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# Irony and Clerisy



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# Irony and Clerisy

## Introduction: Irony and Clerisy

### Deborah Elise White, Columbia University

1. The topic for this volume in the Romantic Circles Praxis Series was intended as something of an experiment. My initial impulse in soliciting articles under the heterogenous rubrics of "irony" and "clerisy" was to consider each in the nature of a metonymy for broader generic and ideological questions raised in romantic writing. I suggested irony as a stand-in, so to speak, for the romantic *topoi* of self-conciousness and self-division: contradiction, fragmentation, dissolution. I suggested clerisy as a stand-in for the seemingly rather different romantic *topoi* of high-culture and high-mindedness: institutionalization, historicization, stabilization.

2. Of course, the *aporias* of irony turn out to be, in many ways, the inevitable condition of clerical intervention and authority, even as the call for such intervention and authority testifies to an ironic consciousness that their influence can by no means be assumed. In conjoining these categories, I suppose (as do, I think, the authors of the articles that follow) that once they are set in motion, the interest lies in their profound interrelatedness and interdependence. The essays gathered together here explore such connections in a variety of ways that I shall take note of towards the close of this introduction, but I first take an editor's liberty of offering a brief sketch of the manner in which the two words have come into constellation within my own reading of romanticism.

3. Both "irony" and "clerisy" emerge into peculiar discursive prominence during the romantic era. Irony's provenance as a rhetorical term dates back to antiquity, but its usage receives a new birth through the theorizing of Friedrich Schlegel, emerging in his writing as something rather different than the "merely" rhetorical strategy through which one says one thing and means another. For Schlegel (and in his wake) the divide that characterizes its traditional rhetorical definition becomes an allusive point of departure for rethinking the divided nature of discursivity and subjectivity both. "Clerisy" is Coleridge's coinage for a learned class of (more or less) state functionaries responsible for the preservation and dissemination of the national heritage. The role of such a class—its centrality and importance to the nation-state—is developed in various ways, theoretical and practical, throughout the nineteenth century and, in Britain, usually with explicit reference to Coleridge's formulation (see Knight, Prickett, and Readings).

4. One way in which these two seemingly heterogeneous strands of romantic discourse come to be linked occurs thematically through the concept of *Bildung* or cultivation. In Schlegel's words "*Bildung ist antithetische Synthesis, und Vollendung bis zur Ironie* . . . " ("Cultivation is antithetical synthesis and perfection to the point of irony . . ." [quoted in Behler 98, my translation]). Irony for Schlegel plays many roles not the least of which is to designate the human capacity for playing many roles. The ironist stands away from himself. He arrives at perfection *to the point of irony*—to the point, that is, of reflection and reversal. Perhaps the best shorthand translation for specialists in British romanticism would be Keats's negative capability. Like negative capability, Schlegelian irony posits the projection of multiple identities in the absence of any one fixed identity. Keats associates this explicitly with the "poetical Character" (Keats 418), but for Schlegel all character is properly or, in its ironic (im)perfection, poetic. The notebook entry quoted above concludes:

> *Bei einem Menschen, der eine gewisse Höhe und Universalität der Bildung erreicht hat, ist sein Innres eine fortgehende Kette der ungeheuersten Revolutionen.*
>
> For a man who has achieved a certain height and universality of cultivation, his inner being is an ongoing chain of the most enormous revolutions. (Behler 98)

Irony is the impossibility of arriving at the end of this process—i.e. the impossibility of *being* cultured. [1] For just this reason, it is cultivation's antithetical condition of possibility.

5. The figure of "revolutions" evokes the radical provocation of such aphorisms for the business of *Bildung*—that is, for the production and reproduction of culture. The ongoing chain of irony must, to be genuinely ongoing and genuinely ironic, include itself as one of its links. "What gods will be able to save us from all these ironies?" Irony ends, as Schlegel himself writes, as "irony of irony," a fate from which no (human) history can escape: (Schulte-Sasse 125). This has been the emphasis of most contemporary readings of Schlegel. One of the most influential and uncompromising versions is still Paul de Man's: "absolute irony is a consciousness of madness, itself the end of all consciousness; it is a consiousness of a non-consciousness, a reflection on madness from the inside of madness itself . . . " (De Man 216).[2] Reading Schlegel as a (theoretical) revolutionary, one finds that the theory of irony ironizes even the acts of reflection that make irony possible.

6. To cultivate the self is, in effect, to discover that there is no self to cultivate. From a pedagogical point of view, in particular, to do it right is to get it wrong. The institutional forces of education and learning —for which Coleridge coined the term clerisy—must operate precisely in the space of this paradox. Irony constitutes the crisis of the clerisy. At the same time, and as it were ironically, clerisy represents itself as the resolution of that crisis. In Fichte's words, the scholar's vocation is to "supervise and promote" (Breazeale 173) the ongoing *Bildung* of all classes even as he continues on his own progress of unending development. (That is, he is supposed to teach and do research). The asymptotic narrative is recognizably the same as Schlegel's, but the goal to which it approaches is rather different: "absolute unity, constant self-identity, complete agreement with oneself" (Breazeale, 149). One does not have to be more than an average dialectician to see that the difference may amount to less than it appears. Nevertheless, for most contemporary readers, irony names an interruption of the authority laid claim to by secular and not so secular clerics whose vocation is to guarantee the continuity of culture in the face of the most enormous (or, as one might also translate *ungeheuerste*, the most monstrous) of revolutions. Clerisy presumably would like to lay such monsters to rest. The "*cultivation*, in the harmonious development of those qualities and faculties that characterise our *humanity*," is, in Coleridge's words, the guarantee of a "continuing" socio-political compact: "We must be men in order to be citizens" (Coleridge, 42-43, his emphasis).

7. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that an identity-oriented or traditionalist concept of the clerisy operates without its own quite deliberate ironies. The very project of instituting a social class responsible for culture bespeaks a certain ironic consciousness in and of that culture. Coleridge's account of the "idea" of the clerisy in *On the Constitution of Church and State* is thoroughly ironic, if by irony one means the deliberate conjoining in one form of two absolutely irreconcilable intentions (a definition that is, at least, very close to Schlegel's "antithetical synthesis," [cf. Albert]). Coleridge's "translation" of Fichte (Hartman, 208) develops the nationalist dimension of Fichte's cultural project quite explicitly, but in doing so it also situates national culture against the antithetical horizon of Christianity. What *On the Constitution of Church and State* calls the "national church" comprehends "the learned of all denominations:"

> -- the sages and professors of the law and jurisprudence; of medicine and physiology; of music; of military and civil architecture; of the physical sciences; with the mathematical as

> the common *organ* of the preceding; in short, all the so called liberal arts and sciences, the possession and application of which constitute the civilization of a country, as well as the Theological. (Coleridge 46)

Theology is not one among many, but the "head of all" the liberal arts and sciences (46), and yet the reason Coleridge gives for its place in the heirachy of learning is anything but theological. If theology "of good right [claims] the precedence," it does so on an entirely philological basis:

> Because under the name of Theology, or Divinity, were contained the interpretation of languages; the conservation and tradition of past events; the momentous epochs, and revolutions of the race and nation; the continuation of the records; logic, ethics, and the determination of ethical science, in application to the rights and duties of men in all their various relations, social and civil; and lastly, the ground-knowledge, the prima scientia as it was named,—PHILOSOPHY, of the doctrine and discipline of *ideas*. (Coleridge 46-47)

8. These are long passages, and I propose no more here than to remark how thoroughly secular Coleridge's vision of the national "church" is (a tribute, one should add, to the earnestness of his Christianity). Theology matters because the "SCIENCE" of theology stands at the origin of the secular disciplines. To associate its spiritual or "sacerdotal" function with its national one "is to be considered as . . . a mis-growth of ignorance and oppression." At the same time, Coleridge refuses to make the final disciplinary cut, one that would separate sacred and profane truths with all due finality. On the contrary, he insists at several points that without reference to the sacerdotal, all other sciences would be reduced to so much empiricism and utilitarianism. There can be no *national* church without an *other* church, antithetical to the nation-state, antithetical even to the very idea of the nation-state, as its quasi-teleological framework. I write "quasi" teleological only to emphasize that actually to arrive at the telos would be, for Coleridge, to regress into "ignorance and oppression." (The structural affinities with Fichte and Schlegel are evident.) From the point of view of the nation, religion is a productive blind spot. Though, of course, from the point of view of religion, it is the nation that sees through a glass darkly.

9. Institutionally, the interplay of theology and nation-state is embodied in Coleridge's vision of a specifically Anglican clerisy. The guardians of culture not only may but must be embodied in the sacerdotal figure. England, of course, is peculiarly fortunate in that its national church is also a Christian one, but *in any case* priestly authority must be responsible for the heterogenous though interdependent functions of national and spiritual well-being:

> . . . two distinct functions do not necessarily imply or require two different functionaries. Nay, the perfection of each may require the union of both in the same person. And in the instance now in question, great and grievous errors have arisen from confounding the functions; and fearfully great and grievous will be the evils from the success of an attempt to separate them . . . (Coleridge 57)

The logic is that of both/and. The clerisy as the guardian not just of the state's civilization (that is, its material development) but as Coleridge repeatedly insists of its culture (its philosophical and moral development) must always be, as it were, in touch with a noumenol realm "outside" the nation if it is indeed to arrive at anything approaching *culture*. And yet that realm must never be equated with the cultural mission of the nation-state as such. Practically, to do so would be to equate transcendental conditions of morality to the particular mores of a time and place—at an extreme, to institute not a clerisy but an inquisition. Even ideally, Coleridge cannot permit himself to imagine such an *end* to his project, for it would lose its antithetical and productive power (cf. Prickett 268-269). Human history and divine providence would be at all times and everywhere the same.

10. The irony of Coleridgean clerisy lies in the thoroughly secular nature of its defense of theology. It also lies in the thoroughly theological ground of its secular ideals. More precisely, it lies in the impossibility and the necessity of bringing these together. The choice of the word irony to describe *On the Constitution of Church and State* may always seem a bit counter-intuitive. It is far from an amusing read—Coleridge could not be more in earnest—but romantic irony is no joke. I refer again to Schlegel, this time on Socratic irony in the *Lyceum*: "It contains and arouses a feeling of indissoluble antagonism betwen the absolute and the relative, between the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication" (Schlegel 13). Linking "irony" and "clerisy" draws out the structure of fundamental "antagonism" that they share. In this context, too, it becomes clear that irony is not so much the crisis of clerisy or clerisy a response to that crisis as that both are negotiations of antithetical structures that can be traced across boundaries of discursivity and subjectivity, culture and theology, philosophy and poetry.

11. Such negotiations are the topic of the four essays that follow. All are variegated and nuanced in ways that the telegraphic summaries of an introduction cannot hope to convey. One rather marked difference, however, between all of them and my own formulations lies in the greater prominence they give to political questions and concepts. Adam Carter's "'Insurgent Governments': Romantic Irony and the Theory of the State" specifically traces the relation between Schlegel's theory of irony and his theory of the state. It suggests, too, the tensions—productive but also dangerous—between an ironic dialectic of political pluralism and the impositions of arbitrary authority that bring it to a halt even in the relatively early writings of the *Lyceum* and *Athenaeum* fragments. The next two essays take up quite explicitly the question of political apostasy that, I think, hovers in the margins of Carter's discussion of Schlegel. More particularly, they take up the political turn from revolutionary to reactionary that constitutes the narrative irony of so many romantic trajectories. Charles Mahoney's "The Multeity of Coleridgean Apostasy" reads Coleridge's own working through of "apostasy" as the very principle of vacillation against which and yet through which his thought takes shape. Mahoney suggests apostasy as a uniquely Coleridgean translation of Schlegelian irony: a falling away from any (possibility of) foundational or static principles, that is all too often misread—even by Coleridge himself—as the foundation for yet another stance. Linda Brigham's "*Alastor*, Apostasy, and the Ecology of Criticism," reads Shelley's poem as offering an analysis of just such ironies of apostasy especially as they shape Shelley's own reading of Wordsworth. In *Alastor*, Shelley dramatizes a tale of two poets to explore how a Wordsworthian opposition to an earlier or an other self (a perfection taken to the point of irony) produces the mirror image of what it opposes. This reading of the poem brings it into closer conjunction with later Shelley works such as *Prometheus Unbound*, but Brigham also implicates contemporary literary criticism and theoretical debate in a similarly structured dialectic of opposition and identity. In Shelley, she finds a different model of reading and writing, one whose point of departure includes a sheer "communication of pleasure" that (in Shelley's view) Wordsworth has replaced with a symmetrical discourse of sympathy that can all too easily give way to ideology and totalization. This threat is reflected (in Brigham's view) in the totalizing implications, whether sympathetic or oppositional, of much academic debate. The concluding essay, Forest Pyle's "'Frail Spells': Shelley and the Ironies of Exile" takes up similar problems, but situates them in relation to Shelley's rhetoric of exile. Pyle argues that Shelley can be productively read as deriving a powerful and liberatory language of critique both from his position of exile from Britain and from a supplementary critique of the concepts of nation and homeland that underwrite that position. The dialectic of contemporary criticism that would recuperate exile—or "diaspora"—as a position of authoritative critique fails to take such a supplementary critique *of* exile into account—a mistake that Shelley, in Pyle's reading, does not make. Shelly's "exile" operates, therefore, as a limit case of "epistemological irony so extensive that it disqualifies the claims of any clerisy to escape it." As in Brigham's reading, Shelley is used as a lens through which to focus on debates in contemporary criticism, though the emphasis is on the remainders of knowledge rather than those of pleasure. In a broader sense, all four of the pieces gathered here reflect an interest in "irony" and "clerisy" not only as historical artifacts but

as historical forces at once enabling and disrupting the antithetical structuring of an ongoing scholarly, critical, and pedagogical *Bildung*.

## Notes

[1] *Bildung* takes in a world of translations. It is cultivation or formation, and still more specifically "liberal education leading to self-development," (Hartman 34). For Schlegel, a more or less normative definition of its aims may be found in Fichte's definition of *Cultur* as a harmonious oneness between man's rational and sensuous nature:

> Insofar as man is considered as a rational, sensuous creature, then culture [*Cultur*] is the ultimate and highest means of his final goal: complete harmony with himself ... Man's ultimate and supreme goal is complete harmony wth himself and -- so that he can be in harmony with himself -- the harmony of all external things with his own necessary, practical concepts of them (i.e. with those concepts which determine how things ought to be. (Breazeale 150; Fichte 298-299)

Schlegel's aphoristic notation with its emphasis on antithesis and irony obviously puts a certain amount of pressure on this norm, and on Fichte's figure of harmony (Übereinstimmung) in particular, but his fundamental assumptions are similar.

[2] Strictly speaking, the passage I am quoting refers to Baudelaire. Later in the essay De Man equates Baudelaire's absolute irony to Schlegel's (De Man 220-221).

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# Irony and Clerisy

## "Insurgent Government": Romantic Irony and the Theory of the State

**Adam Carter, University of Lethbridge**

1. "As a temporary condition," Friedrich Schlegel writes in *Athenaeum Fragment 95*, "scepticism is logical insurrection; as a system it is anarchy. Sceptical method would therefore more or less resemble insurgent government." The statement is one of many in Schlegel's published fragments that present suggestive analogies between his philosophical and aesthetic concerns, for which he has been widely read, and political concerns for which he has often been either ignored or critically evaluated. Missing from such responses is the sustained attempt to read Schlegel's fragments on aesthetics and philosophy in relation to his fragments on politics and government—a relation that Schlegel himself repeatedly gestures toward. This must, perforce, take the form of a consideration in Schlegel's fragments of the relation between politics and *irony*.

2. Schlegel's reintroduction of the ancient rhetorical concept of irony into modern critical and aesthetic discourse, as well as (arguably) his significant revision and expansion of the meaning of this term, have been, along with his theorization of romantic poetry itself, among the most significant legacies attributed to the fragments published in the *Lyceum* and *Athenaeum* journals between 1797 and 1800. While the published fragments directly devoted to irony are relatively infrequent (less than a dozen among over seven hundred) the concept as Schlegel theorizes it and attempts to enact it is central to the interpretation of the fragments as a whole and to Schlegel's politics in this period in particular. The strongest case for taking irony as the master trope of the *Fragments* is provided by Schlegel's own testimony to this effect in his essay "On Incomprehensibility" published in 1800. In this essay Schlegel looks back upon his then scandalous fragmentary style—on "all the offence the *Athenaeum* has given, and . . . all the incomprehension it has provoked" (35)—and attempts (albeit with irony) to explain and justify it. "A great part of the incomprehensibility of the *Athenaeum,*" Schlegel asserts, "is unquestionably due to the *irony* that to a greater or lesser extent is to be found everywhere in it" (36). Schlegel then proceeds to quote two of his most important statements on irony, *Lyceum Fragments 48* and *108*, in full, both as an illustration of what he means by irony, and as a clear indication of the best hermeneutic strategy with which to approach the *Fragments* as a whole. To read, in the manner Schlegel here invites, the fragments through his theorization of the concept of irony is to glimpse both the politics of his irony and the irony of his politics.

3. My analysis finds a starting point with Frederick Beiser's thesis that the politics of the "early" German Romanticism of 1797-1800 constituted an attempt to negotiate between a tradition of enlightenment liberalism widely believed to have precipitated the French Revolution and a conservative response to the violence, rapid change, and disempowerment the Revolution produced.

    > [Early German Romanticism] struggled to avoid the extremes of liberalism and conservatism: an insistence on individual liberty that destroyed all social bonds on the one hand, and an emphasis on community that suppressed all individual liberty on the other hand. It accepted the communitarian elements of conservatism, but rejected its paternalism, its identification of the community with the old social and political hierarchy. It endorsed the defence of individual liberty of liberalism, but criticized its free-for-all of

self-interested agents. (223)

The romantics initially supported the ideal of a democratic republic propounded by the revolutionaries in France: "They believed that the true community will come into existence only through the liberty, equality, and fraternity of a republic" (Beiser 223). They even "hoped that, eventually, through increasing enlightenment and education, the need for the state itself would disappear" (Beiser 223). Yet they were not revolutionaries in the sense of supporting violent political upheaval, not, in any event, in their own German political context. They remained suspicious, even critical, of the violence resorted to by the French Revolutionaries—a suspicion that, I maintain, is manifested in Schlegel's philosophical critique of the violence of abstract conceptuality upon particularity and individuality. In place of political revolution they supported, in the tradition of Schiller and the German enlightenment, or *Aufklärung*, the role of culture, of art, poetry and philosophy, as *Bildung*: as educating the people to become the future citizens of the ideal republic (Beiser 228-229).

4. In his reading of Schlegel's aesthetic theories Beiser is primarily concerned with demonstrating how they partake in the Schillerian project of "the aesthetic education"—in the progressive reformist tradition of the German enlightenment (247), and how his theory of romantic poetry constitutes "the aesthetics of republicanism" (260). Irony, however, generally regarded as so central to Schlegel's theory, is not mentioned by Beiser. Irony is, nonetheless, the best overall description for the dialectical relationship between the antinomies of liberal and conservative positions that Beiser seeks to delineate as the early Romantic's political position.

