets do from his “Preface” to the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*: “we shall describe objects and utter sentiments of such a nature and in such connection with each other, that the understanding of the being to whom we address ourselves, if he be in a healthful state of association, must necessarily be in some degree enlightened . . .” (126). The Wordsworthian subject, then, utters words in such a way that those who hear will take into themselves the distinctly Wordsworthian sublime perception—or, in existential language, a transcendent state of existence.

One does not scale Snowdon—nor write an epic about the experience—without sacrifice. The beginning lines of Wordsworth’s Book Fifth of *The Prelude* deal poetically with the psychostructural process by which the poetic utterance is transcribed through the act of writing, a living breath entombed in the hope of extending its longevity. This process tortures the living word, and the poet questions whether the violence of inscription can be justified when even the most canonized and carefully preserved texts inevitably face decay: material decay as the physical book falls apart and rots, contextual decay as the culture and society which infused it with meaning alter over time, and total

decay as humanity itself eventually becomes extinct and the universe dissolves into entropy. The life, inscription, erosion, and eventual erasure of the written word might then resemble the impermanence of the matured mind of the triumphant poet at the end of Book Fourteenth. Both written word and mind-scape face a mortality which would be denied but cannot be, and so in Book Fifth, Wordsworth's subject mourns, despite the triumphs of

. . . the sovereign Intellect,
 Who through that bodily image hath diffused,
 As might appear to the eye of fleeting time,
 A deathless spirit. (5.15-5.18)

While the "sovereign Intellect" might achieve transcendence, Wordsworth's subjects dreads the death of that Intellect's living works. The poetic subject adds that

Thou also, man! hast wrought,
 For commerce of thy nature with herself,
 Things that aspire to unconquerable life;
 And yet we feel—we cannot choose by feel—
 That they must perish. (5.18-5.22)

Indeed, the process of writing poetry itself summons *ennui*: "Through length of time, by patient exercise / Of study and hard thought; there, there it is / That sadness finds its fuel" (5.9-5.11). An inspired utterance begins, born out of the chora (the voided place), but the sustained utterance, the epic in particular, has to defend its life against encroaching

silence. At the end of each line, the poem looks back on itself and wonders, “Was it for this?” (1.269).

It was never for “this,” particularly in Wordsworthian poetry which seeks to invoke more than it denotes. Wordsworth attempts, perhaps as much as any poet, to indicate a texture of reality which eludes words and exists as a temporal instant: being only once and never again, precious in that it never returns and often dismissed as irrelevant for the same reason, like the Boy of Winander—but the boy destined to die will have to wait.

The strange collection of scenes in Book Fifth have a reasoned, thematic order which ought to be respected in analysis. The Book begins as the fire fueling the novice poet burns down, and he faces the grim, grinding reality of crafting a great text. The despair in the *Dream of the Arab*, then, expresses a desire—sublimated into the unconscious of a friend (Coleridge, surely) so intimate as to have been at times confused with the self—for apocalypse to wash away all obligation to elaborate upon and repair the egotistically sublime edifice of both the singular and collective intellectual accomplishment.

The accomplishment of literary and martial feats bear some parallel consideration, evidenced by the drafting process of *The Prelude*. The editors of the 1979 Norton edition of *The Prelude* note that “In Book IV of the five-book *Prelude* there was no break between the *Discharged Soldier* (1805, IV, 360-504) and 1805, V, 1-48” (152). The *Discharged Soldier* calls to mind other military men from *Lyrical Ballads*, on their own epic journeys home, met by a naïve, uncomprehending narrator. This *Discharged*

Soldier interrupts the young, vacationing Wordsworth who had been recovering from the negative influences of university life, soothed by a return to nature's yonic care.³⁸ The Discharged Soldier appears as a sobering reminder that the great work—be it the work of the war or the work of composing an entry in the English poetic canon to rival Milton—remains undone. The ghostly aspect of the soldier draws out sympathetic (if perhaps fundamentally self-serving) pains in the young poet, himself retreating from a war with conventional modes of being and expression.

The 1850 *Prelude* obscures the link between the Discharged Soldier at the end of Book IV and the fuel of sadness which begins Book V. That the Discharged Soldier passage is one of several poems composed separately and then incorporated into *The Prelude* indicates an association in the mind of Wordsworth intuiting the interlude as offering a thematic link that he later rejected as inappropriate. Perhaps Wordsworth sensed upon reflection that his parallel between a soldier of war and a soldier of mind might strike readers as gratuitous. Writing might be thought of as a “martial art” at times, but this soldier was, in all likelihood, inspired by a particular, once-living man whose sad condition demanded discrete treatment.