5. To take Schlegel's theory of irony as the dominant trope defining his political position is to begin to modify and problematize in significant ways Beiser's thesis on the politics of the early romantics. We find that Schlegel hovers between the antinomies of conservatism and liberalism in a less synthetic and more vertiginous fashion than Beiser's reading suggests. Beiser, indeed, while he proposes to read Schlegel and his circle as positioned between liberalism and conservatism, in effect shows Romanticism's strong leanings toward liberal republican ideals at an early stage followed by a turn in a very short space of time toward conservatism. In this conventional narrative of Romanticism's movement from an early idealism to a later reactionary position, much of Romanticism's proposed political inbetweeness is lost or ignored. One rather conventional hermeneutic strategy with which to explain such contradictions would be to characterize the published fragments of 1797-1800 as politically transitional and, in a sense, confused; this, in part at least, is Beiser's position.[1] But to assign the *Fragments,* and this entire period, to a transitional confusion is to do away with most of Schlegel's early Romanticism including the theory of romantic poetry that Beiser delineates as the "aesthetics of republicanism" (260) and thus to involve Beiser in a further contradiction.

6. To read Schlegel's political statements in the *Fragments* through his own theorization of the concept of irony and to attempt to see these statements as structurally homologous with this theory constitutes another, and I would argue more satisfying, hermeneutic strategy. In this reading we see Schlegel deliberately and self-consciously juxtaposing and alternating between the antinomies of liberal and conservative assumptions on such fundamental issues as the individual, the community, progress, authority and the status of reason, in an attempt to delineate a politics comprised of a non-synthetic dialectic that might permit both individual freedom and the recognition of one's place and duty within the wider totality of the polis or nation. The contradictions remain in this reading, certainly, but we do Schlegel—who in advance even of Hegel begins to thematize the productivity of contradiction—the credit of dealing with them self-consciously.

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7. To consider Schlegel's directly political statements in the *Fragments* is to experience the same

vertiginous motion of "contradict[ing] oneself continuously and join[ing] opposite extremes together" [2] that characterizes Schlegel's method in the fragments as a whole and which comprises one of Schlegel's several distinct but related definitions of irony. In *Athenaeum 121* Schlegel writes: "An idea is a concept perfected to the point of irony, an absolute synthesis of absolute antitheses, the continual self-creating interchange of two conflicting thoughts." It is important to note along with numerous commentators on Schlegel's irony that the "absolute synthesis" to which Schlegel refers is not the monistic identity sought for in certain articulations of the dialectic, but precisely this "*continual* self-creating interchange" of opposites (Eichner 63; Muecke 194; Mellor 11; Handwerk 15; Albert 826-829, Miller 368).

8. In reading Schlegel's fragments devoted to political concerns this "continual self-creating interchange of two conflicting thoughts" applies first and foremost to his evaluation of the very worth of politics and political discourse. On the one hand, Schlegel lists "a positive politics" as being amongst "the most important desiderata of philosophy" (Ath 28), and asserts that in a society "antipolitical or unlawful people are the only ones who shouldn't be tolerated" (Ath 272). On the other hand Schlegel asserts: "Wherever there are politics or economics no morality exists" (Id 101); and he enjoins his reader: "Don't waste your faith and love on the political world" (Id 106). Beyond this fundamental antinomy, which amounts to a simultaneous embrace and rejection of politics, one finds analogous contradictions with respect to two other key indices to Schlegel's politics: his position with respect to the French Revolution, the support for or opposition to which determined the ideological spectrum for his times; and his view of the cultural/political program of the romantic poetry and philosophy he theorized and championed.

9. In *Athenaeum 216* Schlegel lists the "French Revolution, Fichte's philosophy, and Goethe's *Meister*" as "the greatest tendencies of the age," a statement that might appear, given Schlegel's high estimation of the latter two elements in this list, forthrightly to endorse the Revolution. The remainder of the fragment, however, qualifies such an assessment. The greatness of the "noisy and materialistic" French Revolution, Schlegel suggests, is a rather vulgar quantitative greatness, in comparison to which in "the history of mankind . . . many a little book, almost unnoticed by the noisy rabble at the time, plays a greater role than anything they did." Nonetheless, that Schlegel contends that Fichte's philosophy and Goethe's *Meister* should themselves be considered revolutionary indicates that he at least sides with the *idea* of revolution.

10. Schlegel's sympathies with the Revolution's republican cause and the means it employed are more directly evident in *Athenaeum 251* where he derides "the delicate morality of a century that only tried to slander the French Revolution." Schlegel defends the morality of the revolutionaries Honoré Mirabeau and Sebastien Chamfort, contending that while they might be among those whom "the rabble considers . . . criminals or examples of immorality . . . a truly moral person would class [them] among the extremely rare exceptions who may be regarded as creatures of his own kind, as fellow citizens of his world" (Ath 425). As late as his last published Fragments of 1800, Schlegel asserts a positive impetus behind the revolution.

    > The few revolutionaries who took part in the Revolution were mystics as only Frenchmen of our age could have been mystics. They legislated their characters and their actions into religion. But future historians will consider it the greatest honor and destiny of the Revolution that it was the strongest stimulus to a slumbering religion. (Id 94)

    One could imagine these words to have been penned by Marx in a derisively sarcastic vein. "Mystic" and "religion," however, are not derisive terms in Schlegel's vocabulary. On the contrary, there is a persistent messianic strain in Schlegel's *Fragments* and, thus, to be labelled a mystic is to be paid a compliment generally accorded to an elite of artists and intellectuals dedicated to pursuing the absolute.

Furthermore, in invoking "religion" Schlegel is not, at this stage, referring to any orthodox traditional belief system but to an as yet only dimly glimpsed faith that will characterize the coming "organic age . . . of the next solar revolution" (Ath 426). In *Ideas 94*, then, Schlegel suggests that the French Revolution be regarded as contributing to this progressive movement of the *Zeitgeist*.

11. However, in what Kierkegaard (with Schlegel fully in mind) aptly named as irony's "negative dialectic" (133), the antinomy to Schlegel's support for the Revolution is equally well presented in the *Fragments*. *Athenaeum 424* represents the Revolution as "the most frightful grotesque of the age, where the most profound prejudices and their most brutal punishments are mixed up in a fearful chaos and woven as bizarrely as possible into a monstrous human tragicomedy." "There is no greater need of the age," Schlegel later contends, "than the need for a spiritual counterweight to the Revolution and to the despotism which the Revolution exercises over people by means of its concentration on the most desirable worldly interests" (Id 41).

12. That Schlegel is not simply shifting from earlier radical to later conservative political sympathies in the course of the *Fragments* published over three years between 1797-1800 is well indicated by his placement contiguously of the two fragments cited above alternately critiquing and upholding the Revolution, *Athenaeum 424* and *425*. That he is not, on the other hand, simply confused but is deliberately presenting an ironic doubled perspective on the Revolution is clearly established in *Athenaeum 422*.

> Mirabeau played a great role in the Revolution because his character and mind were revolutionary; Robespierre because he obeyed the Revolution absolutely, devoted himself entirely to it, worshipped it, and considered himself its god; Bonaparte because he can create and shape revolutions, and destroy himself.

The description of the revolutionaries closely reiterates Schlegel's articulation of irony in *Athenaeum 51* as a dialectic of "self-creation and self-destruction."

13. While Schlegel refers to a process of self-creation and self-destruction at various points in the *Fragments,* to the extent that Ernst Behler describes it as "the dominant theme in the exposition of irony in the *Athenaeum*" (*German* 148), *Athenaeum 51* is the sole fragment where this process is explicitly discussed in conjunction with irony: "Naive is what is or seems to be natural, individual, or classical to the point of irony, or else to the point of continuously fluctuating between self-creation and self-destruction."

14. In *Athenaeum 51* Schlegel works with Schiller's concept of naive art as an art that "is nature," that provides "the completest possible *imitation of actuality*" (Schiller 274, 275). Schlegel's point is that irony, in the sense of a hovering between instinct and intention, must inhabit even the most apparently natural "naive" works of art. "If it's simply instinctive, then it's childlike, childish, or silly; if it's merely intentional, then it gives rise to affectation. The beautiful, poetical, ideal naive must combine intention and instinct" (Ath 51). The dialectic of self-creation and self-destruction, then, represents in this context the artist's movement between instinctive (un-self-conscious) and intentional (self-conscious) attitudes toward the work. For Schlegel, the way to achieve such a movement is to alternate between enthusiasm and skepticism, "inspiration and criticism" (Ath 116), toward the creative artifact (or in a philosophical context toward the idea or concept), alternately affirming it as natural and true and negating it as artificial and false.

15. In the schema articulated in *Athenaeum 422* Mirabeau, distinguished by his "character" and "mind," represents the Revolution's conscious idea and intention; Robespierre—"obey[ing] the Revolution absolutely, devot[ing] himself entirely to it, worshipp[ing] it, and consider[ing] himself its god"—

represents the Revolution's un-self-conscious, instinctive moment in which it is actualized by being enthusiastically and unreflectively embraced. Bonaparte is the true ironist in this schema hovering between the two positions, "continuously fluctuating between self-creation and self-destruction" (Ath 51). He can "create and shape revolutions, and destroy himself," a reference to the popular view of Napoleon at this pre-military-dictatorship stage (1798) as simply extending France's republican revolution and its attendant enlightenment ideals to other nations and as such acting merely as an instrument of progress. Once another nation was freed from monarchic government and granted a republican constitution Napoleon's work in that nation would be finished.

16. The fragment has been interpreted as indicating Schlegel's support of the Revolution (Beiser 242), but in contrast to the other statements I have examined it appears to be positioned in the interstice between an enthusiastic and a critical position, a space within which Schlegel attempts to theorize the condition of the possibility of these actors playing "great role[s]" in an historical and political upheaval. What appears to constitute the condition of such a possibility is the structure of irony. What Schlegel might mean in so proposing a necessary irony in the political sphere will become clearer after further consideration of Schlegel's political position.

17. Schlegel's perspective on the cultural and political program of the romantic poetry that he champions also enacts an ironic dialectic of "contradict[ing] oneself continually and joining opposite extremes together." Does Schlegel, as Beiser among others has contended[3], view romantic poetry/philosophy as extending and radicalizing the enlightenment project of *Bildung*, of educating and cultivating the masses to become the citizens of an ideal future state? *Athenaeum 222* is, perhaps, the most programmatic statement to this effect: "The revolutionary desire to realize the kingdom of God on earth is the elastic point of progressive civilization and the beginning of modern history. Whatever has no relation to the kingdom of God is of strictly secondary importance in it." By this view modern poetry and philosophy, given that they are by no means "of strictly secondary importance" for Schlegel, must participate in this revolutionary process.

18. *Athenaeum 137* affirms such a worldly project for Schlegel's own writing. Here Schlegel declares that "there is a material, enthusiastic rhetoric that's infinitely superior to the sophistic abuse of philosophy, the declamatory stylistic exercise, the applied poetry, the improvised politics, that commonly go by the same name." This "rhetoric," one assumes, refers to Schlegel's own experimental critical discourse with its deliberate attempt to combine and juxtapose each of these other elements in a fragmentary form that might succeed in overcoming their traditional shortcomings. "The aim of this rhetoric," he continues, "is to *realize philosophy practically* and to defeat practical unphilosophy and antiphilosphy not just dialectically, but *really annihilate it*" (emphasis added).

19. A later fragment again affirms the worldly mission of a newly construed culture, although in more foreboding terms.

    > We agree on this point because we are of one sense; but here we disagree because you or I am lacking sense. Who is right, and how are we to settle the matter? Only by virtue of a culture that broadens every particular sense into a universal, infinite sense, and by faith in this sense or in religion. *Then we will agree before we can agree to agree*. (Id 80, emphasis mine)

    Echoing Schiller's *Aesthetic Education*, this represents Schlegel's strongest statement in the published fragments on the function of culture in the production of ideological hegemony—the maintenance of social consensus through the eradication of the very grounds of difference.[4]

20. Yet Schlegel will also forthrightly defend the autotelic nature of art, rejecting a lengthy tradition that

attributes a didactic role to it. He refers to the "vulgar prejudice that moral ennoblement is the highest end of the fine arts," and contends that "Wit is its own end, like virtue, like love and art. . ."[5] (Ly 59). "What if," Schlegel queries, putting into question the entire project of *Bildung,* "the harmonious education of artists and nobility is merely a harmonious illusion?" (Ly 110).

21. One could argue that these two positions in Schlegel's fragments—that art cultivates the subject and thus allows society to evolve toward a more harmonious social order, and that art is primarily autotelic—present no contradiction. By this view what Schlegel is rejecting is the notion that art consistently has any moral *content* that might instruct its audience. It is, rather, its harmonious and non-instrumental *form* prior to all content that provides the potentially ideal model for the social/political order. Such a position would be close to the political program Schiller theorizes for the aesthetic.

22. Schiller, like Schlegel at certain points, insists upon the aesthetic as a sheerly empty form:

> for beauty produces no particular result whatsoever, neither for the understanding nor for the will. It accomplishes no particular purpose neither intellectual nor moral; it discovers no individual truth, helps us to perform no individual duty and is, in short, as unfitted to provide a firm basis for character as to enlighten the understanding. (*Aesthetic* 147)

The aesthetic is a nothingness, sheer potentiality and freedom prior to all determination, and yet as such is a very pregnant nothingness in so far as it becomes the ground for all determination. As an idealized form bearing a very uncertain relation to the real, the "aesthetic state" is, Eagleton argues

> the utopian bourgeois public sphere of liberty, equality and democracy, within which everyone is a free citizen, 'having equal rights with the noblest.' The constrained social order of class-struggle and division of labour has already been overcome in principle in the consensual kingdom of beauty, which installs itself like a shadowy paradise within the present. (*Aesthetic* 111)

There is certainly direct textual evidence to support a reading of Schlegel as also drawing the analogy between aesthetic and political form. Yet Schlegel, I would argue, attempts to substitute a quite different aesthetic model in an attempt to circumvent some of the difficulties presented by the attempt to apply to politics the traditional aesthetic model with its harmonious mediation between general and particular. Schlegel, moreover, remains ironically ambivalent about drawing the analogy between aesthetics and politics in the first instance.

23. *Lyceum 65* predicates a direct analogy between poetic form and a republican political state, suggesting that the former provides an ideal model of a free and non-coercive public sphere: "Poetry is republican speech: a speech which is its own law and end unto itself, and in which all the parts are free citizens and have the right to vote." *Lyceum 103* is consistent with this analogy and further suggests Schlegel's view of the politics of the particular *fragmentary* aesthetic that he theorizes under the name of romantic poetry in opposition to a more traditional neoclassical aesthetic with its emphasis upon unity, order, and generic purity. Schlegel's position on the fragmentary text anticipates and no doubt influences Benjamin and Adorno's idea of the "constellation" which as Eagleton writes "strikes at the very heart of the traditional aesthetic paradigm, in which the specificity of the detail is allowed no genuine resistance to the organizing power of the totality" (*Aesthetic* 330).

*Lyceum 103* commences:

> Many works that are praised for the beauty of their coherence have less unity than a motley heap [*bunter Haufen*] of ideas simply animated by the ghost of a spirit and aiming

> at a single purpose. What really holds the latter together is that free and equal fellowship in which, so the wise men assure us, the citizens of the perfect state will live at some future date; it's that unqualifiedly sociable spirit which, as the beau monde maintain, is now to be found only in what is so strangely and almost childishly called the great world.

Schlegel does not deride such works for being little more than "a motley heap of ideas," but rather criticizes the impulse to turn such a heap into a unity. The fragment (a meta-fragment in effect—a fragment about fragmentariness) continues:

> On the other hand, many a work of art whose coherence is never questioned is, as the artist knows quite well himself, not a complete work but a fragment, or one or more fragments, a mass, a plan. But so powerful is the instinct for unity in mankind that the author himself will often bring something to a kind of completion at least with the form which simply can't be made a whole or a unit; often quite imaginatively and yet completely unnaturally. The worst thing about it is that whatever is draped about the *solid, really existent fragments* in an attempt to mug up a semblance of unity consists largely of dyed rags. (emphasis added)

The "motley heap" Schlegel suggests is analogous to "the perfect state," a rather audacious figure in its very banality when one considers, as Ian Balfour has recently discussed, the rhetorical sublimity many of Schlegel's contemporaries employed to figure the nation ("Sublime"). The "motley heap" is a configuration in which each individual has its own autonomy and direction and yet loosely connects with the whole through an "unqualifiedly sociable spirit." The supposedly unified work, on the other hand, only achieves its coherence through *unnatural* manipulation. If we were to extend the political analogy Schlegel applies to the fragmentary text to such falsely unified works of the traditional aesthetic the latter would appear analogous to a highly coercive normalizing authority. Significantly Schlegel represents the presentation of unity as a covering over of the particular in its materiality and existentiality, as "dyed rags" thrown over, "the solid, really existent fragments," suggesting, in this allegory of govermentality, the uncodifiable particularity of the body politic.

24. The falsely unified work, then, is a dissimulation, a mask, much as Schlegel defines Socratic irony in *Lyceum 108* as "dissimulation."Yet unlike irony this "instinct for unity" does not present its false totality as a "completely deliberate dissimulation" (Ly 108). "Socratic irony," Schlegel insists in another conjoining of opposites, is "the *only* involuntary and yet completely deliberate dissimulation" (emphasis added). In this lack of self-consciousness of itself as artifice lies the potential danger of the falsely unified work. *Lyceum 103* concludes:

> And if these [dyed rags] are touched up cleverly and deceptively, and tastefully displayed then that's all the worse. For then he deceives even the exceptional reader at first, who has a deep feeling for what little real goodness and beauty is still to be found here and there in life and letters. That reader is then forced to make a critical judgment to get at the right perception of it! And no matter how quickly the *disassociation* takes place still the first fresh impression is lost. (emphasis added)

A later modernist poet and critic like T.S. Eliot, in a classic articulation of the aesthetic ideology, bemoans an epoch of the "disassociation of sensibility," and looks back nostalgically upon an idealized Renaissance society when thought and feeling, general and particular were, as Eliot quotes Johnson, "yoked by violence together" (60)—an aesthetic position whose political underpinnings were only too clearly represented in Eliot's political sympathies. For Schlegel, by contrast, it is this fundamental "disassociation" or fragmentation that must not be elided. Preferably, it should be presented openly in the work and when it is not it is one of the tasks of criticism to fragment the false totality.

25. But a problem presents itself with respect to this coherent position I have attributed to Schlegel vis-à-vis the ideology of the fragmented versus the falsely unified work: the self-evident rhetorical irony in Schlegel's mode of presentation. The analogy between the fragmented text and the "perfect state" is interwoven with a series of what ironologists call ironic *markers* (Booth 3-8 and passim; Hutcheon ch. 6), verbal equivalents of the wink of an eye that distance the speaker's intent from his apparent meaning: "so the wise men assure us . . . as the beau monde maintains . . . what is so strangely and almost childishly called. . . ." These markers suggest both that Schlegel is hesitant to draw a definite analogy between the aesthetic and the political realms, and that he distrusts any invocation of a finished "perfect state." For even to counter the Schillerian aesthetic state with its subsumption of the general and the particular into a seamless whole with an aesthetic model that presents a greater resistance to totality is still to aestheticize politics with all the dangers that entails. Schlegel's strategy amounts to suggesting an aesthetic analogy that might surmount the difficulties presented in the traditional aesthetic model and yet simultaneously to ironize the analogy such that one views it as imperfect. Furthermore, as Peter Szondi has argued (63-65), history for Schlegel is a progressive movement towards an ideal and thus any attempt to characterize the future "perfect state" from one's own place in time must be inevitably flawed. Irony represents one strategy for expressing an awareness of such limitations. "[W]e have to be content," Schlegel writes, "with brief notes on the prevailing mood and individual mannerisms of the age, without even being able to draw a profile of the giant" (Ath 426).

26. With respect, then, to two major indices to his political position (his response to the French Revolution, and the cultural program he envisions both for Romantic poetry and his own critical discourse), Schlegel retains a persistently ironic stance, enthusiastically embracing a worldly project of political transformation and critically negating such an intention. Is he, then, as Hegel would imply, being simply and, perhaps, uselessly evasive? The answer, I believe, is that he is not, that his ironic stance does translate into a more definite political vision of sorts, with a content that we may agree or disagree with, a vision that would be better described as *provisional* rather than evasive.

27. Schlegel raises the idea of provisionality in *Athenaeum 266*, a passage that refers to philosophy but once again employs a suggestively political metaphoric vehicle, here a nation's constitution, to articulate the idea: "Couldn't we have a provisional philosophy right now, even before drafting a logical constitution? And isn't every philosophy provisional until that constitution has been sanctioned by acceptance?"

28. A philosophical system is an attempt to construct an absolute of sorts, a totality within which each particular finds its meaning and its place. However, much as in *Lyceum 103* with respect to the work of art, Schlegel will repeatedly emphasize in metaphors that clearly import the political concerns underlying his theoretical position, the violence that any philosophical system and its concepts must perform upon the particular in order to marshall it into system: "The demonstrations of philosophy are simply demonstrations in the sense of military jargon. And its deductions aren't much better than those of politics; even in the sciences possession is nine-tenths of the law" (Ath 82). For Schlegel no philosophical system has represented more than what he describes, in a phrase that anticipates later theories of ideology, as "polemical totality" (Ath 399)—a limited and motivated view of the whole which, while it "can no doubt destroy one's opponents completely, . . . does not suffice to legitimize the philosophy of its possessor . . ." (Ath 399). Thus a general "logical constitution" adequately governing all particulars is unavailable. Schlegel implies in *Athenaeum 266* however, that this does not preclude the necessity of acting in the world as adequately as possible with the best knowledge that one does possess.

29. Schlegel's provisional strategy is to combine system and non-system, the necessity of the organizing, governing concept, and the recognition of the always insurgent particular. This position is most succinctly stated in the often cited *Athenaeum 53*: "It's equally fatal for the mind to have a system and

to have none. It will simply have to decide to combine the two." Furthermore Schlegel is clear that this is one of the several related ways we are to understand irony: "It [irony] contains and arouses a feeling of indissoluble antagonism between the absolute and the relative, between the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication" (*Ly 108*). Politically this strategy (which is already an allegory of governability) translates into an attempt to negotiate between a strong governing authority and democratic freedom, to negotiate between conservatism and liberalism—the paradoxical figure of an "insurgent government" which Schlegel allies with his "sceptical method."

30. *Athenaeum 449* most directly indicates Schlegel's attempt to negotiate between the antinomies of a strongly conservative tradition and a liberal radicalism.

> As yet there has been no moral author who could be compared with the great masters of poetry and philosophy. Such a writer would have to combine the sublime antiquarian politics of Müller with Forster's great universal economics and Jacobi's moral gymnastics and music; and combine in his language, too, the weighty, dignified, and enthusiastic style of the first with the fresh hues, the lovable delicacy of the second, and refined sensitivity—so like a distant, ghostly concertina—of the third.

The Swiss historian Johannes von Müller's "sublime antiquarian politics" consisted of a very traditional defence of the Holy Roman Empire (an anticipation, indeed, of the politics the later Schlegel would embrace); Georg Forster by contrast was one of the most radical political voices of late-eighteenth-century Germany, an ardent political reformist and such a strong supporter of the French Revolution as to be widely declared a traitor in Germany. Schlegel published a spirited defense of Forster's work in the form of a *Charakteristiken*, or pen portrait (Eichner 29), but in so doing was, as Frederick Beiser writes, "a voice crying in the wilderness" (154). Forster "recognized that the moral development of a people depends on its material conditions, particularly its economy and distribution of wealth" (Beiser 184), a recognition that would lead Lukacs in the 1940's to revive his reputation as a proto Marxian dialectical materialist. Forster's "great universal economics," as Schlegel describes it, came to increasingly emphasize in a socialist fashion that the "problem of the state . . . is to ensure a more equal distribution of resources that would enable everyone to develop their humanity" (Beiser 184).

31. F.H. Jacobi's "moral gymnastics," as Schlegel's athletic metaphor suggests, straddles the positions of the two former writers. Jacobi was on the one hand, Beiser writes, no defender of the "*ancien regime* whose demise he regarded as inevitable" (151). He supported such liberal tenets as "free trade, liberty of conscience . . . civil freedom" (151), and a generally *laissez faire* conception of the state. Yet he was in effect "a spokesman for the aristocracy" (141); his economic writings expressed the "physiocratic orthodoxy" (141): agriculture, the land, is the fundamental source of all of society's wealth, all other forms of economic activity (exchange, consumption, transportation) are merely derivative of this productive origin: "Since all wealth ultimately derives from them, the landowners represent the true interests of the state" (141). Jacobi was, furthermore, an early and influential critic of the enlightenment, of what he described as its "tyranny of reason" (qtd. in Beiser 147). One of the leitmotifs of his moral and political writings was a "lament about the egoism and materialism of contemporary life" (Beiser 141), a disposition that would lead him in his later writings to posit religious faith as the basis upon which the state ought to be founded (Beiser 151). He was as equally an ardent critic of the French Revolution as Forster was a supporter, believing that it represented the worst excesses of rationalism and materialistic self-interest. In the Revolution's abolition of aristocratic land holdings, furthermore, Jacobi saw a dangerous precedent.

32. Such, then, is the peculiar constellation of political ideologies that Schlegel would wish to keep in play—a thoroughly ironic political vision in so far as it is a paradoxical one attempting to maintain apparently contradictory positions without privileging one over the other. It is at the same time, at least

partially, a dialectical political vision. Schlegel recognizes in the *Fragments* that liberalism as the opposition to more traditional views is partial and incomplete, structurally dependent upon that which it opposes. A truer political vision would arise from the synthesis of these views, of community with diversity and individual freedom; and a provisionally adequate politics in avoiding the extremes of tyranny and anarchy would at least keep the polarities in tension.[6]

33. Thus Schlegel, on the one hand, makes assertions of a broadly progressive democratic nature, such as calls for judicial reform: "Wherever a public prosecutor puts in an appearance, a public judge should also be at hand" (Ath 70); and generalized assertions of the right to liberty: "Perhaps no people deserves freedom, but that is a matter for the *forum dei*" (Ath 212), which is to say that in this political world one must assume that one individual or group has as much right to freedom as any other. Furthermore, in a salvo aimed directly at the Prussian absolute state, Schlegel asserts that far from being democratic it cannot even be described as aristocratic: "A state only deserves to be called aristocratic when at least the smaller mass that despotizes the larger has a republican constitution" (Ath 213). He further warns that the nominal possession of a republican constitution ought not to delude the public into believing that it necessarily enjoys a democratic government:

> What is it, if not absolute monarchy, when all essential decisions are made secretly by a cabinet, and when the parliament is allowed to discuss and quarrel about the forms openly and ostentatiously? In this way an absolute monarchy might very well have a kind of constitution that to the uninitiated might even appear to be republican. (Ath 370)

34. Yet at the same time expressing an uneasiness towards "the rabble" (Ath 425) and its "demagogic popularity" (Ath 246) Schlegel supports a hierarchical structure of government based, at least in part, upon class and inherited privilege.

> A perfect republic would have to be not just democratic, but aristocratic and monarchic at the same time; to legislate justly and freely, the educated would have to outweigh and guide the uneducated, and everything would have to be organized into an absolute whole. (Ath 214)

Such a position may not be reactionary, per se; in Schlegel's Prussian context the adoption of such a governmental structure would have, indeed, constituted a considerable movement toward greater democracy, and given the prolonged violence of the French Revolution such an evolutionary model of government had undeniable appeal. Yet it certainly represents a vitiation of the more radical political impulses that inform many of the fragments and herein we may begin to glimpse the failure of Schlegel's ironic dialectic to keep political conservatism and radicalism in tension.

35. In two key fragments Schlegel sides strongly on behalf of political authority working against his own theoretical/political concern for the violence of the concept.

> In the transactions and regulations that are essential to the legislative, executive, or judiciary powers for achieving their aims, *something absolutely arbitrary, something unavoidable often happens that can't be deduced from the concept of those powers, and over which they therefore seem to have no lawful authority*. Isn't the authority for such extraordinary cases actually derived from the constitutive power and shouldn't that power therefore also have to have a veto and not merely a right of interdiction? Don't all absolutely arbitrary decisions in the state happen by virtue of the constitutive power? (Ath 385, emphasis mine)

The passage fully demonstrates a political manifestation of Schlegel's philosophical concern for the

concept and the remainder that eludes it—the ineradicable "contrast of form and content" (Ath 75) that Schlegel through irony characteristically attempts not to elide. Yet as compared to fragments in which the concept is figured as dictatorial and militaristic in its marshalling of the particular, Schlegel here figures the particular as threateningly subversive—"something absolutely arbitrary, something unavoidable"—and seeks only to locate the proper authority that with countervening "absolutely arbitrary decisions" can bring such insurgent elements under control. Significantly Schlegel locates such authority in the veto of the "constitutive power" by which he refers to the monarchy (Beiser 261). Beyond the problematic nature of granting the monarchy a veto over more democratically representative bodies, the very conception of the monarchy as "the constitutive power" is itself profoundly hierarchical and anti-democratic. One might argue that this fragment simply represents another moment in Schlegel's political dialectic of authority and insurgency that I have been outlining, yet there is an absoluteness and a finality to arguing for such a veto for the crown (itself a fully arbitrary power) that suggests, rather, the termination of such a dialectic.

36. *Athenaeum 369* on political representation also touches upon the very heart of the philosophical concerns that inform Schlegel's *Fragments*, yet like *385* it covers over the philosophical problematic of irony, of "the indissoluble antagonism between the absolute and the relative" (Ly 108) in the name of political stability and authority.

> A deputy is something quite different from a representative. Representative means only someone who, *whether elected or not*, portrays in his person a political whole that is, as it were, identical with himself; he is like the visible world-soul of the state. . . . The power of the priest, general, and educator is by its very nature undefined, universal, more or less a kind of lawful despotism. Only by virtue of the spirit of representation can it be softened and legitimized. (emphasis added)

In addition to the troublesome indifference to the democratic origin of the political representative —"whether elected or not"—the fragment asserts a naive view of totality, the "political whole," and the ability of an individual to stand in for such a whole. Such a view of totality is particularly unconvincing given that the entire tenor of both the form and content of the *Fragments* continually subverts it. The assertion, furthermore, that while the offices of power will always represent "a kind of lawful despotism," through "the spirit of representation [it] can . . . be softened and legitimized," is a disturbingly cynical articulation of the need for rule by hegemony. It says in effect that despotism will always continue but that the masses might be made to feel better about it through the recognition that it is being performed in their name. The dominant trope in this view of political representation as "the visible world-soul of the state" is, indeed, not irony but the romantic symbol: a spiritualizing, detemporalizing trope whose ideological implications have, of course, been explored by Benjamin and de Man.

37. The positive political content in Schlegel's *Fragments*, that is, the direct statements about the arrangement of governmental powers and the structure of the constitution, become, then, troublesomely reactionary. One can see how certain of these statements attempt to propound an "insurgent government," a productive fluctuation between freedom and individualism on the one hand, and communalism and a necessary authority on the other hand. Yet such a dialectic is not successfully maintained and in certain fragments Schlegel fully affirms tradition and authority in a manner that will characterize his later largely reactionary politics. One might well maintain, as David Simpson has suggested, that having a determinate political content necessarily entails the curtailing of irony and thus assuming the inevitable shortcomings of any fixed position (198). After all, for Schlegel's ironic dialectic to have come to a standstill on the opposite pole in an affirmation of an anarchic individualism would have been, perhaps, equally unsatisfactory.

38. I would, however, resist such a conclusion. Schlegel's fragments demonstrate how irony, rather than being opposed to political engagement, might represent a condition for the individual's noncoercive participation in larger political communities and movements, a sense of belonging *within* a larger whole, and a sense of the necessity of acting as and for such a whole, while at the same time providing a saving critical perspective upon that whole, a sense of it as artifice and of one's own position *without* it. This entails a necessary hovering between "naive" and "intentional" attitudes toward the polis, between the "self-destruction" of a communalist politics and the "self-creation" of a individualistic politics. That Schlegel himself is unable to successfully maintain this precarious position in no way detracts from the productivity of the model with which he has provided us, a model which reverberates in a variety of twentieth century cultural and political theories from Laclau and Mouffe's adaptation of Gramscian hegemony, to Spivak's "strategic essentialism," to what Rorty (with no apparent consciousness of the debt to Schlegel) will once again name "irony."

## Notes

[1] Beiser writes: "Throughout the *Athenaeum Fragmente* Schlegel's early radicalism is still very much in evidence" (261) and yet the "political doctrine of the *Fragmente* marks a definite retreat from the radicalism of 1796" (261).

[2] The fragment is among four by Friedrich Schlegel "included in Novalis's collection of fragments, *Blütenstaub* (Pollen), published by the Schlegel brothers in *Athenaeum 1798*" (Peter Firchow's Translator's Note, Philosophical Fragments 17). All quotations of the fragments are from this translation and noted by an abbreviation of the name of the fragment series and the fragment's number within this series: *Lyceum* (Ly), *Athenaeum* (Ath), and *Ideas* (Id).

[3] Beiser writes: "The fundamental political problem facing the romantics was therefore clear: to prepare the German people for a republic through further education and enlightenment. Their task as intellectuals in the Germany of the 1790's was to define the standards of morality, taste, and religion, so that the public would have some ideal of culture, some model of virtue" (229).

[4] See Eagleton's *Ideology of the Aesthetic*, chapter 4, "Schiller and Hegemony."

[5] Cf. Ly 58, 70, 77, 86, Ath 329, Id 12 for Schlegel's oscillation between the didactic and the autotelic artwork.

[6] Behler discusses the very similar political theory of Novalis, Schlegel's close friend in the Jena circle:

> In this oscillating manner of thinking, operating between opposites without overcoming them, accepting the antinomies as natural, Novalis reflected upon the two forms of government of democracy and monarchy. On the surface, the two seem to constitute "an insoluble antinomy--the advantages of the one to be terminated by the opposed advantage of the other." . . . Novalis adds to this observation: "The time must come when political entheism and pantheism are most intimately connected as interactive members." "Entheism" in this fragment is the designation for monotheism, and in political terms, it stands for the monarchic system, while pantheism is doctrine according to which God is everywhere and which therefore corresponds to democracy in the political realm. Monarchy and democracy, in other words, are the poles between which our thinking oscillates, the phenomena of an interactive quality that determine each other. (*German* 60-61)

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*Irony and Clerisy* Introduction

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# Irony and Clerisy

## The Multeity of Coleridgean Apostasy

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...for definite terms are unmanageable things. (Coleridge, 1802)

1. "Once a Jacobin always a Jacobin," Coleridge maintained in 1802. And 1809. And 1818. In itself, the recurrence of this adage might appear to be nothing more than a piece of journalistic ephemera, a detail rightly relegated to the footnotes by various editors of the *Collected Works*. But the near-pathological obsession Coleridge's writing belies regarding this curious formulation--repeating or alluding to it, claiming its originality while disclaiming its implications, not once or twice but on numerous occasions between its original appearance in the *Morning Post* in 1802 and its *n*th revivification in *The Friend* in 1818--suggests that it is more than merely a successfully catchy slogan for (or is it against?) the revolutionary politics of the day. In league with its heretical relation, "apostate," "Jacobin" emerges in Coleridge's treatment as a word to watch with skepticism and vigilance. Indeed, the entire phrase, and the implicit ideological indictment it contains, presents us with a prism through which we can observe the numerous refractions not only of Coleridge's personal politics of the 1790s but also, increasingly, of his transmogrifications of politics into metaphysics in the 1810s. With its converse insight into the modality of romantic apostasy, this volatile epigram is nothing less than the fulcrum with which we can gain sufficient purchase to negotiate the critical conversions of Coleridgean recantation, from the odes of the 1790s through the desultory journalism of the 1800s and 1810s to the "Logosophia" of 1817 and after.

2. These six words summarize the tortuously circuitous "logic" of Coleridge's notoriously lax "foundational principles." Indeed, as we shall see, they epitomize in an altogether perverse fashion the "consistency" of political principle that he regularly claimed for himself, as eloquently as (and far more succinctly than) such habitual sites of interrogation as the Bristol lectures of 1795, numerous articles written for the *Morning Post*, and Chapter 10 of the *Biographia*. By examining the putative logic of (as well as the spell cast by) this enigmatic adage, we can obtain a far more nuanced understanding of the critical question pertaining to Coleridge's politics: not was he (once) a Jacobin, but was he (always) an apostate? Concentrating on this adage can provide us with an answer that will be at once more discriminating and more comprehensive than would be possible through looking at either the revolutionary Coleridge of the "*Conciones ad Populum*" or the reactionary Coleridge of the *Statesman's Manual*--or even (à la Hazlitt, Thelwall and others) through repeatedly juxtaposing the two *personae* with the intent to expose either their chaotic inconsistency or their fundamental consistency. For there may in fact be an unanticipated consistency to Coleridge's political reasoning, albeit not what either his apologists or his detractors have claimed, one better described as "hypostatic" than as apostatic; that is, closer to an under-standing than a standing-away (*hypo*-under; *apo*-away; *stasis*-standing). "To hypostasize" is in fact a Coleridgean neologism, one concocted to denominate the recognition of a substance (or power or person) as self-existent;[1] thus, to speak of a hypostatic Coleridge is to acknowledge an abiding sub-stance between the "Jacobin" of the 1790s and the "Tory" of the 1810s. To postulate a hypostatic union at the outset serves to underline the temporal dimensions of any inquiry into the question of Coleridge's apostasy. How long does Coleridge have to stand for his standing to count as such? What does it mean for "He Hath Stood" to make a stand?[2] That is to say: what is the time of apostasy?