Particular life is the exact essence of being which the written word tends to obscure and inspires a corresponding rage in the speaking poet as he claws against the tomb he builds around himself—that is the burial of the speaking subject in the great,

³⁸ “Yoni” is a Sanskrit term for “vagina” or “womb” and is symbol for the Hindu Divine Mother, either Shakti or Devi (“yoni”). Some feminists have adopted the term and use the word “yonic” to describe imagery evocative of the feminine as in lakes, fertile earth, dark forests, etc.

epic poem. The poet sacrifices his momentary self to his monumental self, in imitation of the myth of transcendence. Wordsworth's subject describes the

. . . Tremblings of the heart
 It gives, to think that our immortal being
 No more shall need such garments; and yet man,
 As long as he shall be the child of earth,
 Might also 'weep to have' what he may lose,
 Nor be himself extinguished, but survive,
 Abject, depressed, forlorn, disconsolate. (5.22-5.29)³⁹

Wordsworth shrinks back at the degradation of those moments of sublime insight, as if he would snatch at the clouds of glory trailing away. The essence of the sublime experience cannot be bottled.

Wordsworth's despair launches into a fantasy—the Dream of the Arab shared with him by “a studious friend” (5.51). That the friend's dream begins after reading another epic (Cervantes) echoes the theme already introduced: books before the flood. Although the narrator of the dream and his Arab Quixote are to “bury those two books,” ostensibly to protect them from the oncoming deluge, one notes that the second book—the shell that sings an Ode—prophesies the (its) forthcoming destruction. Perhaps the words themselves had brought this end, just as the reading of Cervantes inspired the dream where all the world would be washed away but for, possibly, books of geometry

³⁹ Editors of the Norton Critical Edition of *The Prelude*, note that the quoted phrase points to Shakespeare's sonnet 62: “This thought s as a death, which cannot choose / But weep to have that which it fears to lose” (66).

and verse. The shell-book itself becomes divine. The woken dreamer describes the shell/book, writing that it

. . . was a god, yea many gods,
 Had voices more than all the winds, with power
 To exhilarate the spirit, and to soothe,
 Through every clime, the heart of human kind. (5.104-5.109)

A book inspires a dream of a flood, a book prophesies the flood, and, upon waking in terror with the image of a drowning world still in his mind, the studious friend views the sea spread before him and a book by his side.

Dreams, Freud says, express desire. Even nightmares express repressed aggressions and death drives. In doing so, they expose an ambivalence at the heart of all human relationships, tangles of conflicted feelings that they are. The Dream of the Arab exposes the ambivalence of authorship, the extent to which writers hate the words they write for the inferiority of those words to communicate the experience which inspired them. Simultaneously, the dreamer desires to “cleave unto this man,” this Quixote, the man carrying the books, but the dreamer also desires to be abandoned in the “bed of glittering light” that is “the waters of the deep / Gathering upon us,” the wash of impressions evoked by masterful poetic language in their excess of meaning beyond signification (5.129-5.131). The Arab knight rides for the books by “Shakespeare, or Milton, laborers divine!” (5.166). The Arab is a scholar, carrying the sacred knowledge into the future, but he is not Wordsworth.

John Jones wrote of Wordsworth in *The Egotistical Sublime: A History of Wordsworth's Imagination* (1954) that Wordsworth “read little, and showed no interest in contemporary thought” (9). Jones overstates in reaction to a trend in his time “to argue that in a particular poem or period of his life Wordsworth was under the influence of this or that philosopher; and then to study the work of master and disciple in close relation” despite “Wordsworth himself [who] gives no encouragement to this tendency” (9).⁴⁰ Stephen Gill’s *Wordsworth: A Life* (1989) establishes Wordsworth as uncommonly well read as a young boy and, drawing on letters by Dorothy, describes an adulthood in which books fed the man when food couldn’t. To say Wordsworth was no scholar should not imply he “didn’t read.” Rather, he had a different relationship with books than a scholar might. The scholar preserves the canon. Wordsworth sought to surpass that canon.

Wordsworth addresses fellow poet Coleridge: “How could I ever play an ingrate’s part?” (5.173) and then adds,

O Friend! O Poet! Brother of my soul,
 Think not that I could pass along untouched
 By these remembrances. Yet wherefore speak?
 Why call upon a few weak words to say
 What is already written in the hearts
 Of all that breathe? (5.181-5.186)

Why attempt to write what has already been masterfully expressed in words of such fine composition that they have impressed into the national consciousness? He answers

⁴⁰ The tendency Jones objects to among Wordsworthians of the 1950s may still be alive and well in many and varied branches of critical theory.

himself: it is just to celebrate utterances expressive of profound meaning. No matter whether those utterances were found in “low” or “high” discursive genres. Irrespective of their historical, cultural situation, such great poetic utterances speak something seemingly universal, something like the “untimely.” He wrote that it is just to commemorate

. . . all books which lay
 Their sure foundations in the heart of man,
 Whether by native prose, or numerous verse,
 From Homer the great Thunderer, from the voice
 That roars along the bed of the Jewish song (5.197-5.203)

From the most socially and spiritually elevated men to cottagers, spinners, “sun burnt travellers,” old and working men, to Wordsworth, it is just

That I should here assert their rights, attest
 Their honours, and should, once for all, pronounce
 Their benediction; speak of them as Powers
 For ever to be hallowed (5.216-5.219)

In their introduction to the Norton Critical Edition of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth, Abrams, and Gill write, “Above all, it was Milton against whom [Wordsworth] matched himself; and of the major long poems in English only *The Prelude* stands comparison with *Paradise Lost*” (ix). In fact, the “numerous verse,” the Norton editors note, references *Paradise Lost*, V, 150, in which the angels sing,

. . . Such prompt eloquence
 Flowed from their lips in prose or num’rous verse

More tuneable than needed lute or harp

To add more sweetness (5.149-5.152)

The truth of Heaven had been written by Milton, and, perhaps, the truth of Great Men by Homer, but the truth of common men or merely a common man, a poet failing in philosophic pretension, starving and wandering between England and France—that had not been written yet and that was still worthy. To Wordsworth, profound poetic utterance is only less “For what we are and what we may become, / Than Nature’s self, which is the breath of God, / Or his pure Word by miracle revealed” (5.220-5.223). In other words, poetry as a means of spiritual elevation is second only to nature.