3. As we shall see, the operations of the term "apostasy" are fundamentally uncontrollable. Whenever put in play (or even merely conjured, as above), "apostasy" elides any attempt to fix the terms according to which it might be managed. While, etymologically, "apostasy" may signify a standing-off or -away, it repeatedly figures a standing so precarious as finally to be indistinguishable from a falling—and not an isolated fall at that, but an always- or always-already falling that can be seen to occur with reference not merely to political principle but, far more unpredictably, literary language. The unmanageability of the term is such that any definition of apostasy as merely a standing off postulates a limit to which, in its seemingly inevitable performance of falling, it cannot be held. In this sense, apostasy is an exemplary *mot glissant*[3]—or, as Coleridge would have it, it is a word with a *multeity* (i.e. multitude) of registers.[4]

4. If there is a logic to Coleridge's politics, it is not one of principle so much as of figure, of apostasy considered as a trope according to which a standing converts or *turns into* a falling. This disruptive interruption is an operation of irony, of irony considered as the undoing of any narrative of apostasy.[5] To represent apostasy narratively entails an attempt to render the movement of standing away (the stepping from one stasis to the next) both consistent and stable, in order that the subject might be understood to have maintained a coherence of self in the interim. When the discourse of romantic apostasy shifts to represent the standing-away of apostasy as something other than simply another stand—as something more akin to a turn, which in turn raises the possibility of a fall—the register of apostasy must be reconfigured to accommodate this new, tropological attention to inconsistency and inversion.[6] Irony, then, can be said to name the precipitous conversion of apostasy from a standing-away into a falling, a falling that is neither isolated nor terminal but vertiginous and never-ending, as a "once" turns out to be an "always." And it is this repetition (as it is articulated in the Coleridgean economy of "once / always") that finally determines *apo-stasis* as a "state" of always falling.[7] Recognized in the tangle of Coleridgean politics, irony does not afford an alternative to apostasy, a heading under which to explain Coleridge's "virtual consistency" or his "habitual method of disunity" (irony in lieu of apostasy).[8] Instead, by dint of interrogating the very possibility of standing, irony interrupts romantic narratives of both his political consistency (the Coleridgean "He hath stood") and inconsistency (Hazlitt's articulation of Coleridge's "own specific levity" [7.117]). The question thus becomes, how long does Coleridge have to have stood for falling to count as such?

5. The question of Coleridge's "apostasy" continues to matter. It is the most telling example of what E.P. Thompson long ago recognized as "the intellectual complexity of [romantic] apostasy" ("Compendium of Cliché" 149), the "riddle" of which, as Alan Liu more recently affirmed, "has so haunted Romantic studies" (426). And there is no shortage of possible solutions. In positions remarkably similar to those first articulated by Hazlitt and Coleridge, Thompson and Thomas McFarland maintain, respectively and unequivocally, that Coleridge "was, of course, an apostate" ("Compendium of Cliché" 149) and "that Coleridge was a committed Jacobin who then became an apostate Tory is, on the evidence, demonstrably not the case" (80). Of these was neither and was both at once: as Jerome Christensen (the most astute reader of the sinuousness of Coleridge's apostasy) has noted on several occasions, "Coleridge was always slightly away from a political position; ...he was always technically an *apostate*" ("Once an Apostate" 464). And, in a more complex formulation: "At every point we examine him, even at the beginning, Coleridge is already falling away from every principled commitment" ("Guilty Thing" 772). We will return to Christensen's reading as it bears on Coleridge's "metaphysics" of apostasy in the 1810s, but for the moment we might simply note that, presented in immediate juxtaposition to one another, these two brief citations reveal a crucial shift in Christensen's thinking on Coleridge: how did "always slightly away" turn into "already falling away"? As suggested above, irony can be said to name the conversion of a standing into a falling and thus to designate the disruption of any narrative of political consistency, however involuted. And Coleridge's word for irony, it turns out,

is apostasy.

6. Before proceeding any further toward a reading of the tangled skein of Coleridge's "apostasies"—of the multeity of his apostasy—however, we would do well to sketch a trajectory of the inception, deployments, and appropriations of his youthful political squib, if only to situate both its ungovernable afterlife and Coleridge's peculiarly specular relation to it.

* * *

7. With the Peace of Amiens faltering and English support growing for a resumption of the war with France, Coleridge wrote a lengthy article in October, 1802, for the *Morning Post*, "Once a Jacobin Always a Jacobin," with the professed purpose of answering, once and for all, the question "What *is* a Jacobin?" and thereby provoking the English (with a decidedly Burkean indignation) into consolidating their own increasing anti-Jacobinism. While this piece is, as Erdman has noted, a "threshold-crossing essay" (insofar as it signals that Coleridge is backing away from the support he manifested for Napoleon during the overtures for peace), it is also, ironically, an essay that reveals the difficulties—if not the impossibility—of crossing or re-crossing any border marked "once / always." For if Coleridge's purpose is to provide a suitable rationale for recantation to English Jacobins (EOT 1.cix)—staunch devotees of Liberty, such as he, still walking with awe and singing his stately songs[9]—his own performance of crossing over repeatedly erodes the stable ground of consistency he would claim for himself as an enlightened anti-Jacobin of long-standing. While the essay's polemic seems straightforward enough—to provide a detailed substantiation of Pitt's claim (recorded and embellished by Coleridge two years earlier) that "the mind once tainted with Jacobinism can never be wholly free from the taint"[10]—it is complicated first by Coleridge's favorable (indeed, often sentimental) representation of Jacobinism and later by his disdainful mockery of Pitt's maxim as a presumptuous life-sentence passed "by those who would turn an error in speculative politics into a sort of sin against the Holy Ghost, which in some miraculous and inexplicable manner shuts out not only mercy but even repentance!" (1.373). Admitting at the outset that "definite terms are unmanageable things" (1.367), Coleridge nevertheless attempts to micromanage the term Jacobin here sinuously enough to "prove" the truth of what is in effect his own adage at the same time as he exculpates himself from its implications. No wonder, then, that it is "our duty to have clear, correct, and definite conceptions" (1.370).

8. Though Coleridge reminds us at various moments that he never succumbed to the temptations of Jacobinism (and thus is ostensibly free of its indelible "taint"), both his passionate defense of a Jacobin as a sincere advocate of Liberty and his ridicule of the postulate "once / always," as applied to a speculative error, suggest otherwise. The assertion "once a Jacobin always a Jacobin" requires, it turns out, not a counter-argument but merely a rejoinder—in this case, the blunt "we were never, at any period of our life, converts to the system of French politics" (1.372)—for, as Coleridge reminds us, the adage is not an argument but merely an assertion, and therefore cannot be disproved but only rebutted in like form. So Coleridge does, with a signature pronouncement that he will repeat time and again over the years. The two declarations remain locked in a strenuous tug-of-war over the fulcrum of apostasy ("once / always" balanced against "never a convert"), until the "turn" and "conversion" implicit in Jacobinism itself are articulated (by Hazlitt, in 1816), after which the modality of the term "apostasy" shifts from a standing-apart to a falling-away in such a fashion that Coleridge can then "convert" politics into metaphysics—which, it would appear, is precisely what he was trying to do all along.

9. In the interim, Coleridge reprinted a lengthy section from "Once a Jacobin Always a Jacobin" in Nos 10 and 11 of *The Friend* (October, 1809), as part of a disquisition on the "Errors of Party Spirit." While he proudly signals this incorporation of earlier material by pointing out to the reader that it was he who

formulated "the first fair and philosophical statement and definition of Jacobinism and of Jacobin" in 1802 (*Friend* 2.144), Coleridge abjures the discriminating analysis of the varieties of English Jacobinism that would substantiate this claim, in favor of reprinting the essay's attempt to demystify the adage that continues to haunt him. "'*Once a Jacobin, always a Jacobin*'—O wherefore?" demands Coleridge:

> From what source are we to derive this strange Phaenomenon, that the Young and the Enthusiastic, who as our daily experience informs us, are deceived in their religious Antipathies, and grow wiser...; should, if once deceived in a question of abstract Politics, cling to the Error for ever and ever? (2.145)

Coleridge's expostulations equating Jacobinism and heresy sound more hysterical than philosophical, and fail to address (let alone answer) the question of why one cannot shake it off, particularly when, in retrospect, the consequences of Jacobinism have proved to be such that "every good Man's heart sickens and his head turns giddy at the retrospect" (2.145). There is no reason *per se*, but simply the incommutable sentence passed by the adage. The use of "giddy" at this juncture is telling: denominating a confused sensation or mental dizziness and suggesting a susceptibility to falling, "giddy" foreshadows the vertiginous valence that "apostasy" will acquire in the 1810s, and turns the "retrospect" from a looking-back into a turning-back. Occurring as it does in the final sentence of the essay, "giddy" describes the verge from which to re-view Coleridge's theory of Jacobinism as well as the sensation attendant upon any attempt to unravel the temporal logic of the adage which he won't allow his readers to forget. How is one to survey the past when it is repeatedly conflated with and rolled into the present, as happens in the disconcerting temporal vise of "once / always"? Coleridge's formulation precludes the very retrospect that might free us from the snares of Jacobinism.

10. Leaving this critical question unanswered at the end of *The Friend* No 10, Coleridge abruptly begins No 11, "I was never, at any period of my life, a Convert to the System" (2.146). We have heard this before (1802) and will hear it again (1817-18). What is of note in this particular formulation of Coleridge's claim for political consistency is the allegorical emphasis on French Jacobinism not as a "speculative error" (a matter of belief, akin to an heretical opinion regarding the Holy Ghost) but as a "system" (a formal set of rules, modulated according to its own logic) and, more importantly, for the explicit characterization of Jacobin politics as a matter of conversion. Before one can attempt to turn away from Jacobinism (before one can turn apostate), one must turn away from an anterior ideology and toward Jacobinism. Jacobinism is thus a product of an initial apostasy—indeed, of an initiating apostasy, once we consider (as Coleridge propels us to here) the taint of the "once / always" as pertaining not so much to the -ism of Jacobinism as to the conversion to it: once a convert always a convert. This shift in emphasis, from the temporality of Jacobinism to that of conversion, of apostasy, prefigures the ironization of apostasy that comes into play when Coleridge next rejuvenates the adage in the 1810s.

11. Coleridge's revivification in 1809 of the adage "once a Jacobin always a Jacobin" is representative not only of his insistence on restaging his own past but also his vulnerability regarding the past, both the status of his personal history and the operations of past tenses. Can the past (whether earlier political positions or antecedent conversions) be treated *as such* when organized under the heading "once / always"? The greater the lapse of time, the more susceptible Coleridge becomes to the curious, somehow binding temporality of his own adage. This sense of the progressive time of the past is complicated for us, as it was for his contemporary readers, by the knowledge of Coleridge's susceptibility to charges of having been once—and thus still—a Jacobin. Robert Southey, Coleridge's accomplice in the pantisocratic scheme of 1794-95 (which, predicated as it was upon the communality of property, bluntly violates Coleridge's later claims always to have endorsed the rights pertaining to individual property), was quick to vent his irritation with Coleridge's insufferable "canting" and

downright manipulation of the past in *The Friend*, writing to a correspondent, "It is worse than folly, for if he was not a Jacobine, in the common acceptation of the name, I wonder who the Devil was. I am sure I was, am still, and ever more shall be" (1.511). What is at stake in the objections of Southey and others to Coleridgean historicism is not simply the question of whether Coleridge was or was not a Jacobin according to the "common acceptation of the name," but whether, despite Coleridge's self-congratulatory claims to the contrary, the term itself can be governed. Never hesitating to assume for himself the merit of having been the first to have "explicitly defined and analyzed the nature of Jacobinism," Coleridge even goes to far in the *Biographia* as to claim that "I both rescued the word from remaining a mere term of abuse, and put on their guard many honest minds, who even in their heat of zeal against jacobinism, admitted or supported [its worst] principles" (1.217). Whether or not it was "fair and philosophical," Coleridge's 1802 analysis of the nomenclature of the term Jacobin repeatedly provides his "honest mind" with sufficient latitude in his oblique evasions of every accusation of ever having been one.[11]

12. Beyond the barbed *j'accuse!* of the contemporary responses to Coleridge's performances of political versatility, the abiding significance of these repeated juxtapositions and conflations of the 1790s with the 1810s has more to do with the propriety and manageability of the terms themselves. Coleridge's concern at the outset of his 1802 essay—that "definite terms are unmanageable things," either bereft of any meaning whatsoever or hampered by too many—is all the more the case in the period between the composition of Chapter 10 of the *Biographia* (autumn 1815) and the re-publication of "Once a Jacobin Always a Jacobin" in the three-volume edition of *The Friend* (1818), and at no time more than the winter of 1816-17, when England was beset by a series of calamities (literary as well as political) which did not merely recall the tumultuousness of the 1790s but largely restaged them. Chief amongst these was the pirated publication, in February, 1817, of Southey's jacobinical drama of 1794, *Wat Tyler*.[12] The publication of this seemingly insignificant piece of juvenilia ignited a ferocious public debate regarding the status of English Jacobinism and apostasy, a debate which can be read as a critical referendum on the validity of Coleridge's adage and its ties to the modality of romantic apostasy.

13. Within a month of the appearance of *Wat Tyler*, Southey had been accused of sedition in the House of Commons not once but twice (by Henry Brougham and William Smith) and was further ridiculed by Hazlitt in the *Examiner* for disclaiming the "hypostatical union" between the dramatic poet of *Wat Tyler* and the critic of "On Parliamentary Reform," his vehement and nearly simultaneous attack in the *Quarterly Review* on the seditious liberties of the press (7.169). Soon thereafter, Southey defended himself in a letter to the *Courier*, prompting Coleridge to write a four-part vindication for the same paper, all the while Hazlitt and Hunt continued their merciless assault on both Southey's apostasy and his subsequent *apologia*, the *Letter to William Smith*.[13] Southey was moved to rebut Smith following Smith's designation of him as a malignant "renegado," and his indignation at being branded by this word in particular reveals the degree to which this climactic debate over revolutionary apostasy took shape as a struggle for control over several notoriously unmanageable terms—to wit, Jacobin, apostate, and now renegado—as well as over the problem of consistency, political or otherwise. More precisely, the furor provoked by *Wat Tyler* prompted Coleridge to re-examine the efficacy of his pet adage and finally to forge a way out of its previously binding atemporality. It catalysed his transformation of apostasy from a political dilemma into a metaphysical principle.

14. When revising *The Friend* in the spring of 1817, Coleridge introduced a footnote à propos his inclusion, yet again, of the extract from the self-consuming article of 1802 exculpating him from any charge of youthful Jacobinism. Reminding his readers that what followed was "the first philosophical appropriation of a precise import to the word Jacobin," Coleridge went on to note that "the whole Essay has a peculiar interest to myself at the present moment, (1 May 1817) from the recent notorious publication of Mr. Southey's juvenile Drama, the Wat Tyler, and the consequent assault on his character

by an M.P. in his senatorial capacity" (*Friend* 1.221).[14] Dating the present as precisely as he does, Coleridge brings his own writing of the moment (the four-part "Mr. Southey and Wat Tyler" of March-April 1817) into collision with the entirety of "Once a Jacobin Always a Jacobin." The "present moment" designates not only the "now" of discourse but, of greater consequence, the time that will interrupt the vise-like grip of "once / always" on Coleridge's thinking about consistency and selfhood. As such, it operates as a fulcrum, the apex over which Coleridge lists as he begins to abjure the putative stasis of Jacobinism in formulating the apo-stasis and, finally, the falling of apostasy. The opportunity to defend Southey enabled Coleridge to shake off the binding decree of "once a Jacobin always a Jacobin" and formulate an economy of conversion in such a way that it would no longer be necessary for him to maintain the illusion that he had never been a Jacobin.[15] Indeed, Coleridge's *apologia* ought to be considered not as a defense of but a eulogy on apostasy.

15. Taking exception to Smith's aspersions regarding the virulence and fury of the renegade, Coleridge presumed to explain in the *Courier* that "it is natural and necessary for a renegade ... to be more violent than another":

> He is ashamed of the errors he has committed, he regards those who delude others into such errors as the worst of men; and feeling the pangs of remorse, he seeks to make reparation for his sins, by preventing others from falling onto similar courses. He has been stung, knows the mischief of the poison, and cautions society. (EOT 2.451)

It is in his capacity as defender of the faith, then, that the apostate emerges from Coleridge's defense as a member of a new clerisy—those select few who know just enough about the dangers of Jacobinism to warn others of the armed jacobin revolution that seemed imminent in 1816-17.[16] This is the crux of what we might call Coleridge's construction of heroic apostasy, of apostasy in terms of clerisy, a position he maps out with even greater élan in the final article, where we are to consider the apostate not as a political opportunist but as "the Shield-Bearer of the Faith, the Crusher of Heresy":

> Had no other fragments of the works of the heretic Faustus been preserved but those in which he calls St. Augustine, Apostate and Deserter, yet these would have been amply sufficient to make it *certain* that Faustus himself had remained a Manichean. The very hatred attached to the name Apostate is the clearest proof that the most puissant and formidable enemies, are those who have themselves held the same doctrines, who are familiar therefore with all the sophisms which had ensnared them..., and who above all are able and eager to detail the fatal consequences of the error, with an authorised voice of warning, and the strong, persuasive eloquence of personal sympathy. (EOT 2.475)

Apostates are the greatest defenders of the faith because they alone know the sophistical attractions of the error which they have renounced; they alone are qualified to prevent others from "falling" into the same trap.

16. The apostate's use of violent language establishes the authority of his voice in order that he may check others before they fall (as above) and, more critically, to demonstrate that his own conversion is complete, for the use "of qualified language respecting those who are deluding others into sin, as they deluded us, would prove the conversion to be insincere, or only half effected" (EOT 2.451). Equivocal language would belie an incomplete or merely "half effected" conversion, leaving the would-be apostate either suspended over the abyss into which he might again fall, or at the very least in danger of a relapse. Indeed, how can we know that the conversion is terminal? Though Coleridge represents conversion as a one-time affair (*once* I was a Jacobin, *now* I am not, with the clear implication that neither will I be one in the future; I will never again hold the opinions I held then), somehow

guaranteed by the virulence of the apostate's language, the language of apostasy repeatedly shows itself —as we have seen—to be critically unstable. To infamize another as a renegade or apostate is to confess oneself, Coleridge explains, as continuing to retain the principles "which the other had *reneged* and *stood off from*—in modern phraseology disowned and *turned against*" (474). The shift which Coleridge concedes to contemporary usage—that apostasy is not a simple matter of "standing off" but "turning against"—is significant: the introduction of turning destabilizes an operation which is otherwise to be understood as terminal and, furthermore, completed in the past. If apostasy is not in fact a matter of standing but of turning, how are we to know if and when the turn has been completed? The versatility of the apostasy (not merely a standing away but a turning against) points out the *giddiness* of the transition from one state to another and alerts us to the implicit dangers of a lapse or, indeed, a relapse (as "the head turns giddy at the retrospect"). It furthermore implies the possibility of a "once / always" economy lurking in the "conversion" of apostasy—both as a turning that cannot arrest itself and, more vertiginously, as the turning of a standing into a falling.