The friend in the Dream, a repressed aspect of Wordsworth’s subjectivity as well as a representation of Coleridge the man, wavers between his desire to join with scholars, preserve the legacy of the great poets of the past and to upset that tradition with a revolution in poetic language. A scholarly identification would be in keeping with those forces which compel the poetic subject to maintain the Symbolic order and support the Law of the Father. However, Wordsworth’s appropriation of those forms traditionally reserved for commemoration of ancient kings and gods (epics) for what is almost inarguably the most egotistical poem in the entire English literary canon creates a new law.

That Wordsworth should then gesture towards maternal nature (5.222-5. 245) and, even more strikingly, make reference to his actual mother who has been all but entirely absent from his autobiographical reminiscences, completes the oedipal cycle (5.246-5.293). Wordsworth writes of a disinclination to disrupt his “resting” mother, to

. . . break upon the Sabbath of her rest
 With any thought that looks at others' blame;
 Nor would I praise her but in perfect love.
 Hence I am checked (5.260-5.264)

Gill's biography describes a mother often retreating to her parents' home to escape the burden of her often solitary parental responsibilities while her husband traveled. Upon her death, the Wordsworth brood would scatter, falling into the care of various relatives who expected circumspection and gratitude from their wards. The kind owner of a boarding house served as something of a surrogate mother in Wordsworth's school days, but the figure of Nature itself, more than any particular woman, would become the object of his passionate mother-oriented desire. The vast abstractions of Nature as Mother and Holy Spirit as Father in Wordsworth's imagination operate so literally as to be almost critically embarrassing to explain. For instance, in the *Stolen Boat* passage, Wordsworth's speaking subject remembers himself as young boy in a strikingly oedipal scene. He transgresses by first stealing a boat and, with phallic oars, rowing on (thrusting into) the surface of the lake, maternal in its womb-like cradle of darkness, until a massive, upright and thus paternal cliff appears to loom over, threaten, and chase him away from surface of the mother-lake. The dynamic between maternal and paternal figures presages the Freudian formulation—almost ploddingly so. Wordsworth adds of his literal mother that she “had virtual faith that He / Who fills the mother's breast with innocent milk / Doth also for our nobler part provide” (5.271-5.274). In addition to having a childlike faith in providence, Wordsworth writes that his mother loved the

“hours for what they are” with “modest meekness, simple-mindedness, / A heart that found benignity and hope, / Being itself benign” (5.286; 5.291-5.294). Thus, all that Wordsworth can say of his mother is that she was what a woman of his time was supposed to be: submissive, pious, and quiet. The passive, silent characterization of Wordsworth’s mother contrasts with his ecstatic devotion to his surrogate, imaginary mother. The poetic subject addresses her,

. . . O Nature! Thou hast fed
 My lofty speculations; and in thee;
 For this uneasy heart of ours, I find
 A never-failing principle of joy
 And purest passion. (2.447-2.451)

Wordsworth is then able to have two mothers: Ann Cookson Wordsworth and Nature herself. Ann Wordsworth could assume the status of the passive feminine at the service of masculine authority (in her case, insofar as Wordsworth characterizes her, more to the masculine God the Father than John Wordsworth), and Nature could figure as that maternally sublime object of desire that Wordsworth would fight the father (the father being both the literary tradition and God himself) for dominion over. Wordsworth’s bifurcated maternal identification allows him to explore psychic desires which would otherwise be unutterable. Fragmented and divided association in *The Prelude* betray a repressed desire to defy of inscription—inscription being, for example, unity in the compositional arrangement of Book Fifth or even a finalized, published edition of *The Prelude* in Wordsworth’ lifetime.

Having wandered so far into the fantasy-scape of the imagination, Wordsworth introduces the Boy of Winander to return to his theme of the relationship between books and mortality, because he writes, “My drift I fear / Is scarcely obvious . . .” (5.293-5.294). As Wordsworth waxes on about the ideality of childhood, the Boy of Winander appears. The subject remembers, “There was a Boy: ye knew him well, ye cliffs / And islands of Winander!” (5.364-5.365).⁴¹ The memory of the boy recalls the sounds he made when

. . . with fingers interwoven, both hands
 Pressed closely palm to palm, and to his mouth
 Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,
 Blew mimicking hootings to the silent owls,
 That they might answer him (5.370-5.374)

The boy makes an instrument of his own body to create animal sounds. His play with unstructured sound resembles infantile babble—pleasurable and sensual without making sense. The boy’s own body, his own self originates the sounds which cause a cacophony as nature responds

. . . with quivering peals,
 And long halloos and screams, and echoes loud,
 Redoubled and redoubled, concourse wild
 Of jocund din (5.376-379)

⁴¹ The passage has been published separately in its 1799 form in *The Complete Works*.