17. Subsequent to his defense of Southey, Coleridge's considerations of apostasy abjure the term's contemporary political connotations in favor of more traditional theological implications (initially put in play above), as appropriated and reinvigorated by Coleridge in order that he might deploy apostasy as a standing away from the divine—a standing of little or no stasis, however, designating as it repeatedly does the fall from God. Thus in a fragmentary essay from 1820, "On Love, the Holy Spirit, and the Divine Will," "apostasis" names "the willing of a station ( [stasis, standing]) *from* ( [away, from God]) *merely* potentially" (SWF 868), and in *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* (1824), it is the Second Class of Coleridge's "System of Credenda" (SWF 1118). Following upon the First Class, designated stasis (the transcendent cause, or "whatever *verily* is"), the spiritual chaos of the fall from God (apostasis) results in the Third Class, "metastasis" (understood as a change of state), which is itself antecendent to the Fourth Class, "anastasis," or a rise in state (i.e. Redemption) (SWF 1118-9). Given the multeity of significations overdetermining apostasis in Coleridge's writing, it should not come as any surprise that Coleridge and his critics have increasing trouble reining it in. Indeed, though Coleridge may not ever have presumed to have managed the term apostasy to the degree that he claims to have purified Jacobinism, it becomes for him yet another unmanageable term when, in conjunction with his re-reading of Schelling with T.H. Green in 1817-18 (crucial to much of his later thought, including the "System of Credenda" above), he would subsume it into the metaphysical operation of his emerging "Logosophia" as an initiating fall. Whether consequence or coincidence, it was in the immediate aftermath of the public spectacle of Southey's apostasy that Coleridge began to convert a political liability into a metaphysical necessity.

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18. Hazlitt suggests something similar when, in castigating Coleridge for moving always "in an unaccountable diagonal between truth and falsehood," he notes the versatility with which Coleridge "slides out of a logical deduction with the help of metaphysics" (7.116). Here and elsewhere, Hazlitt repeatedly draws our attention to Coleridge's sinuous logic in order to expose the "perverse obliquity" of his writing and its consequent inconsequentiality.[17] Unaccountably oblique, Coleridge's apostasy is not, Hazlitt intimates, finally reconcilable with any static model of apostasy which would attempt to arrest the "always" that characterizes its falling away.

19. Christensen (Hazlitt and Coleridge's most sophisticated reader on this count), argues otherwise. Reading the "unaccountable diagonal" of Coleridge's thinking more recuperatively than Hazlitt, he argues that "Coleridge makes history by turning political vacillation into philosophical equivocation," then identifying as Coleridgean the strategy "that equivocates politics and political philosophy and that imaginatively converts the former into the latter" ("Once an Apostate" 463, 464). Christensen's elaborate reading of Coleridgean sublimation would ground Coleridge through delineating apostasy as

a principle, one with a concomitant "logic of equivocation proper to principles as principles" (464), and thus arresting Coleridgean vacillation by insisting on the status of swaying as a principle. Such a strong reading of apostasy as a strategic susceptibility to double signification, while both erasing and remarking the stigma with which Thompson and others would brand the apostate, furthermore "turns apostasy into a kind of power" (464), namely the power of standing slightly away from both history and apostasy. Unequivocally an apostate, according to Christensen, "Coleridge was always slightly away from a political position; never a Jacobin revolutionary or a Burkean compromiser, he was always technically an *apostate*" (464). *Fixing* apostasy as the principle of standing *always* away, Christensen arrests Coleridge's fall from principle and ironically establishes the continuity of his career through empowering apostasy as a position resistant to power by virtue of being always away, always on the verge of falling out or in with power.[18] Such a position is equivocal in the sense that it is susceptible of being assigned to either of the extremes between which it presumably wavers, an equivocation which, "*proper* to principles *as* principles" (emphasis mine), insists on the *apo-* of apostasy as both "off" and "against." By virtue of Christensen's complicitous sublimation of politics into philosophy (and etymology), Coleridge can be said to be always off—off the mark and away from the principled position where both his supporters and detractors would locate him. And this includes Christensen, who of course cannot always control the numerous conversions to which his own reading is liable: if always away, may not Coleridge be said to be in all ways away (*now* as ever)?

20. As is the case with any significant consideration of Coleridgean apostasy, Christensen's is both guided and haunted by Hazlitt, whose own reading qualifies the salutary continuity of equivocation which Christensen constructs through attending to the variety of ways that Coleridge has of being away. Hazlitt is valuable as a critic of romantic apostasy because, beyond the vigilance and severity of his critique, his own writing practice can be said to succumb to the very falling it so ruthlessly exposes. That is to say: what Christensen means by "Burke" (the identification of politics with the forcefulness of tropes [464]) is what, for the purposes of reading Coleridge's apostasy, I mean by "Hazlitt." Though Thompson invokes Hazlitt as somehow exemplary of a committedly (empirical) political critique of Coleridge's apostasy, Hazlitt's writing is in fact distinctive for its contamination of the political with the literary, and therefore for the reminder it provides that there can be no stable ground of judgement regarding such a self-violating word as apostasy.

21. The ground of Hazlitt's critique repeatedly falls away under pressure from the ever-shifting modalities of Coleridge's apostasy. Indeed, Hazlitt's pointed deployment of Coleridge's adage on jacobinism against him provides a telling scenario of the complexity of an apostasy that can here be seen to contaminate Hazlitt as well as Coleridge. If, as Thompson puts it, apostasy is a matter of *falling back* in with the forms and sensibility of "traditional culture" ("Disenchantment" 155; emphasis mine), then, as we noted earlier, it is predicated upon a previous falling—a falling out with that culture prior to a falling back in. It is not surprising that Hazlitt should make this point apposite Coleridge's own anti-jacobinical definitions of Jacobinism (which are themselves "not slightly infected with some of the worst symptoms of the madness against which they are raving" [EOT 1.370]), as he does in the second of his "Illustrations of *The Times* Newspaper" ("On Modern Apostates") in December 1816. Questioning the "liberal turn" that has of late been given to apostasy, Hazlitt clarifies the implications of Coleridge's notorious formulation:

> *Once a Jacobin and always a Jacobin*, is a maxim, which, notwithstanding Mr. Coleridge's see-saw reasoning to the contrary, we hold to be true, even of him to this day. *Once an Apostate and always an Apostate*, we hold to be equally true; and the reason why the last is true, is that the first is so. A person who is what is called a Jacobin (and we apply this term in its vulgarest sense to the persons here meant) that is, who has shaken off certain well known prejudices with respect to kings or priests, or nobles, cannot so easily resume them again, whenever his pleasure or his convenience may prompt him to attempt it. And it is

> because he cannot resume them again in good earnest, that he endeavours to make up for his want of sincerity by violence, either by canting till he makes your soul sicken, like the author of *The Friend*, or by raving like a Bedlamite, as does the Editor of *The Times*. (7.135)

According to Hazlitt's appropriation of Coleridge, Jacobinism is itself an apostatic position, characterized here as a shaking off of accepted prejudices. Furthermore, while the attempted resumption of these same prejudices is equated with the preliminary apostasy as a shaking off, it is not as simple as falling back. It is in fact the inability simply to fall back that prompts the violence of the apostate's condemnation of the jacobinism which he can now never entirely shake off—"He blusters and hectors, and makes a noise to hide his want of consistency.... He has ... no feeling of any thing but of hatred to the cause he has deserted" (7.136). The residue of what Hazlitt figures as "old jacobinical leaven," however, renders such blustering completely ineffectual: "You see the Jacobinical leaven working in every line that he writes, and making strange havoc with his present professions ... [as] the spectre of his former opinions glares perpetually near him, and provokes his frantic zeal" (7.136).[19] Recalling that "old leaven" is both that residue which remains behind, and that fermenting agent which enables a rising up, if the "logic" of the maxim "Once a jacobin and always a jacobin" is predicated upon leaven-as-residue, then that of "Once an apostate and always an apostate" relies on leaven-as-levity. The levity of apostasy names a falling up—especially as applied to the case of Coleridge's "own specific levity" (7.117).

22. In his own reading of Hazlitt's diatribe (in a second examination of Coleridge's apostasy), Christensen overlooks the havoc wreaked by residual Jacobinism in suggesting that Hazlitt unwittingly lets Coleridge off the hook:

> if Hazlitt shows that Coleridge is constrained by a compulsive rhetoric of reversal, Hazlitt himself is not free of the Coleridgean figure. By equating Jacobin and apostate under the act of "shaking off," he curiously vitiates the moral force of his indictment; he formalizes change into a pattern of mechanical repetition that is more exigent than any ethical posture or political program. Hazlitt captures Coleridge within the restraints of his ironic equation only to open a trapdoor through which Coleridge escapes, leaving behind any responsibility, let alone culpability, for actions that are compulsive rather than wicked, paradigmatic rather than perverse. ("Guilty Thing" 772)

According to Christensen, Hazlitt's indictment loses its force when, in inscribing Jacobinism within apostasy as a pattern of repetition that is finally mechanical, it relieves Coleridge from any sort of responsibility for his actions and thereby sets him free. But perhaps that is exactly the "force" of Hazlitt's critique: if apostasy is unavoidable, then not only is Hazlitt subject to it himself (the real trapdoor here), but its never-ending economy (whether figured in terms of falling or of fermentation) gives it a far more radical agency than either Hazlitt or Christensen seems to realize. Although Coleridge may "leave behind" any responsibility, he cannot, according to Hazlitt, so easily leave behind the jacobinical leaven that will (mechanically?) continue to rise up and implicate him. While Coleridge may "escape" via a slide from logic to metaphysics (the performance of the sublimation that Christensen previously read), it does not follow that he will then be free from the "necessity of yielding to the slightest motive" (7.117). As a "pattern of *mechanical* repetition," operating without the exercise of thought or volition, apostasy can not be stopped by the application of critical will—which as we will see, both Coleridge and Christensen (in a decidedly Coleridgean strategy) would bring to bear. As with his previous diagnosis of Coleridge's apostasy, Christensen's reading here is valuable for its liberation of the charge of apostasy from the ethical overtones that so often determine it; what it doesn't do, however, is clarify or finally abide by the exigencies of repetitive falling it would articulate.

23. Whereas Christensen previously constructed Coleridge's apostasy in terms of the equivocation of his standing always slightly away, here, standing gives way to falling, but a falling which in no way compromises the "power" of Coleridge's apostasy. As Christensen continues:

> Hazlitt's assertion, "*Once an Apostate and always an Apostate*," is true but only if modified in a way that discharges it of its polemical force: "Once an apostate and *always already* an apostate" is the better, not to mention more fashionable, motto. At every point we examine him, even at the beginning, Coleridge is already falling away from every principled commitment—commitments which are, indeed, endowed with significance solely by that lapse and the critical reflection it allows. (772)

Apostasy here is not merely a "lapse," nor even an "already falling," but an "always already" falling. The mechanics of this economy of falling seem to be already compromised, however, by Christensen's valorization of apostasy in terms of an attendant critical reflection. Indeed, Christensen's turn from the mechanical to the critical suggests that if Coleridge elides responsibility through escaping as he does out of a trapdoor, that exit is opened not by Hazlitt so much as by Christensen-as-Coleridge. If the trapdoor turns out to be metaphysically rather than ironically hinged, it can be seen to be held open by Christensen, who, in his apocryphal reading of Coleridge's apostasy, turns to Coleridge's notebooks to explicate what he terms a "metaphysics of apostasy" (772).

24. In an important 1818 entry on Schelling's "two fundamental errors" with regard to the "establishment of Polarity in the Absolute," (in the *Einleitung zu seinem Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie*) Coleridge attempts, according to Christensen's reading, to construct "apostasis as the crucial articulation of a cosmogonic paradigm that would take account of the law of polarity and yet preserve the determinant, singular unity of an absolute" (773). As cited by Christensen, the entry reads as follows:

> ...there must be the way downwards and the way upwards—but this is because there are two spheres, ...the Plenitude and nature—the way downwards commencing with the Fall from God, Apostasy—the path of transit with the Chaos and the *descent* of the Spirit—the way upwards with the genesis of Light.—Thus in my Logosophia I have four great Divisions, I. That which is neither ascent or descent—for instead of a way, it's that "*from* which" and "to which," not a road at all, but at once the starting-post, and the Goal.—Call it then Stasis. II. Apostasy or the way downwards. III. Metastasis. IV. The way upwards. More neatly thus: I. Stasis II. Apostasy III. Metastasis IV. Anastasis.[20]

Repeating Coleridge's immediate query, "Well but what is the use of all this?", Christensen clarifies:

> The use, clear from our neo-Hazlittian perspective, lies in the transformation of "*Once an Apostate and always an Apostate*" into a cosmogonic crux. Apostasy is the crucial, or rather, the *critical* stage of Coleridge's paradigm because it is the first break in the stasis that precedes all paradigms, the *standing away* that precipitates the creation. (773; emphasis mine)

While this makes a great deal of sense as a distillation of such a significant Coleridgean meditation, *our* neo-Hazlittian perspective suggests a somewhat different reading. Whereas he previously championed Hazlitt's maxim for its insight into the Coleridgean modality of an always already falling, Christensen now withdraws from the implication of always falling in this climactic deployment of apostasy as a "*standing* away." As an always falling, apostasy doesn't precipitate creation so much as chaos (according to the order of Coleridge's Logosophia), and it remains for metastasis to check this fall. Indeed, as the medial position which arrests the movement downward and re-orients its "path of

transit," metastasis is far more crucial to the coherence of the Logosophia. Rhetorically, as a rapid transition from one point to another, metastasis enables Coleridge *and* Christensen to escape the precipitous state of always falling that is proper to apostasy *as* apostasy.

25. My point here is not to quibble with Christensen regarding an arcanely apposite entry in Coleridge's notebooks but rather, in pointing out the way in which Christensen's reading falls away from its own most challenging insight (namely, the implications of thinking apostasy as a formalized "pattern of mechanical repetition"), to focus on the unpredictable yet seemingly unavoidable exigencies of apostasy from which the critical discourse on apostasy is not immune. While the escape into metaphysics (Coleridge's or Christensen's) depends on the sleight of falling back upon a strict etymological denotation, such a construction is explicitly at odds with the usage of apostasy that is everywhere apparent in Coleridge's notebook (in terms of "the Fall ... the *descent* ... [and] the way downwards") as a falling and a lapse. Perhaps what is needed here is a different lexicon for apostasy, one more representative of the elusive operations of such a perverse *mot glissant*: slipping in this manner, apostasy revolts (in line with a second, Greek usage of *stasis* as faction and strife), and operates more like *catapipty* (*cata*-down; *pipto*-to fall), if not *apopipty* (to fall away; to fall and end up in a different place). Indeed, the word that the turn to (or is it against?) metaphysics really needs is *apocatapipty* (an apart-downward falling), a neologism so appropriate to the economy of Coleridgean apostasy that one would like to imagine his assent scribbled in the margins with a simple *stet*.

### Notes

[1] The two earliest examples cited by the OED are Coleridge's: "...for from the effect we may fairly deduce the inherence of a power producing it, but are not entitled to *hypostasize* this power (that is, to affirm it to be an individual substance) any more than the Steam in the Steam Engine, the power of Gravitation in the Watch, or the magnetic Influence in the Loadstone" (*Friend* 2.75); "The admission of the Logos as *hypostasized* (i.e. neither a mere attribute or a personification) in no respect removed my doubts concerning the incarnation and the redemption by the cross" (BL 1.204-5).

[2] From 1802 forward, Coleridge often signed himself (ostensibly, punic Greek for or "*He hath stood*") as testimony to his non-apostasy. As he wrote to William Sotheby in September 1802, " signifies--*He hath stood*--which in these times of apostacy from the principles of Freedom, or of Religion in this country, & from both by the same persons in France, is no unmeaning Signature, if subscribed with humility, & in the remembrance of, Let him that stands take heed lest he fall--. However, it is in truth no more than S.T.C. written in Greek. *Es tee see*--" (CL 2.867; Griggs notes that " signifies 'He hath placed' not 'He hath stood.'").

[3] The phrase is Bataille's, denoting a word which establishes a limit to which it cannot hold itself. The most immediately recognizable examples (e.g. Blanchot's *le neant*) behave according to Bataille's inflection of *le silence*: "*Du mot il est déjà ... l'abolition du bruit qu'est le mot; entre tous les mots c'est le plus pervers, ou le plus poétique: il est lui-même gage de sa mort*" (28).

[4] The OED defines "multeity" as "the quality or condition of being many" and attributes it to Coleridge in both the "Principles of Genial Criticism" and the *Biographia*, where, in justifying his use of scholastic formulations, he prefers multeity to multitude for its greater precision in expressing "the kind with the abstraction of degree" (BL 1.287). Cf. *Notebooks* 4352 (on the laxity of philosophical language in English), 4449 (to which I will turn in conclusion), and 4450. For my purposes here, multeity denominates (in a succinctly Coleridgean fashion) the unmanageability of the term apostasy as deployed both by and regarding Coleridge.

[5] Irony, as Paul de Man repeatedly argues, "is precisely what makes it impossible ever to achieve a theory of narrative that would be consistent" ("Concept of Irony" 179). In the context of a consideration of romantic apostasy, irony represents the threat of a systematic undoing of any understanding of the self-consistency of the apostate in any narrative of his standing-away as somehow stable. As will become increasingly apparent here, my consideration of irony closely follows the implications of de Man's own, particularly as developed in "The Concept of Irony" and "The Rhetoric of Temporality."

[6] In this regard, the conversion of a standing into a falling resembles what F.W. Schlegel and, following him, de Man, have designated as a moment of parabasis, or "the interruption of a discourse by a shift in the rhetorical register" ("Concept of Irony" 178). Thus, the always falling that evolves from the economy of Coleridgean apostasy will be seen to resemble Schlegel and de Man's structure of "permanent parabasis."

[7] De Man most explicitly considers the relation between irony and falling in the early "Allegory and Irony in Baudelaire," where he observes (à propos "*De l'essence du rire*") that for the subject to come "face to face with its own fallen condition" is for it to recognize the attendant "threat of a persistent falling" (111), a falling which has been initiated by "a passing from a mere extension of the self to an altogether different kind of self that results from a radical change of the *level* of consciousness"—which one can think of, in turn, "as a vertical movement of climbing and falling" (110). (See "The Rhetoric of Temporality," especially 211-16, for a further refinement of the connection between the multiplication of the self and a moment of falling.) For a detailed consideration of de Man's articulation not merely of irony but in fact of theory with falling, see Caruth.

[8] As David Erdman notes in his introduction to *Essays on His Times*, Sara Coleridge described her father's politics in terms of a "virtual consistency," which Erdman then proceeds to consider in terms of the oscillation of an S-curve, concluding that Coleridge "is in truth 'ever the same' in the sense that he is never single-sided or single-minded but always both Jacobin and anti-Jacobin, Radical and Tory, poet and moralist, intermingled" (lxiv-v). In his analysis of Coleridge's "habitual mode of disunity," Alan Liu remarks, "It was not that Coleridge changed his mind from Yea to Nay, in sum, but that he consistently said Yea *but* Nay" (422). Liu's contribution to the consideration of Coleridgean apostasy is to substitute a synchronically self-doubling perspective for the traditionally chronological method--"...at every moment Coleridge faced in two directions such that the articulation of one view necessitated, as if structurally, the articulation of its opposite" (421)--the consequence of which, according to Liu, is that there never was any apostasy (423), for at precisely those moments when it was required of him to take a stand, Coleridge "was neither here nor there" (422).