The quivering and swelling crest of noise suggests an arousal in the landscape. Nature responds passionately to the cries of the Boy of Winander like a mother to an infant. The exchange is followed by refractory silence and

. . . in that silence while he hung
 Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
 Has carried far into his heart the voice
 Of mountain torrents (5.381-5.385)

The voice of Nature and the voice of the mother stream into the Boy's inner self and indicate that he is a mother-identified son. However, the identification of boy to nature and mother through sound ends in death "ere he was full twelve years old" (390). As the mother-identified child risks falling into a passive, silent state in imitation of the mother's repressed state in patriarchal Western society, a being of pure utterance (voice) must necessarily dissolve in the chora of nature as a "Yawp" fades into silence. In the same way that birth predicts death and so makes the chora a space indicative of both, so does a subject born in the pure soundscape of voice ultimately predict silence—that "speaking subject's dissolution.

The speaking subject of *The Prelude* recalls seeing death in the same valley as the Boy of Winander in what can be read as an apology for books and justification for the continuation of the Great Work of the poet's life: composition. The Drowned Man "bolt upright / Rose, with his ghastly face, a spectre shape / Of terror" (5.499-5.501). However, the nine-year-old Wordsworth recalls feeling no fear at the sight of the corpse, having been inoculated by fantasies far more grim in "the shining streams / Of faëry land, the

forests of romance” and recalls his volume of *Arabian Nights* (5.454-5.455; 5.462). The association offers an escape from the confrontation with an immutable horror: the horror of death and the realization of mortality. Books offer the distance necessary to escape the death-by-drowning (excessive maternal identification). Then, while books limit the capacity of the ideas their author might attempt to express, they also carry something away which would otherwise echo and vanish into the night just like the hoots of the Boy of Winander. Books offer, then, a memorial to the speaking subject, and, for the speaking subject of *The Prelude*, that memorial creates an entry into monumental time as Kristeva has described it.

Kristeva writes that the subject-in-process navigates between a desire for the mother—understood as embodied, immediate, and entirely mortal experience—and a desire for affinity with the father—understood as structures, even sometimes monumental power capable of mastery of that maternal. A subject-in-process avoids total identification with either power, rather playing between the two. The “golden store of books” Wordsworth so tellingly locates at his father’s house serves as memorials, signs which can only indicate a moment which has passed (5.477-5.479). So, while Wordsworth might say “I am sad / At the thought of raptures now for ever flown,” he would still, powerless against the truth of inevitable death, give honor to the consolation of poetics for what they can preserve. When Wordsworth’s speaking subject describes “visionary power”—a future-oriented agency—he finds it “embodied” in the mystery of words. As Kristeva has written, the nature of utterance is to navigate between dark and shadowy mother-oriented desires and aspirations to structured, secure power of the

father. Wordsworth's speaking subject navigates these desires, professing belief that if the words be "intricate," those words will be "circumfused" with a "glory not their own" and, through deft appeal to the Symbolic order while sneaking in the shadows, build a monument (a "mansion" as the Wordsworth's speaking subject describes it) in which to "live" outside time (mortality). Wordsworth's speaking subject aspires to an agency in which

. . . Visionary power

Attends the motions of the viewless winds,

Embodied in the mystery of words:

There, darkness makes abode, and all the host

Of shadowy things work endless changes there,

As in a mansion like their proper home.

Even forms and substances are circumfused

By that transparent veil with light divine,

And, through the turnings of intricate verse,

Present themselves as objects recognized,

In flashes, and with glory not their own. (5.595-5.605)

A faith or "projection," then, drives Wordsworth's composition: he hopes to write so that readers, or at least some readers, having sufficient imaginative capacity and sensitivity, can recognize the meaning filtering through the veil of inscribed words and summon in their own bodies an approximate perception of the transient substance that was his own experience. In so doing, the embodied meaning which cannot be contained

in words but merely evoked—merely indicated—might find a different mode of embodiment in a “quality and fabric more divine.” Thus, Wordsworth’s transcendence might be perhaps like that of the existentialists at least as much as like that of theologians.

In the shadowy and maternal creative space where the poetic utterance comes into being, the subject dies and is reborn. Wordsworth returned to this site in his revisionary process because he had faith that, in the crucible of becoming over again, he might craft a subjective utterance which might enter the monumental position of literary canon. Such a position would occupy both paternal “history” *and* maternal time—birth and death embodied in readers who themselves bring the subject of poetic utterance into being in futures ongoing.

CONCLUSION

Legacy and Love

In *The End of the Line: Essays on Psychoanalysis and the Sublime* (1985), Neil Hertz suggests that Julia Kristeva's abject subjectivity provides a model to illustrate a seeping of consciousness between place, time, and bodies (259). Hertz finds one such seeping consciousness in the dissociative identifications made by the speaking subject of *The Prelude*. Wordsworth's subjective orientation vacillates between present and past, reader and author. Hertz writes that chains "of successive and analogous relations" produce sublime meaning (25). In addition to contributing one of the few analyses of Wordsworth which takes account of Kristeva's contributions, Hertz points out that Wordsworth's speaking subject occupies the positions of both reader and poet.

Wordsworth's Book of Books pays homage to the books which had influenced Wordsworth's speaking subject. In other words, Wordsworth's speaking subject analyzes the intertextuality of its own utterance. In the Riverside *Selected Poems and Prefaces by William Wordsworth*, Jack Stillinger glosses *The Prelude* Book Fifth's lines 591-605. According to Stillinger, the "visionary power" passage compares the relationship between poetic imagination and nature to the relationship between a reader's imagination and poetry. Stillinger writes, "The general idea is that the reader's imagination ('that transparent veil') operates creatively upon the 'works / Of mighty poets' in the same way that the mind acts creatively upon nature itself" (552). Wordsworth's lines following the passage on the "visionary power" of "intricate" verse turn his meditation on the theme of books towards his sense of himself as a reader.

Wordsworth concludes his Book of Books, reflecting that “Thus far a scanty record is deduced / Of what I owed to books in early life” (5.606-5.607). He adds that he could not continue his work on *The Prelude* without acknowledging his literary influences and writes that he “was indisposed / To any further progress at a time / When these acknowledgements were left unpaid” (5.611-5.613). The speaking subject could not account for its own growth without recognizing the genealogy of signifying structures and systems of organization and coherence it has inherited. Kristeva has named such transpositions the “phenotext.” Following Kristeva’s theory that all books produce meaning intertextually by borrowing meanings and systems of signification and presenting those borrowed elements from new position, those influential books constitute an aspect indivisible from the speaking subject of *The Prelude*. Thus, the work of accounting for the growth of the poet’s mind would naturally require some recognition of the texts it took into itself. Furthermore, all readers make meaning when they read a text by comparing the text they are currently reading to every text they have read before. Therefore, while Book Fifth ostensibly considers the importance of books to Wordsworth as a reader, those books also create a model for his view of himself as a maker of books—or what he wanted to accomplish through print.

Wordsworth and his intimate circle believed that Wordsworth’s poetry would be work for the ages. One could turn to Coleridge’s faith (unfulfilled) in the greatness of the never-complete *The Recluse* to illustrate the confidence Wordsworth’s private community had in his work. One could also just as well turn to the dedicated support of Wordsworth’s coterie and patrons. However, perhaps the greatest testament of faith in the

greatness of Wordsworth's poetry was given by the women who loved him—especially Dorothy Wordsworth and Mary Hutchinson. The Wordsworth women, in addition to assuming the domestic labor typical of women in their time, class, and nation, supported William Wordsworth's work morally and practically. In contrast, though Wordsworth would live to experience tremendous public acclaim, his publications received scathing reviews.

William Hazlitt reviewed Wordsworth's *The Excursion* in August 1814, observing that Wordsworth's mind was "jealous of all competition" and so always turned inwards. Hazlitt writes, "The powers of his mind prey upon itself. It is as if there were nothing but himself and the universe. He lives in the busy solitude of his own heart; in the deep silence of thought" (10-11; qtd. in *William Wordsworth* 304). Despite assertions by Wordsworth's friends and family that Hazlitt's often biting reviews were motivated by a personal vendetta, Hazlitt's criticism accurately describes Wordsworth's speaking subject as one fascinated by objects mainly as they relate back to that subject. Wordsworth refrained from publishing *The Prelude* in his lifetime primarily because he believed that the self-fascination evident throughout the poem could only be justified by *The Recluse*. Wordsworth's sense of propriety which kept *The Prelude* private underscores that his was a mind conscious of its own excessive self-awareness.

His tendency to "revisit" and revise early work was a response to criticism and an attempt to control the legacy his poetry would leave in the minds of readers. That legacy would be proof of divine approbation. Wordsworth once wrote of his legacy to Catherine Clarkson, dated 31 December 1814, "I have neither care nor anxiety being assured that if

it be of God—it must stand; and that if the spirit of truth, ‘The Vision and the Faculty divine’ be not in it, and so do not pervade it, it must perish” (181; qtd. in *William Wordsworth* 311). If his legacy persisted, that persistence would be proof that his poetry invoked divine meaning. While his standards might be bold and indicate a deep well of self-confidence, those standards also suggest that, if his work did not survive in posterity, the labor of his life would be entirely a waste—indeed, sinful. Wordsworth expressed many times that the purpose of poetry ought to be the spiritual improvement of its audience—for example, in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* and in the final lines of Book Fourteenth of *The Prelude*. He must have written his lines on the “visionary power” of words not only as homage to the books he had read but also as a measure of what he hoped to achieve with the books he would create.