[9] During the preceeding week, the *Morning Chronicle* had published a revised version of "France: An Ode" and a 62-line excerpt from "Fears in Solitude," Coleridge's "recantation" poems of 1798. As was the case at the time of their initial publication, it is unclear whether the appearance of these poems (particularly the ode, which had been originally titled "The Recantation") signifies a recantation from or a steady adherence to Coleridge's (oscillating) politics of 1798, given their ambivalent endorsement of "Liberty" at the expense of both France and England. For the editorial introduction to the first appearance of "The Recantation," see Erdman's Appendix (EOT 3.287-8; for the corrections to the poems in 1802, see Erdman's notes (EOT 3.295-6).

[10] In its entirety (as reported by Coleridge), Pitt's pronouncement reads, "The mind once tainted with Jacobinism can never be wholly free from the taint; when it does not break out on the surface, it still lurks in the vitals; no antidote can approach the subtlety of the venom, no length of quarantine secure us against the obstinacy of the pestilence" (EOT 1.186; see Erdman's note here for the relation between

this formulation and Coleridge's "Letter to Fox" of November 1802).

[11] John Thelwall, for example, recorded his own shock and indignation at Coleridge's repeated periphrases in the *Biographia*, most pointedly apropos Coleridge's anecdotal account of his youthful political opinions in Chapter 10, where Coleridge repeatedly alludes to "Once a Jacobin Always a Jacobin" in support of his claim that even during the production of *The Watchman* in 1796, "my principles were [opposite] to those of jacobinism or even of democracy" (1.184). A far more visible and "radical" Jacobin than Coleridge, Thelwall (who had corresponded with Coleridge at the time before meeting him the following year in Nether Stowey) disagreed. Conceding the difficulty of defining, let alone rescuing, such a term as Jacobin, Thelwall's immediate response upon reading the *Biographia* suggests that, in this case, Coleridge has failed to guard the honesty of his own mind:

> What Jacobinism may mean I cannot tell: if the principles of the first leaders of the Jacobin club, what friend of liberty of human reason & human happiness would disown them? If the doctrines (or declamations, & the practices of the last, what friend of Man would not recoil from them with horror? If Jacobinism be antisocialism, I have never gone the lenghts [*sic*] in that way which the Pantisocratist went at any rate, nay I may say I never had the slightest tinge of that with which Mr C. was deep died: but that Mr C. was indeed far from Democracy, because he was far beyond it, I well remember--for he was a down right zealous leveller & indeed in one of the worst senses of the word he was a Jacobin, a man of blood. (Pollin 81)

Of Coleridge's reminiscences later in Chapter 10 regarding his "retirement" to Nether Stowey, Thelwall intervened, "Where I visitted him and found him a decided Leveller--abusing the Democrats for their hypocritical moderatism, in pretending to be willing to give the people equallity of privileges & rank, while at the same time, they would refuse them all that the others could be valuable for--equality and property--or rather abolition of all property" (Pollin 82).

[12] The history of Wat Tyler (a fourteenth-century blacksmith who led an abortive Peasants' Revolt against Richard II to protest taxes levied during yet another war with France) had been circulating since December, 1816, when one of the leaders of the Spa Fields riots had invoked it (Carnall 161-2). Though the rioting was quickly contained, the spectacle of an armed mob of English Jacobins brandishing liberty caps and tricolor flags was sufficiently unnerving to provide Castlereagh's ministry with the necessary pretext for suppressing the Reformers, and when Parliament reconvened in January, 1817, the Habeas Corpus Suspension Act and the Seditious Meetings Act were passed in both Houses by the end of March. It was in the midst of the debates over this flurry of repressive legislation in the winter of 1817, when the British Government seemed intent on re-staging, act-by-act, the counter-revolutionary terror of the 1790s, that Southey's Jacobin drama of 1794 was anonymously published in a pirated edition. Disinterred on 13 February with the taunting Shakespearean epigraph, "Thus ever did Rebellion find rebuke," Southey's juvenile dramatization of Wat Tyler appeared in the same week as his reactionary article, "Parliamentary Reform," ran (also anonymously) in the *Quarterly Review* and the report of the Committee on Secrecy (established in the aftermath of the Spa Fields affair) was made public. The timing was perfect: on both a national and a personal level, this otherwise insignificant piece of juvenilia provided a final, melodramatic twist to the ongoing exhumation of the revolutionary politics of the 1790s. The publication of *Wat Tyler* provided Opposition critics with an irresistible opportunity not only to discredit a repressive ministry that was implementing extraordinarily harsh peacetime measures against the disaffected (Carnall 164) but also to spotlight the political apostasy of the Poet Laureate. If, as Marx quipped, all world-historical incidents of note occur as it were twice, then the "tragedy" of Wat Tyler might be said to have returned as both a farce and, in this case, an epitaph--an unsought inscription for the youthful Jacobinism that, for whatever reason, had not

perished but lingered to haunt Southey throughout the 1810s. (For a detailed account of the political agitation during the winter of 1816-17--specifically, the significance of the three Spa Fields meetings of 1816--see Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 631-41.)

[13] For a detailed account of the furor in the periodical press over *Wat Tyler*, see Hoadley.

[14] For extracts from Smith's speech in the House of Commons, see Madden 236-9.

[15] Maintaining the division of the extract from "Once a Jacobin Always a Jacobin" that he had used in 1809, such that the subsequent essay begins, "I was never, at any period of my life, a convert to the system," Coleridge prefaced it in 1818 with this couplet (attributed to Coleridge by E.H. Coleridge): "Truth I pursued, as Fancy sketch'd the way, / And wiser men than I went worse astray." (*Friend* 1.223)

[16] Southey strikes this pose repeatedly throughout the *Letter to William Smith*, even going so far at one point as to characterize the English Jacobins of the 1790s as a uniquely enlightened class: "[*Wat Tyler*] was written when republicanism was confined to a very small number of the educated classes; when those who were known to entertain such opinions were exposed to personal danger from the populace; and when a spirit of Anti-jacobinism was predominant, which I cannot characterize more truly than by saying, that it was as unjust and intolerant ... as the Jacobinism of the present day" (7).

[17] Commenting on the editorial practice of Coleridge and T.G. Street in the *Courier*, Hazlitt wrote in the *Morning Chronicle*, 28 October 1813 (as cited in EOT 3.276): "...although I despair of reforming, yet I will occasionally undertake to expose, the inanity of their statements, and the perverse obliquity of their comments.

[18] For Liu, such a position closely resembles the stance of Opposition politics, as epitomized by Burke: "...apostasy was endemic to the basic negational structure of opposition. Referenced on a pure relation, Opposition was in the final analysis a will to oppose independent of settled object" (411). See Liu 407-13.

[19] Compare with "On Consistency of Opinion": "It seems that they [apostates] are afraid to look their old opinions in the face, lest they should be fascinated by them once more. They banish all doubts of their own sincerity by inveighing against the motives of their antagonists. There is no salvation out of the pale of their strange inconsistency" (17.24). See also "Arguing in a Circle": "Their zeal, their eagerness to distinguish themselves in their new career, makes them rash and extravagant" (19.276).

[20] For a more detailed account of this lengthy entry, see the notes of the editor of the *Notebooks*, Kathleen Coburn (whose translations of Coleridge's Greek have been inserted here), as well as "Guilty Thing" 772-4. Closely related to Coleridge's reading here of Schelling are his letter of 30 September 1818 to T.H. Green (CL 4.873-6), the fragment "On the Error of Schelling's Philosophy" (SWF 786-7), and Coleridge's marginalia concerning the *Naturphilosophie*, where he asserts the superiority of his own conception of "multeity" over Schelling's positing of "original productivities" (*Marginalia* 4.381).

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# Irony and Clerisy

## *Alastor*, Apostasy, and the Ecology of Criticism

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1. The opposition of life and death, arguably, subordinates other differences—in taste, lifestyle, and politics, for example—however much these might seem like matters of life and death at particular personal or historical moments. Death threats have the capacity to transform effective ideological difference into ideological equivalence. Take the 60s Cold War arms control strategy of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD). MAD governed military interactions between the "red" and "free" world superpowers on the principle that neither side would initiate an aggression that would result inevitably in its own annihilation as well as that of the enemy. Making survival the ultimate guarantor of world peace diluted other values, including those on which opposition was supposedly based. The superpower pact with death assimilated politics by pitting nation-states against citizens; the equivalent positions between these states on the one hand and their hostage civilian populations on the other eroded the significance of political difference.

2. In 1815, Percy Shelley grappled with the effects of a death threat, although largely a false alarm. Misdiagnosed as a consumptive, Shelley, according to Mary Shelley's note about the period, was ordered to change his introspective, indoor, and generally melancholic way of living. The *Alastor* volume of poetry, published in early 1816, issued from this conflicted period of Shelley's life, and many readers have judged its politics as a quietistic contrast to the outspoken radicalism of *Queen Mab*. But at least as striking as its difference from *Mab* is the complex ambivalence internal to the volume.[1] Shelley's collection is a curious mix of equivocation and polemic; the final lines of "Mutability," for example, would certainly sound understimulating to an activist:

   > It is the same!—For, be it joy or sorrow,
   > The path of its departure still is free:
   > Man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow;
   > Nought may endure but Mutability. (13-16)[2]

   However, "Feelings of a Republican on the Fall of Bonaparte," as the title indicates, is both topical and political, concluding

   > That virtue owns a more eternal foe
   > Than Force or Fraud: old Custom, legal Crime,
   > And bloody Faith the foulest birth of Time. (12-14)

3. The oscillation between equivocality and political commitment also entangles the critically controversial preface to "Alastor." The preface begins with a descriptive synopsis in which the poem's protagonist is described as "a youth of uncorrupted feelings and adventurous genius," from whose fate the narrator exacts the moral that "the Poet's self-centered seclusion was avenged by the furies of an irresistible passion pursuing him to speedy ruin" (69). But immediately after delivering this lesson the preface breaks into a polemic defending rather than attacking its hapless "luminary." The narrator continues,

> They who, deluded by no generous error, instigated by no sacred thirst of doubtful knowledge, duped by no illustrious superstition, loving nothing on this earth, and cherishing no hopes beyond, yet keep aloof from sympathies with their kind, rejoicing neither in human joy nor mourning with human grief; these, and such as they, have their apportioned curse. (69)

"These" types are castigated through the rest of the preface, and finally threatened with a "miserable grave" (70). The preface, in other words, swerves into an argument against the detached equivalence expressed by "Mutability," and makes distinctions among the world's losers (who appear to be a variegated everybody "who attempt[s] to exist without human sympathy" [70]), that is, both those deluded by "contemptible" error and those deluded by "generous error." In the world of the dead, it appears, there are good dead and bad dead. Clearly, the preface is ambivalent; the critique of enthusiasm with which the preface begins undermines its polemic, and vice versa. Insofar as Shelley is engaging in argument, his means and ends split off from each other; his first move is similar to MAD's consequentialism; he values effects over worthy intentions, and seems to critique an overrating of ideological matters. But in a second movement, he seems to reverse that emphasis and engage in polemic—leaving the troubling question, if solitude and death are the fate of both enthusiastic pursuit and defensive withdrawal, idealist radicalism and conservative apostasy, what can be the foundation of polemic? Rather than searching for a resolution to this long-familiar inconsistency, in this essay I suggest these contradictions as byproducts of agonistic pressures themselves. "Alastor's" peculiar, sporadic attachment to polemic is the result of a form of argument gone haywire, like the logic of "Live free or die" in a global context of nuclear deterrence.

4. It might be noted that Shelley's predicament faces all those who risk loosening up the suspicion that has powerfully inflected Romantic studies in the last two decades, signalled by Jerome McGann's provocation, *The Romantic Ideology*. Ideology critique is not neutral; while it has a major descriptive and explanatory component, concerned with the concealed or repressed processes by which value is conferred on the status quo, the whole point of scrutinizing these processes is lost if "bad" qualities cannot be distinguished from "good," if exploitation cannot be distinguished from neutral production. But ideology critique, because of its dedication to discerning the invisible, has a susceptibility to a hypertrophied anxiety, a paranoia over unaccounted phenomena that tends to the production of equivalences, as I shall further discuss below.[3] We might take paranoia as the hunchback in the puppet described in Walter Benjamin's famous opening to the *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, an interior dwarf who renders critics, ecstatic mannikins all, as never suspicious enough of themselves, dialectical method notwithstanding. The difficulty of an account of phenomena as totalizing as theories of ideology tend to be, as Benjamin says of "historical materialism," is that "it is to win all the time" (253)—in other words, it is "strong theory."

5. I take this notion of strong theory from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who takes it from cognitive psychologist Silvan Tomkins.[4] Strong theory refers to a dynamic of interaction between a theory and its environment, both terms taken in a broad sense. In a psychological context, for example, the subject employs "theory" to help regulate contact with the environment in a way that minimizes pain and maximizes pleasure. The fact that Freud tilts his developmental theory primarily towards the former, on the overriding significance of *un*pleasure, is a symptom of strong theory at work: strong theory tends to be preemptive, organized by the demands of prevention rather than facilitation. The connection of these features to strong theory rests on their responsiveness to feedback: a strategy of pain avoidance, in contrast to pleasure seeking, grows stronger when it fails. In the wake of a failure to ward off pain, the response is to produce a more general theory of wider scope to avoid a repetition of the failure. So failure enhances theory; strong theory grows out of failure (Karl Popper's concept of falsification as the governing process behind the history and progress of science exemplifies this). It is to this dynamic we

owe the production of "truth." But—and this point is of primary importance—the dynamic does not work when the object is pleasure-seeking. Pleasure is too local, too particular, too ephemeral, and most important, too delicate; it is too easily deformed by theory itself, as the killing effect of explaining a joke demonstrates. Pleasure seems to require "weak" theory rather than strong.

6. Thomas Pfau, in his essay for Romanticism and Conspiracy in the Romantic Circles Praxis Series, provided a lucid description of traits constituting a "conspiratorial logic" that seem especially characteristic of Romanticism, traits that Sedgwick, with a different emphasis, discusses in the context of Tomkin's work. Paranoia, that state of being most clearly associated with conspiratorial logic, is indeed a paradigmatic strong theory. Preemptively, it equates potential with fact. As a result it cannot relax before apocalypse, before, that is, the universe has been grasped in its totality. Every novelty, good or bad, is *bad* in the sense that it represents a breach in surveillance, a vulnerability. This compulsion to full accountability extends to the whole past and the whole future; anything less total permits the disaster of attack. Furthermore, paranoia is mimetic, contagious: it produces a real or metaphorical arms race. As a strong theory, it filters phenomena in terms of hostile potential; in the process, it reduces all "players" to threats or dupes, a reduction that dynamically mediates the deformation of social reality into its fantasmatic orbit. Being regarded as a threat produces a defensiveness that mutates into real threat; being regarded as a dupe forces one, defensively, to wise up to the paranoid's standards. And finally, as theory, paranoia puts all its faith in the exposure of the truth, a self-serving investment, as Pfau points out, that creates a hero of the critic. The critic's work, a complete portrait of the Truth, is also the Good and the Beautiful; there is no other object.

7. The implications of this approach for criticism in the arts is obviously immense (it is an example of strong theory, I suppose). Essentially, we are talking about an ecology of criticism, a non-linear dynamics of critical causes and effects encompassing the critics themselves (and their products in texts and pedagogies), their domain (both literary and cultural), and "theory" proper. Insofar as criticism by definition is agonistic to a greater or lesser degree, it abounds in defensive structures and their mimetic effects. However, the defensive mimesis that structures critical debate can become exaggeratedly severe—paranoid, that is to say—when literary texts become sites of ideology critique—doubly so for a period when ideology critique itself flourished. Whether it take the classical, analytic method of the *Idéologues* or the more complex, critically current techniques derived from nineteenth-century German historicism—or whether it follow after Plato's allegory of the cave—ideology critique requires *self*-critique in tandem with a critique of phenomena, a purportedly therapeutic suspicion of what one might be inclined to take for granted, a keen sense of distinction between appearance and reality, between a conscious self and an unconscious self, an animation behind the animation. Given the consideration—a valuable and necessary consideration—that the relation between appearance and reality is not innocent, that it tends toward an invidious deception, ideology critique needs to remain central to criticism. But there is an excess to its process that also warrants consideration. In an atmosphere where no one can truly be reflexive enough, where there always remain apertures for hegemonic forces to invade and occupy those cultural watchdogs whose very *raison d'etre* is to exclude such invasions, and where, invariably, some one *else* finds the weakness of one's position, despite the most disciplined self-surveillance—evidence of the catastrophe of a momentary lapse—under these conditions, opponents, indeed, begin to resemble each other, and straiten the general ecology of criticism. Moreover, such an observation submitted to a paranoid logic can only result in an exacerbation of surveillance. What happens when this becomes the fear? What results from paranoia about paranoia?

8. Harold Bloom presented a related scenario with quite a different emphasis some time ago in *The Anxiety of Influence*. Bloom's point was not strong theory, but strong poetry, style that so successfully mastered its engendering conditions that the threat of ventriloquizing the father, so to speak, is overcome. But from a systems standpoint, the anxiety of influence can never be overcome through "strength;" strength as a function of surveilling power only increases the anxiety. The same might be

said of many recent arguments based on quite different principles recommending a return to ethics in criticism. Certainly recognition of what criticism *does* is a valuable addition to the critical obsession with truth, with what *is*. However, it seems all too easy to incorporate this ethical concern into an increased pressure for self- and other- surveillance that fails to make ethical contexts any more yielding than political-ideological ones. Attention to what Jean-Luc Nancy called the "excription" of meaning, the outside of thought, does not necessarily temper the paranoid bent of critical agonistics (105).

9. After this excursus on the ecology of criticism, it is with some trepidation that I enter the fray with a critical discussion of "Alastor," a field so brilliantly traversed in the last twenty years. Roughly—quite roughly—this criticism divides along the poles of what Timothy Clark called the "theory of Two Shelleys," presenting either a polemical or a philosophical "Alastor" (4). The first often engages the poem as a response to the apostasy of the first generation Romantics, and the second engages the consistency of the poem itself, often in the context of Shelley's wide reading in literature, philosophy, and politics. Perhaps predictably, I propose to do both of these, but in a specific combination: I engage "Alastor" as a text responsive to an ecology of criticism, subordinating questions of what is true to questions of what the struggle for truth does to an environment that is both ideological and affective, where a poet—in contrast to a political economist, a historian, or a scientist—cannot write by truth alone. Shelley *is* critically engaged with Wordsworth; however, he is keenly aware that engagement brings with it a dangerous portion of ventriloquizing Wordsworth. Shelley *is* engaged in systematic philosophy, but reflects on the capacity for both skeptical and positive modes to dilute ideological difference through supervening theory. With these considerations in mind, I take "Alastor" to be hyperbolically paranoid, an exposure of paranoia *as* exposure, *as* surveillance, *as* mimesis. But what I propose to add to this metastasizing of surveillance is the thread of another, different consideration: pleasure. Might we not find in the massively self-reflexive web of the poem something besides strong theory and its discontents?