Rather than viewing Wordsworth’s preoccupation with his legacy as evidence of an egotistical or narcissistic personality, his worried attention to the effects of his poetry might be interpreted as an expression of sublime love. In “Thomas Aquinas: Natural Love and Love of Self,” Kristeva describes accounts of love as an attraction to an idea of metaphysical, supersensible connectedness with a force that challenges subjective boundaries—the divine or transcendent. She finds that such forms of love have persisted not only in jouissance but also in aesthetic accounts of the sublime and writes, “One might have followed, with Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel, the surviving manifestations of that amatory appetite that, as the feverish pull toward the One and appropriation of the good, becomes distorted into esthetics or morality, into sublimity or jouissance . . .” (186). Thus, Kristeva suggests that the aesthetic account of the sublime

exists as a relic from a neglected account of love—one which recuperates love so that it is not conceptualized as fundamentally self-serving. She explains through Baruch Spinoza's *amor intellectualis* that God—as a being encompassing all that is—cannot love “others” because nothing is “other” than himself. Thus, when God loves, he must love himself. Divine love, then, is a sensation which plays between the sense of the self as a subject and the sense of the self as continuous beyond that subjectivity. According to Kristeva,

It is obvious for Spinoza that God does not love, properly speaking, for there is no object external to him, but he loves himself, and it is by partaking of that truth that understanding reaches its goal—salvation. Therefore, Spinoza will not define love, as Descartes had done, as the “will of the lover to join the loved object,” but as follows: “Love is joy with the accompanying idea of an external cause.” (186-187)

In the model of love offered by Spinoza, Kristeva writes, love does not have to be a willful oriented at an external object. Will implies mastery, and a distinct external object requires a point of demarcation.

The joy of love, in Spinoza's model, escapes the soulosexual power dynamic implicit in the only partially accurate boundaries that separate the “I” who loves from the idea of what might cause love. Kristeva frames the experience of joy in divine love is a pleasure at continuity rather than a thrill of mastery. She writes, “the amatory impulse of joy is an identification of one's own self with God (*sive Natura*): without a Cartesian falling back toward a mastering subjectivity, but through jubilatory submersion of understanding in an object or infinite cause that is joyously in love with itself (187).” The

mind of the lover, in other words, might be said to be find salvation by identifying with God-as-love—and, in doing so, love of the self is redeemed. When Wordsworth's speaking subject imagines a rebirth—a reincarnation—in the minds of readers, that subject imagines gifting moments of rapture through a divinely sanctioned connection.

The divine rebirth might, in the fantasy of Wordsworth's speaking subject, recuperate the maternal as a facet of the sublime. Further consideration of Wordsworth's maternal sublime might give more attention to Barbara Shapiro's *The Romantic Mother: Narcissistic Patterns in Romantic Poetry* (1983) in light of an expanded account of Kristeva's notion of sanctified self-love. Mary Jacobus's *Romanticism, Writing, and Sexual Difference: Essays on The Prelude* (1989), *First Things: The Maternal Imaginary in Literature, Art, and Psychoanalysis* (1995), and *The Poetics of Psychoanalysis: In the Wake of Klein* (2005) might also contribute valuable insight into the nature of maternity in the romantic imagination. Jacobus's *The Poetics of Psychoanalysis* in particular might read well alongside Kristeva's *Melanie Klein* (2001).

Further research into Wordsworth's maternal sublime should consider various mother figures who would represent troubling embodiments of maternity to Wordsworth, beginning with Ann Cookson Wordsworth (his dead mother), Ann Tyson (a surrogate mother figure), Annette Vallon (Wordsworth's French lover and mother to his illegitimate daughter), and Mary Robinson (the "real" Mary of Buttermere). How were these historical women represented in Wordsworth's poetry? What do those poetic representations reveal about the influence of women on Wordsworth's psychology?

One might also interrogate the mythology of the Romantic author as a solitary genius, separate from influence. In the case of Wordsworth, his compositions show the influence of Spenser and Milton and benefit from ideas developed through conversation with Coleridge and Dorothy Wordsworth. Furthermore, the kind of work undertaken by Dorothy Wordsworth, Mary Hutchinson Wordsworth, and Sara Hutchinson of transcribing Wordsworth's drafting notes into manuscripts in preparation for printing warrants reconsideration as a form of collaborative authorship. The fiercely supportive Lady Margaret Beaumont is another woman who worked tirelessly (in Lady Beaumont's case, perhaps at times counter-productively) to ensure Wordsworth's poetic legacy (*William Wordsworth* 267). Her role and the role of women like her who cultivated societies supportive of literary endeavors deserves serious attention. In short, an interrogation of the notion of the "individual author" would do well to consider gynocritical work and elaborate on that work towards a more collaborative theory of authorship.

Yet another possible direction for additional study might consider how Wordsworth's confidence that poetic language offered the most appropriate medium for his project places him in the company of Charles Pierre Baudelaire and Comte de Lautréamont. Kristeva discusses Baudelaire and Lautréamont at length as examples of poetic speaking subjects. Though they wrote in the French literary tradition (rather than English) and began publishing some fifty years after the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Baudelaire, Lautréamont, and Wordsworth make prophetic use of revolutionary poetic language. A comparative literature study drawing on semanalysis might be fruitful,

perhaps beginning with a consideration of how the French Revolution may have influenced each poet's psycholinguistic treatment of the Symbolic order as an abstracted figure of a repressive and crumbling power system.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY

chora: Kristeva defines “chora” in *Revolution in Poetic Language* as “a modality of signifiante in which the linguistic sign is not yet articulated as the absence of an object and as the distinction between real and symbolic” (“The Semiotic *Chora* Ordering the Drives” 26). In other words, the Kristevan chora is a phase of meaning-making pregnant with ideas, feelings, and thoughts—so much so that not every part filling that phase can be embodied once those ideas, feelings, and thoughts find expression in language. Perhaps understood best as the feeling of knowing what one means before “putting it in words,” the chora can be conceptually imagined as an empty space through which meaning is “projected” into a form of representation.