10. One of the most productive sites for hyperbolic paranoia is language itself. The difficulty of bending even one's own mental productions to one's desire arises most intimately and immediately from the speed of language; a supposedly prior integrity always dissolves into a temporality that can betray it.[5] Discourse loops into the future and returns, the finished thought sometimes bearing with it unlooked-for contents. Consequence descends so quickly upon intention that the subject must fear the very progress of thought. "Don't think of a rhinoceros"—too late. "Reading this forbidden," says a sign with the official government logo, and the Medusa's stone gaze constitutes an overarching metaphor for the tragic belatedness of knowledge with respect to the powers of surveillance. The self's own future lies in wait for it. Of course, to take the logic of such messages so literally is an extreme response. The structure of the prohibitory examples above is similar to the structure of the famous "liar's paradox," and they generally submit to the same kind of resolution that Lacan brought to the statement "I am lying": a separation of the subject of enunciation from the subject of the statement, a segregation of frames. The enunciating subject, the speaker, refers to something else by the statement, some other utterance as constituting the falsehood in question. But Lacan's deliberate ambiguity in the phrase "subject of enunciation"—both in the sense of the preposition "of" and in the reference of "subject"—also comes to bear on these statements of warning. The frames collude after all, eliminating the gap between cognition and representation, the gap that permits the freedom of imagination. In moments of perverse and paranoid reflection, this freedom seems a false freedom, a freedom whose terms were emitted from beyond an impregnable barrier. On the level of sheer affect, though, there is a vague magical sense of a signifying frontier where the normally perceived relations of signifier to signified yield an element of surprise, where something customarily covered up is revealed. A foretaste of jouissance accompanies this seemingly hypothetical short-circuit.

11. "Alastor" presents this frame-shattering self-reflexive loop at all levels, from its narrative framework through the minutiae of style. Even a cursory reading of "Alastor" reveals that its respective narrators

—an author, a Narrator, and a character—and the character's mental products—interact too closely for simple sequential analysis.[6] And such interaction is familiar; it dramatizes on the level of reading a negative Romantic commonplace, a theme of *Bildung* and disillusion, the story of the acquisition of a Faustian knowledge that fails to elevate, but instead precipitates catastrophe, and because of this precipitation, contorts the dissemination of knowledge from an ethical imperative into a guilty compulsion. Experience cannot be submitted to communication without contaminating those it sets out to educate, and a similar diegetical contagion plagues "Alastor." The poem's most developed narrative layer consists of the story of the fictional character known only as "the Poet" whose biography a Narrator encloses, and the transferential relationship of the inner narrator to the character explodes the representing/represented binary. This disruption is first of all signalled by surface parallels. The Poet's life consists of distinct phases: gathering an inspiriting knowledge, projecting an imaginary entity, the "veiled maid," losing his creation and falling into inconsolable melancholy. The Narrator's creative experience composes a similar sequence: optimistically petitioning nature in the opening invocation, imagining the Poet, losing the Poet to an untimely death against which the Narrator rails in vain. The effect of transferential repetition is further heightened by the fact that the exposition of these twin courses of narrator and Poet are impossible to disentangle grammatically: it is frequently undecidable whether certain passages tell us about the Narrator or about the subject of the narrative—a breakdown of exemplarity. At its outset, the Poet's journey is vaguely described as a "quest for strange truths in undiscovered lands" (77), a search for novelty. However, whether the desire for novelty is the poet's or the narrator's remains equivocal; the figures that compass the Poet leave in doubt whether we encounter expressions of the Poet's motives or a manner of speaking more indicative of the Narrator. This ambiguity not only suggests representation's inevitable distortion of intention, but also conveys the fact that such distortion is dynamic and reflexive. Poetic creations redound on their creator; identification occurs. The narrator's words, equivocally style or description, seem at once to motivate, relate, and symbolize his object in the overdetermined figurative language with which the Poet's journey is described. The Poet's wandering begins driven by oxymorons: the Poet leaves "His cold fireside and alienated home" (99); attachment to the familiar dies like a flame upon the ashes it produces.

12. The poet proceeds onwards through extremities of wilderness, passing through ice, volcanoes, gem-filled caves, "making the wild his home" in counterpoint to the home which had wildered him (99). But alongside these overdetermined figures there ensue underdetermined effects. What starts as a flight from the familiar concludes with an arrival at memorials of the forgotten past, in contrast to the uncharted wilderness of the present; the world's horizons have subtly swerved, turning inward. The poet's journey has taken him backwards, not from the familiar to the new, but from the familiar to a hoary and forgotten antiquity. This curvature goes unremarked, as invisible as ideology, as insidious as the grip of the *ancien regime* upon the post Napoleonic continent, finally terminating at "[t]he awful ruins of the days of old" (108). Shelley's version of the Temple of Dendera temporarily dams the flow of the Poet's thoughts and travels; here "[H]e lingered, poring on memorials of the world's youth" (122). In contrast to the vast panorama of his earlier experience, vision constricts to a singular intense gaze. At the same time, the quest has become a question, an interlocution; the Poet's mode of perception becomes more interactive. The answer to the question is suggestively aural rather than optical, sympathetic vibrations in the midst of an impassive visual screen: the Poet gazed

    And gazed, till meaning on his vacant mind
    Flashed like strong inspiration, and he saw
    The thrilling secrets of the birth of time. (126-128)

    Although the Poet "gazed" and "saw," his objects seem strangely non-visual: "meaning/ Flashed" like "inspiration" (rather than like an object of sight) and "secrets" are "thrilling"—engrossing the ear rather than the eye. Breath and vibration, breaking into this silent visual scene, suggest that something speechlike has happened to the representation of the Poet's desire, in oxymoronic tension with the

"mute thoughts on the mute walls around" (120). The poet seems to have acquired a physicality, a complexity, to have gone beyond mere gaze and mere portrait. Again, such a development, equivocally style and plot, suggests at once progress in the Narrator's imagination as well as progress in the narrative. The Poet, by becoming a more fully realized projection, cannot but suggest symbolic maturation. At the same time, though, maturation seems utterly entangled with regression, with a return to origins; progress in Poet and Narrator seem to require starting over, rebirth. Yet time goes on.

13. This overall equivocality of figurative implication and attribution signals a peculiarly material and sensual relation of thought to itself that becomes most marked at yet another level of the poem. The Poet, initially the inmost layer of the nested imaginary constructs, imagines (or so it seems) a veiled maid, "herself a Poet" (161). As in the case of the narrator and the Poet, the Poet is intertwined with his own imaginative creation. Her singing repeats his journey in miniature; her contemplation moves from tranquillity to passion, from self-sufficiency to excess. Her description changes in focus from the content of her words, "Knowledge and truth... and lofty hopes of divine liberty" (158-159), to the intensified rhythm of her speed: "wild numbers" (163) to the symphony of her own organism: "The eloquent blood... The beating of her heart... her breath" (168-170)—a "thrill" of the body's alterity to itself like that aural thrill the Poet experienced in the Temple of Dendera. This steady increase in awareness of embodiment generates a glow that penetrates her veil, and at the maximum point of physical radiance, as she and the Poet embrace, she disappears. This convergence and divergence has the interactive complexity of weather. The encounter consists of two mutually responsive intersections of experience: the veiled maid's effects on herself, and her effects on the Poet, and the Poet's effects on himself through her meditation and finally his effect on her. She begins calm to herself, veiled to him, passes through a process of excitation that seems entirely self-propelled, yet ultimately propels her towards him, as he moves from registering her voice "like the voice of his own soul / Heard in the calm of thought" (153-54) to a heart "sunk and sickened with excess / Of love" (181-82). But when these paths meet, she passes into the unknown, while he passes into a bottomless melancholy. "Passes," in this description, functions almost as antanaclasis; physical movement and the movement of thought are doubly equivocal. In any case, the overall effect is to heighten the sense of the inevitability of the Poet's investment in the veiled maid, and its inevitable disaster. Desire's relation to thought produces a conundrum of time and space. As long as anticipatory desire remains forever anticipatory, as long as the object of desire seems to lie ahead, the Poet hopes. But such a condition precludes any interaction between bodies; it also precludes the physical reception of the "thrilling secret of the birth of time," where the body's own nature as an alterity to itself produces the compelling vibration. Bodily awakening is an awakening to the otherness of the self within the body, just as ideal awakening is an awakening to the otherness of self in ideas, in representation. Both dispersion and its recoil, the desire for union, exist on two axes, a physical one and a temporal one. But achieving union in one prevents union in another; if the poet wants ideal union, eternity, he cannot embrace his counterpart; if he wants physical union, in space, she can no longer remain ideal. Moreover, the more desire increases—and it does increase along both poles in the process of development—the more the mutual exclusion of the two axes increases the catastrophe of the inevitable choice.

14. How like the paranoid fatality of *Caleb Williams* this is, where Godwin's narrator famously introduces his life as "a theatre of calamity." This interpretation insists that the Poet's downfall is unavoidable—not because this assertion is the truth—I do not assert that *Shelley* held such a view—but because such conditions create the groundwork for strong theory. The Poet's situation ushers in a hyperbolic mode of paranoia where, it seems, no course of action provides a guarantee against corruption. One is not even safe in one's own head. As a strong failure, the Poet's life calls for an extreme and totalizing response. One might find in this hyperbole a response to Wordsworth. Shelley's protagonist outstrips Wordsworth's exemplary failure in *The Excursion*, the Solitary, whose losses, the deaths and disillusions that have bereft him of faith and hope, are less pure or unavoidable attachments than the more idealized Poet in Shelley's poem. The argumentative strategy of *The Excursion* is a form of

means-extremes: the Wordsworthian Wanderer is able to coopt the Solitary's losses by sympathetically presenting imagined losses much greater, by presenting disillusions much more justified, than those of his opponent. If faith is possible under more perverse conditions than the Solitary's, the argument goes, then it is possible for the Solitary himself. Shelley engages Wordsworth in a means-extremes strategy as well by making his Poet a more far-travelled and uncorrupted figure than either the Wanderer or the Solitary. The blasting disillusion of the Poet outdoes the downfall of the Solitary in sheer megatonnage —at least in terms of the logic of argument.

15. But if Shelley addresses the ecology of criticism rather than just engages in polemic, as I claim here, the point is not about winning or losing the arms race—and bringing about as a result of mimetic defensiveness an equivocation of ideological difference. The next stage of Shelley's poem consists of response to loss. In *The Excursion*, the Solitary has responded to his misfortunes with a form of strong theory that he ultimately cannot endure. After praising the Epicureans and Stoics, the Solitary emphatically agrees with their guiding principles, asserting

    As the prime object of a wise man's aim,
    Security from shock of accident,
    Release from fear; and cherished peaceful days
    For their own sakes, as mortal life's chief good,
    And only reasonable felicity. (III.362-366)

    Yet he cannot set up a surveillance apparatus that filters his memory effectively enough to prevent compelling images of the past from intruding. The Wanderer responds to the Solitary by providing a stronger theory, a more totalizing theory, recommending that the Solitary identify with the omnipotent power for whom alone total surveillance is possible. Projection of and identification with God not only make slaves of His creators, as Shelley so often claimed, these processes also facilitate a kind of paranoia by proxy, imputing to a supreme being a total explanation for everything that can never suffer ultimate refutation—as Shelley demonstrated in his *Refutation of Deism*.

16. So what does Shelley do? His Poet's response, at least initially, like the luminary of the preface, and unlike the Solitary's or the Wanderer's, or, in the Preface, the "morally dead," makes a *strong theory of pleasure-seeking*—an impossibility. His theoretical adaptation does *not* consist of a correction of his own sensibility, is *not* a regret that he has been naive, and felt too much, or hoped too much, but, instead, it consists of return to an impossible threshold, an impossible convergence of mind and body. The poet, like the Solitary, has made an error of projection, but since he relates his error to the disappearance of pleasure, no ideological solution can offer solace; the rigidity of concepts deforms pleasure. Pleasure, it appears, is not portable in ideas the way philosophy is. As the regressive journey of the Poet suggests, he demands nothing less than a backwards movement in time. And in some respects, he becomes aware of the implications of his demand. In a passage following the encounter with the mysterious beckoning spirit of the well, the Poet reflects (only the second instance of direct discourse in the poem),

            "O stream!
    Whose source is inaccessibly profound,
    Whither do thy mysterious waters tend?
    Thou imagest my life. Thy darksome stillness,
    Thy dazzling waves, thy loud and hollow gulphs,
    Thy searchless fountain, and invisible course
    Have each their type in me: and the wide sky,
    And measureless ocean may declare as soon
    What oozy cavern or what wandering cloud

Contains thy waters, as the universe
Tell where these living thoughts reside, when stretched
Upon thy flowers my bloodless limbs shall waste
I'the passing wind!" (502-514)

The poet recognizes here a thermodynamic barrier to the retention of any complex state. His thoughts, like the waters of the stream seeming to compose an integral body, do *not* remain integrated through time, any more than his body does. Attaining a prior condition of thought amounts to attempting to recreate the stream by retroducing it from individual molecules in the ocean or clouds.

17. A strong theory of pleasure is for related reasons a contradiction in terms. Strong theory responds to failure by taking in more phenomena, by increasing its scope and generality. But the reductive consequences of generality and scope by definition destroy a form of affect that depends to some degree on an unplumbed complexity and alterity, on surprise. After the encounter with the veiled maid, awakening to a world that now seems a dead reflection of a vibrant reality, the Poet laments, "Alas! alas! / Were limbs, and breath, and being intertwined / Thus treacherously?" (207 209). It is no coincidence that the intertwining of alterities is in the process of becoming a dominant stylistic motif in the poem's over-long denouement. The prevailing figure becomes, in contrast to the opening oxymorons, the repeated image of the Aeolian lyre, an interactive image, a convergence of distinct entities as opposed to a conflictual divergence—but nonetheless, with little of the positive effects one might expect to proceed from such a social figure. Beginning with the "*thrilling* secrets of the birth of time" (emphasis mine), the frequency of the lyre metaphor becomes marked; moreover, the components of the lyre move progressively from psychic interior to physical exterior. The Poet becomes part of a whole beyond the scope of his own consciousness:

his scattered hair
Sered by the autumn of strange suffering
Sung dirges in the wind .... (248-50)

The image dominates descriptions of the natural ecology: "The breeze murmuring in the musical woods" (403), and

black gulphs and yawning caves,
Whose windings gave ten thousand various tongues
To the loud stream... (548-50)

18. But this interactive complexity fails to impress the Poet about the present, in contrast to its capacity to impress him about the future, as his meditation on the hydrological cycle shows. Instead, the Poet's emblem becomes the image of a lone pine that converts the wild spectrum of the winds to a single note:

A pine
Rock-rooted, stretched athwart the vacancy
Its swinging boughs, to each inconstant blast
Yielding only one response.... (561-64)

As was true of the hydrologic cycle, this acoustical phenomenon is worth a brief digression. The pine is an extraordinary freak of nature, structured and positioned with such precision that it performs a very unlikely reduction, the inverse, actually, of the desired effect of the Aeolian lyre, whose appeal arises from its wide range of response to minute changes in the wind. The pine is a singular mechanism of agile translation, converting an extraordinarily various input into one-dimensional output, and in this respect registers the obsessive monotonizing force of a totalizing truth, and anticipates the reduction at

the end of the poem upon the Poet's death, where the Narrator asserts, "Hope and despair / The torturers slept..." (639-640). This final equivocation accompanies the setting of the crescent moon below the horizon, and underscores the symbolism in the decline of a merely apparent duality, the moon's two "lessening points" of light, into a unifying darkness. The slow demise of the Poet, then, seems to echo the final stanza of "Mutability": "It is the same!"

19. Yet this reduction, reproducing itself in the retiring "simple strain" of the Narrator's closing elegy, hardly does justice to other forms of alterity that haunt the poem. The Poet keeps producing doubles, unwittingly disseminating himself through the sympathy he commands.[7] The most obvious example of the Poet's effects beyond his awareness is the impression he leaves on the Arab woman whose unnoticed ministrations immediately precede the Poet's dream of the veiled maid; the Arabian, in an trance of unrequited love, gazes upon him as he sleeps. This dimension of the Poet's existence remains unknown to the Poet, but the narrator marks it strongly: the most striking transition in "Alastor" is the "Meanwhile" that segues from the climactic moment of intellectual enlightenment in the Temple of Dendera to "an Arab Maiden brought his food/ Her daily portion..." (129-130). Just fifty lines before the Poet's catastrophic loss of his imaginary love, the Narrator describes this "real" woman, "Made pale by the pale moon, to her cold home/ Wildered, and wan, and panting, she returned" (137-39), anticipating what the Poet will momentarily become.

20. Critics have sometimes taken the Poet's inadequate awareness here as an indication of a moral flaw. However, to condemn such a lapse of surveillance is, in effect, to indict the lone pine for its lack of responsiveness to the many winds. The alterity of the Arab woman to the Poet's consciousness is a contingent one, morally unaccountable—and the critical move investing responsibility for that alterity in a single agent is a paranoid and totalizing one. Two kinds of alterity collude and recoil through the poem. One, including the Arabian, is natural, the alterities that relate to the nature of the universe, to sexuality, to the limitations of awareness, alterities that defy accountability because of a combination of physical limitation and sheer complexity. The loss produced by this alterity can only find its remedy in forgetting, as Wordsworth's Solitary asserted. Moreover, forgetting, insofar as it concerns the experience in question with all its complexity, has in a strict sense already happened. But this irretrievable experience leaves a residue like the "ghastly presence" of "Oh! There are spirits of the air," the poem in the *Alastor* volume supposedly addressed to Coleridge. This residue marks the mind like a memory, but it is a changeling, or in Jerrold Hogle's language, a transposition, not a memory at all. Its transformation from an unrememberable complex to a seemingly remembered idea ushers in the second alterity, the alterity that persists as such and continually energizes an urge to union—the urge behind a pursuit that is really the pursuit of pleasure, but has become transformed by fixation on a projection, becoming as a result a pursuit of an idea, a form of totality. This ghostly pursuit constitutes the dark side of sympathy—an important topic I can only sketch briefly here.