conscious: The usage of “conscious” and “consciousness” in this text borrows from the Freudian tradition. While some psychologists distinguish between a conscious, unconscious, and subconscious, the sources herein only discuss the conscious and unconscious. The conscious, in this limited deployment, should be understood as the thought and emotional processes of which a subject is aware.

genotext: The “genotext” is a Kristevan neologism which describe the bodily, often unconscious elements of meaning at work in a text’s production. In “The System and the Speaking Subject” (1973), Kristeva explains it to be “the release and subsequent articulation of the drives as constrained by the social code yet not reducible to language

systems” (28). The elements of the text which are expressive of the bodily drives constitute the “genotext.”

Imaginary: According to Lacan, the Imaginary is one of the three orders of human experience alongside the Real and the Symbolic. Before entering the Symbolic order, children understand their world through an Imaginary order, as when an infant views its reflection in the mirror and confuses the image of its body with its true self. Likewise, the generalized images of objects are confused with the “reality” of the objects in either ignorance or denial of the argument that one experiences one’s experience of reality rather than reality itself. To clarify, one never fully leaves the Imaginary phase but instead overwrites that phase with additional orders of meaning (as in the Symbolic), so the Imaginary order remains present in the meaning-making process. The Imaginary order offers a creative site beneath the social, restrictive Symbolic order where the mind is “ignorant” of the physical limitations of the Real. The liberation of the experience within the Imaginary when unchecked, resembles psychosis (“imaginary (*imaginaire*)” 244).

intertextuality: A Kristevan neologism, “intertextuality” asserts that all texts interact with other texts. Roudiez comments that the “concept, however has generally been misunderstood.” “Intertextuality” does not describe the “influence of one writer upon another” or “the sources of a literary work.” Roudiez defines it as “the transposition of one or more *systems* of signs into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the

enunciative and denotative position” (15). All texts are partial, and all texts are interdependent. All texts borrow meaning and established systems of signs from other texts. All writers become writers by reading and assimilating the models provided by what they have read into their new textual productions. Furthermore, all reading functions similarly, as a reader imagines what they read by referencing texts already read (“intertextuality” 252).

jouissance: Kristeva’s usage follows Lacan’s, given in his 1972-73 seminar. In common French usage, “*jouissance*” indicates sexual, spiritual, physical, and conceptual enjoyment; the different mode of the enjoyment is determined by context. However, when Lacan uses “*jouissance*,” he refers to all modes of enjoyment occurring simultaneously (Roudiez 15-16). This totality of enjoyment overwhelms a subject, so much so that the sensation blurs the distinction between enjoyment and suffering.

phallic mother: In “The Novel as Polylogue,” Kristeva expands on the fantasy of the “phallic woman”—a woman with a phallus (recall that to the child, the notion of the phallus is an image standing in for power, for agency). She writes that “the phallic mother has possession of our imaginaries because she controls the family, and the imaginary is familial” and that the phallic mother “gathers us all into orality and anality, into the pleasure of fusion and rejection, with a few limited variations possible” (191). The figure of the phallic mother, the Kristeva’s account of language, has most power in

the Imaginary, pre-Symbolic order—a gestational zone. She gives and takes herself away and through her presence or absence grants and removes fulfillment of a subject's desires.

phenotext: Yet another Kristevan neologism, “phenotext” refers to the socio-historical production process of a text. Kristeva describes it in “The System and the Speaking Subject” (1973) as “the signifying system as it as it presents itself to phenomenological intuition” and adds that it is “describable in terms of structure, or of competence/performance, or according to models” (28). One might think of the phenotext in terms of established forms and modes of organization and coherence.

Real: Like the Imaginary and the Symbolic, the Real is one of Lacan's orders of human experience. The Real includes those elements of human experience which cannot be represented. The Real cannot be imagined and thus cannot be included in the Symbolic order. Because humans make sense of their experience through images and symbols, encounters with the Real challenge their reality and are traumatic (“real (*reel*)” 400).

semanalyse/semanalysis: Kristeva coined the neologism “*semanalyse*,” a French neologism combining the French “*sémiotique*” or “semiotics” as in “the science of signs” with the French “*analyse*” or “analysis” which refers to the Greek root “*analyein*,” meaning “to dissolve” (Roudiez 18). “*Analyse*,” even more specifically in Kristeva's poststructural usage, calls forth “*psychoanalyse*” or “psychoanalysis.” Thus, “*semanalyse*” or “semanalysis” refers to a practice which draws upon psychoanalytic

models in order to observe how speaking subjects dissolve signs in order to make new meanings.

signifiante: Leon S. Roudiez resurrects the obsolete term, “signifiante,” to indicate a more precise meaning which eludes the varied connotations associated with “significance.” He explains that “signifiante” refers to “fluid and archaic” (a Freudian sense of archaism) operations which occur in language that enable “text to signify what representative and communicative speech does not say” (18). One might understand “signifiante” as the particular texture of meaning available in poetic language.

signification: Kristeva describes the “realm of signification” as “a realm of *positions* . . . structured as a break in the signifying process, establishing the *identification* of the subject and its object as preconditions of propositionality.” She adds, “We shall call this break, which produces the positing of signification, a *thetic* phase” (“The Thetic: Rupture and/or Boundary” 43). Signification, then, can be understood as an instance where a subject links itself to an object. The linkage between subject and object should be understood as the grammatical act which occurs as a result of the “position” of subject and object in relation to each other. This linkage, furthermore, is expressed through the larger system of signs (as in the language) that imposes arbitrary and historically coded signifiers (see entry for “sign system”) onto the signified concepts of subject and object.

When Kristeva uses variations of the word “signification”—words like “significance” or “signify”—those words should be understood as referring to properties of the “realm of signification.”

sign system: In semiotics, the science of signs, “sign systems” often refer to languages. While the phrase has wider applications ranging from “orders of things” to communication between animals, the linguistic application is most relevant for this text. A sign combines, as Saussure writes, “not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image” and adds “[the] latter is not the material sound a physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses” (852-853). The “concept” Saussure refers to is called the “signified,” and the “sound-image” is called the “signifier.” The linguistic sign describes how these two points in relation enable communication. Furthermore, signs take on meaning in their relationship with one another, like when an entry in a dictionary refers to other words. These linkages between signs are called “chains of signification” by Lacan. A sign system encompasses a set of signs and the linkages possible between them and can limit what can be expressed either by absence of signs (as when different language lack words for certain colors) or by limiting the relationships possible between signs (as in the now embattled convention in English of deferring to masculine pronouns when speaking of hypothetical subjectivity).

speaking subject: Each act of speech or “utterance” proceeds from a divided, speaking subject. The speaking subject is divided by what Kristeva calls “the infinitization of the

symbolic limit” or, in other words, endless possible combinations of symbols with endless possible meanings (“The System and the Speaking Subject” 29). In forming its utterance, a subject navigates between competing elements: propriety and desire, conscious and unconscious processes, as well as signifier and signified. These elements seem to the subject to be both inside and outside itself. Likewise, the speech act draws on history as a basis of understanding and rejects that history as it attempts to create a new future. The competitive elements at work in the speaking subject then require that it be thought of as divided, in contrast to the “transcendental ego” which—if it exists, is not observed in the speech act.

subject-in-process: The subject-in-process (*sujet-en-proces*)—also called the “subject-on-trial in reference to its troubled position in relation to the “Law of the Father” structuring the Symbolic order—names the state of being in which a speaking subject is split and exists in fragmented, contradictory portions. This state of conflicted division puts the subject in a state of crisis which it resolves by making an utterance which compromises between the conflicting drives. Such conflicting drives would be a desire for coherence by way of reference—thus subordination—to a sign system established in the Symbolic order as opposed to a desire for unregulated play in sound and gesture.

Symbolic: The Symbolic, along with the Imaginary and the Real, structures human existence according to Lacan. Building upon Saussure’s observation that a signifier and its signified (see entry for “sign system”) are arbitrarily connected, Lévi-Strauss adds that

a representation and its meaning have a similarly arbitrary relationship and extends that principle of arbitrariness to include “all cultural phenomena.” Lacan additionally observes that because the unconscious produces and exists with language systems, the structure of the unconscious must be like the structure of language. Furthermore, a subjectivity only forms once an infant enters the Symbolic order. Because the signifier and signified are not identical and representation is imperfect, subjectivity is alienated—*foremost* from itself—by this entry (“symbolic (*symbolique*)” 461-462). Thus, the Symbolic can be understood as the mental structure imposed and activated by sign systems.

thetic: Kristeva describes the “thetic” as the break “which produces the positing of signification.” In enunciation (necessarily thetic), “the subject must separate from and through his image, from and through his objects. This image and objects must first be posited in a space that becomes symbolic because it connects the two separate positions, recording them or redistributing them in an open combinational system” (43). The thetic should be understood as a space created by various interrelated positions, as between a subject and that subject’s self-image and between the subject (and that subject’s self-image) and one or more objects (and the image of those objects). The theoretical space between the various positions called upon in the moment of enunciation (the positions just described) is thetic.

transcendental ego: Kristeva refers to the “transcendental ego” by way of Husserl as applied to Generative Grammar. She describes this ego as one “which has momentarily broken off its connection with . . . externality, which may be social, natural, or unconscious” (“The System and the Speaking Subject” 27). Husserl’s “transcendental ego” can be thought of as a linguistic subject which bridges the gap between Kant’s pure and practical reason in the speech act—a supersensible, metaphysical aspect of the human being.

unconscious: In contrast to conscious thought and feelings, the unconscious includes all thoughts and feelings which are not recognized by a subject. Psychoanalysis often attempts to reorganize which thoughts and feelings are recognized or repressed by an analysand.