21. In "Alastor," sympathy and paranoia support each other, pursuing and pursued. Shelley's address to Wordsworth's apostasy is not simply a matter of outflanking the elder poet, nor is it a case of capitulating to a more established literary style and taste, or indeed to his own disappointed admiration. Instead, it is a troubled and uncertain withdrawal from the mimetic closure of defensive polemic and sympathetic attachment—for the sake of something aesthetic. Wordsworth's overt ideological engagements in *The Excursion* express not only a politics Shelley rejected, but also, in his view, a poetic decline, and several critics have noted in "Alastor" an allegory of that decline. Pursuing a sympathy that became too ideal, Wordsworth neglected what the Preface to *The Lyrical Ballads* asserted as the chief function of poetry: the communication of pleasure. The dynamic of sympathy threatens to assimilate the rich complexity of poetry to other, more ideological disciplines. Lisa Steinman has pointed out the significance of the 1799 poem, "A Poet's Epitaph" to the *Alastor* volume, and this intertext provides important clues about the indirect relation of poetry to "truth" in terms of Shelley's conception of his own work. "A Poet's Epitaph," after dismissing the sensibilities of various

professionals—politicians, scientists, moralists, and so forth, recommends in their place the poet, who is "weak," "an idler," "contented if he might enjoy / The things which others understand" (53, 54, 55-56). These seemingly pejorative descriptions, descriptions of an ineffectuality (to allude to Arnold's term) that contemporary admirers of Shelley have long labored against, could well be arresting to a sensibility as system-obsessed as Shelley's—and our own—in the context of a critical ecology. If there exists a vehicle for the preservation of pleasure, it is poetry. And poetry can be political precisely because it enjoins pleasure, and subverts the mimetically accelerating hostility of totalizing systems. Surely this cannot be entirely antithetical to the goals of ideological criticism.

## Notes

[1] Neil Fraistat refers to the *Alastor* volume as "an elaborate balancing act" in his illuminating discussion of Shelley's assembly of the collection, 181.

[2] References to "Mutability" and "Alastor" are taken from *Shelley's Poetry and Prose* (1977); "Feelings of a Republican and the Fall of Bonaparte" and "Oh! There are spirits of the air" from *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1921).

[3] McGann cites a description of this invisibility in Pierre Macherey's memorable simile: "Like a planet revolving around an absent sun, an ideology is made out of what it does not mention; it exists because there are things which must not be spoken of" (91).

[4] Sedgwick outlines the relevance of Tomkin's notion of "strong theory" in the context of literary criticism in her introduction to *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, 1-26. The main points of my summary are indebted to her account.

[5] For a superb discussion of the effect of speed in Shelley's style, see William Keach's study, *Shelley's Style*, 154-183.

[6] Tilottama Rajan has helpfully expressed this opposition as "epipsychic" and "episodic," 92.

[7] I have taken this phrase from John Rieder, who uses it as a suggestive echo of Adam Smith's definition of value as "labor commanded," 280-281, expressing, as I do, a suspicion of the operation of sympathy in "Alastor."

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*Irony and Clerisy* Introduction

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# Irony and Clerisy

## "Frail Spells": Shelley and the Ironies of Exile

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### 1. Spirit in Exile

1. The "frail spells" of my title appear in the third stanza of Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" (1816) where they follow the series of questions addressed to the "Spirit of BEAUTY." The celebrated questions that constitute the hymn's second stanza are elaborations of the first question posed to the spirit: "where art thou gone?"(l.15). "Why," asks the speaker, "dost thou pass away and leave our state, / This dim vast vale of tears, vacant and desolate?"(ll. 16-17). "Intellectual Beauty," that which unlike church or state most deserves our "vows" of worship and celebration, has "pass[ed] away" without explanation; and the poem announces the withdrawal of the spirit of beauty in the form of hymn to its absence or, more precisely, to the "path of its departure." The spirit of this beauty is nothing if not divine, for it is a spirit that "consecrates" with its own "hues" all "it dost shine upon / Of human thought or form" (ll.13-15). Why, asks the poem's speaker, has this divine spirit of beauty been exiled from us, an exile which, whether self-imposed or enforced by worldly powers, leaves our state, our worldly actuality, a place of desolation.

2. Far from proposing an answer to this question—which would, after all, require the poem to speak in the name of the spirit—the subsequent stanza serves instead to nullify the entire history of proposed answers, to demystify the claims of all those "sage[s] or poet[s]" who may fancy that they have heard a response:

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

   Placing God and Heaven in the company of ghosts, the lines appear to be a straightforward declaration of Shelley's radical philosophical skepticism. The passage spells out his critique of the "uttered charms" of the various religious and philosophical ideologies that, try as they might to seduce us into belief, cannot "avail to sever" the irreducible condition of "doubt, chance, and mutability" from the sensual world. But the critique is not so straightforward as it first appears, for Shelley qualifies his refusal of the power of these "frail spells": their "uttered charm *might not* avail to sever" "doubt, chance, and mutability" from our worldly perception. If this qualification does not diminish the force of the poem's repudiations, it does nonetheless demonstrate the *necessity* of countering the "uttered charm" of onto-theology with the act of a demystification: a spell can be rendered "frail" only when the "charm" of its utterance is revealed.

3. Shelley's demystification of the "frail spells" of poetry, theology, and philosophy can be extended to his political critique of the nation-state and the nationalisms that institute and preserve it. From Shelley's

effort to vacate all false groundings comes a poetics of the idea that conducts a politics of love and liberty beyond the "frail spells" of national character or identity. In the idiom of Shelley's critical neoplatonism, there can be no idea of the nation: the idea is always in exile and the nation always the scene of the actuality of power. Thus, the idea is in a perpetually ironic relation to the nation and to the clerisies that would institute it. Which is why, according to Shelley, the poet must in an entirely positive sense remain an "unacknowledged legislator of the World." If "all authors of revolutions are poets," as Shelleys declares in the *Defence*, it is because as "hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration," they liberate us from what in *The Triumph of Life* he calls "thought's empire over thought." The moment poetic legislation is *acknowledged* is the moment that poets begin laying down the law, the moment they cease their service to the idea and enlist themselves in the actualities of institution. It is, in other words, the moment they claim to pass from the "awful shadow of some unseen Power" to the light of the aesthetic state.

4. Shelley's critique of the desire for the state places the poet's famous lament in the hymn—"why dost thou pass away and leave our state, / This dim vast vale of tears, vacant and desolate?" (ll.16-17)—in a curiously ironic light: statelessness, it seems, is an originary condition; and beauty only "lends" "for some uncertain moments" (l.37) its "glorious train" (l.41). Beauty's perpetual disappearance leaves a "vacancy" in "our state"; but it is also by virtue of that very vacancy that the "voices" which sage and poet alike call truth—the "voices" of God and ghost and Heaven—can be recognized as echoes of their own "uttered charms." Shelley would voice his commitment to the power of "vacancy" in his 1819 prose fragment "On Life" where it is quite explicitly the "duty" of critical philosophy not to "establish" or institute truth but "to destroy error, and the roots of error" (477). The destruction of error, an interminable critique, necessarily results in the "leaving" of a vacancy: "It leaves, what is too often the duty of the reformer in political and ethical questions to leave, a vacancy" (477). This is, moreover, not merely the "duty of the reformer in political and ethical questions," but the role of the poetic imagination as Shelley conceives it in a poem as late as *Epipsychidion*: it is an illuminating negation, a "reverberated lightning" that "As from a thousand prisms and mirrors, fills / The Universe with glorious beams and kills / Error" (ll. 166-69).

5. To sing a hymn to intellectual beauty is to invoke the incantatory "charm" of the hymn form and defiantly sing in praise of vacancy, the vacancy left by this aesthetic spirit's exile from our state. To sing a hymn to intellectual beauty is thus to be both perverse and reverent and to join one's voice to a non-nationalist chorus which, like the silent voice of the mountain in "Mont Blanc," has the capacity to "repeal large codes of fraud and woe" such as those "sealed" in English statutes. To sing this godless but still sacred hymn is to give worship to the absent spirit of beauty and every form and thought it consecrates. If the proper worship of the spirit of beauty demands an initial demystification of the "frail spells" of god and ghosts and heaven, this worship nonetheless makes good on its vows only through the conjuring, the "calling" of phantoms: in the sixth stanza, the poet, asking the silent spirit to confirm that he has indeed "kept his vows," declares that "even now / I call the phantoms of a thousand hours / Each from his voiceless grave..." (ll.63-65).

6. Ghosts, gods, spirits, phantoms: if each of these figures by turns haunts or inspires Shelley's poem, its success as a "*hymn* to intellectual beauty" depends upon a rigorous distinction between them. It is not, in other words, a matter of opposing anything like actual reality or the living present to the spectral properties of the ghost; it is, rather, a question of distinguishing the differences between God and Spirit, between ghosts and phantoms. While the phantom, for instance, may suggest the spectral qualities of the ghost, the phantom for Shelley is not mere ideological delusion but the shadowing forth of something ideal, such as the appearance of the Spirit of "Intellectual Beauty" addressed by the poem. But since one cannot *see* this Spirit, the distinctions the poem insists upon between spirit and ghost or phantom and god depend on measuring and evaluating their various effects, which might be characterized as the difference between the theological and the aesthetic. It amounts to measuring the

differences between the "frail spells" of "God and ghosts and Heaven" on the one hand and the "hues and harmonies of evening" or the "memory of music fled" (ll.8,10) on the other. But such distinctions are not so easily maintained, as the poem's early praise to the "grace" and "mystery" of the spirit beauty demonstrates. It may well appear that the poem has challenged the "frail spells" of theology only to succumb to the theologizing charms of the aesthetic. Thus, the speaker declares to the spirit of beauty that its "light alone" "gives grace and truth to life's unquiet dream" (ll.32,35).

7. And yet, as many readers have stressed, intellectual beauty is not to be confused with sensuous beauty; and thus the hymn is addressed not to the aesthetic as such—not to the sensory manifestation of the spirit—but to the spirit of beauty itself. This means that the aesthetic exists only in the realm of likeness and that its figural model is that of the simile. But if the "visitations" of the "awful shadow of some unseen Power" leave us with a string of similes, they are similes that, as Carol Jacobs has rightly noted, do not operate in the service of similarity: "The first stanza of the 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' ... is an attempt to define that elusive poetic force through a long series of similes whose terms of comparison seem peculiarly at odds with one another" (171). Our "state" is thus one of failed likenesses, a potentially interminable series of figures which, in Jacobs's words, "mark the refusal of language to define by affirming an identity"(171). No linguistic system based upon a principle of identity could "define" a spirit which not only remains unseen but whose own "seeing" is nothing more than an "inconstant glance"( l.6).

8. If such a "spirit fair" does not preside over the idea or form of any national community, it does nonetheless exert deep binding powers of its own. In the poem's last lines, where this hymn becomes supplication, the poet-suppliant beseeches the spirit of beauty to lend him its power as "one who worships thee, / And every form containing thee, / Whom, SPIRIT fair, thy spells did bind / To fear himself, and love all human kind" (ll.81-84). No one is likely to confuse this with the International, but it is a hymn which, after sounding the emptiness of the "frail spells" of "God and ghosts and heaven," turns its praise to an exiled spirit whose genuinely binding spells are those solely of universal love. If a hymn is not merely a song of praise or adoration but also a form of spell, then one of the intended effects of this hymn to intellectual beauty is to extend its sacred powers to its singers and readers: it is intended to place those who utter it under the spell of love. This is its effect on the poem's own speaker who feels the "shadow" of Beauty's spirit fall upon him as a kind of counter-charm, an antidote to the "poisonous names with which our youth is fed" (l.53). The result is something like a conversion experience in which the eruption of an ecstatic "shriek"—"I shrieked, and clasped my hands in extasy" (l.60)—prompts the declaration of poetic vows. Thus, the comings and goings of the spirit of beauty, a power both unseen and unheard as such, are according to Shelley figured through its phantoms and known only through its effects, like the blind falling of a shadow. And yet it is by its very inconstancy that the spirit of beauty generates the binding force of love, that which the poem's last line identifies as the "love of all human kind." The hymn declares the "hope" that it is within the scope of Beauty's "unseen Power" to "free / This world from its dark slavery" (ll.69-70). If this sounds more than a little like the "spectropoetics" that Derrida unearths in his reading of Marx, perhaps this likeness accounts more than a little for Marx's famously sympathetic assessment of the poet. And perhaps it is because Marx and Shelley, both illegitimate heirs of the Platonic tradition, recognize in this cluster of specters —ghosts, gods, spirits, phantoms—the elements of a theory of ideology.

9. To evaluate the nature of this idealist but genuinely political critique of the actuality of the nation-state, one needs only to situate it alongside *On the Constitution of Church and State* (1829). For Coleridge, of course, there is an idea of the nation; and what he calls the "ever-originating idea" of nation is understood to precede and inform the "Idea of a Constitution" (12) and the insititutions of the nation-state. The origins of this "ever-originating idea" are not, moreover, empirical in nature: Coleridge regards the origin of the nation as a "pure fiction" (14), but one which is the very condition of its effectivity. For the idea of the nation to secure the state and overcome the class divisions that threaten

to undo the sense of a national community, the national fiction must be entrusted to what he calls a "permanent class of order," a "national clerisy." It is thus this national clerisy—a secular poetic intelligentsia—that would effect and adminster what Coleridge would openly acknowledge as the "spell" of that "ideal object" called the nation.

10. When Shelley's poems address the state of the nation, as in those works provoked by the Peterloo massacre, the nation finds its truest expression as the vehicle of oppression: England is itself the "veil" or "mask of anarchy." "England in 1819," a sonnet which Shelley sent to Leigh Hunt with no illusions that it would be published, identifies the institutions of the English state as a set of graves:

> An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying King;
> Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow
> Through public scorn,—mud from a muddy spring;
> Rulers who neither see nor feel nor know,
> But leechlike to their fainting country cling
> Till they drop, blind in blood, without a blow.
> A people starved and stabbed in th'untilled field;
> An army, whom liberticide and prey
> Makes as a two-edged sword to all who wield;
> Golden and sanguine laws which tempt and slay;
> Religion Christless, Godless—a book sealed;
> A senate, Time's worst statute, unrepealed --
> Are graves from which a glorious Phantom may
> Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day.

The dating in the title (which, it seems, was Mary's addition) is significant not because things might be better in 1820 or, say, 1832 but because the phrase "England in 1819" demonstrates that the nation is bound to this date: the nation itself is now "Time's worst statute," imprisoned to actuality. Indeed, the very form of the sonnet seems to be oppressed by the actualities of the nation it describes: this strange sonnet is a static catalogue of phrases and clauses, an enumeration of the ills that characterize the English state in 1819: "An old, mad, despised, and dying King"; "Princes, the dregs of their dull race"; "Rulers who neither see nor feel nor know"; "A people starved and stabbed"; "Religion Christless, Godless"; "A senate, Time's worst statute, unrepealed." The litany extends for twelve lines without hint of turn or, in Shelley's words, "repeal." It is not until the closing couplet that this poem finds its verb, its agreement secured in the static form of the copula: the institutions of the state "are graves." Significantly, the poem turns after this agreement has been reached or, as Adorno might have said, after this identity between subject and copula has been "extorted." The poem's final prepositional phrases herald, through the explosive enjambment of the last lines, the disruptive force of the "glorious phantom": these institutions "Are graves from which a glorious phantom may / Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day."

11. The sonnet's implicit articulation of literary form and political history is the focus of a recent fine reading by James Chandler, who has appropriated the title of the sonnet for his own impressive study of "the politics of literary culture and the case of Romantic historicism." Chandler attends closely to the list of social evils that comprises the body of the sonnet and argues persuasively that "the terms of the times in Shelley's catalogue—the conditions of his tempestuous day—are not simple evils and are not simply overcome by the arrival of an enlightening 'deus ex machina.' Rather, these conditions, these terms of social existence, are in each instance the source from which the illuminations will spring..." (30). For Chandler the ills as they are enumerated by the poem rise to the level of historical "conditions"—genuinely contradictory ones at that—which must be "*read*, like fine print, not merely seen" (31).

12. By attending to the necessity of "reading," Chandler's argument here and throughout his enormous book has the entirely salutary effect of returning our attention to the radical historicizing already at work in Shelley (or, as his other chapters demonstrate, in Scott, Byron, and Keats). Chandler achieves this, moreover, without resorting to the sort of critical contortions evident, for instance, in Marjorie Levinson's celebration of Keats's "badness": while *Keats's Life of Allegory* is certainly a virtuoso performance, it also constitutes something like an end-around of the "romantic ideology." In his own assessment of the new historicism, Chandler asserts that much of the work that has been conducted under this rubric claims a "historiographical, even a political advance over any historical paradigm one uncovers in the Romantic era, but that *appearance* may itself depend on covering over ... the complexity and density of historicist thought in Romantic writing" (139). Chandler's understanding of the "complexity and density of historicist thought" in Shelley concentrates on the poet's notion of the "spirit of the age" which Chandler characterizes as the poet's "preoccupation with contemporaneity" (106). Chandler's Shelley is thus a poet whose work not only reflects upon his own socio-historicical movement but also "situates *itself* in that movement" (525).

13. And yet, should Chandler's reading of Shelley's engagement with his historical "conditions" (such as those inscribed in the sonnet) have the desired (and desirable) results of prompting closer critical attention to Shelley's conceptions of history, the poetics of contemporaneity will reveal itself to be but a "case" of futurity. Thus, if Shelley's poetry is often "written at the suggestion of the events of the moment" (407), as he says in his preface to *Hellas*, its call is to and from the future: poets are, after all, the "hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration, the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present" (508). Without this poetic mirroring of futurity's shadows, England in 1819 would remain a "book sealed." But if poetry opens the book of the future, it does not spell out its contents in advance. "England in 1819" calls upon the phantom as the redemptive force of history, but the power of this resurrected phantom is qualified by the subjunctive mode and figured as potentiality. And yet it is also the turn from the indicative to the subjunctive that opens this redemptive potential: one might call it the grammatical vehicle of the phantom's liberation from the "graves" of the nation-state.

14. The England in 1819 that is represented to us in Shelley's "England in 1819" thus qualifies as what Walter Benjamin, in an essay written during his own exile, would call a "state of emergency" (257) from which the messianic phantoms of the poem "may / Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day." That the sonnet—its method and its effects—should be so precisely illuminated by Benjamin's "Theses on History" demonstrates Shelley's incompatibility with historicism: for Shelley as for Benjamin history is not composed of events unfolding through "homogenous, empty time" (261). And like Benjamin's "historical materialist," Shelley "cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop (262). *This* is "England in 1819": the poetic "sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, ... a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past" (263). As with Benjamin's sense of a "*weak* messianic power (*eine* schwache *messianische Kraft*), a power to which the past has a claim" (254), a messianism without the messiah, Shelley's phantoms would "blast" the state "out of the continuum of history," a revolutionary break with its historical conditions (262).

15. One might assert that Shelley's manipulation of the sonnet form, the sudden force of the enjambment in the closing couplet, expresses his sense of the disruptive power of revolutionary illumination; but it would be more to the point of Shelley's own "Benjaminian" poetics and politics to say that the poem is less an *expression* of his historico-political understanding than that the poem itself—the poetic resources that are conjured in and by the sonnet—*produces* this sense of historical and political possibility. Much of the power of the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" derives from a similar poetic act, its performance of the call to "the phantoms of a thousand hours / Each from his voiceless grave," a call intended to invoke the spell of redeeming love in the phantom conjuring of futurity. In the later sonnet the subjunctive agency of the phantom is conjured to "repeal" not the spell of "God and ghosts and

heaven" but the spell of actuality. Thus, what we might call the critical redemption value of Shelley's poetry, including the sonnet "written at the suggestion of the events of the moment," resides not in its reference to the present or the empirical but in its blank opening onto futurity.

## 2. Shelley in Exile

16. It should not require either the imperative to historicize or the call to read Shelley's historicizing to make us aware of the fact that Shelley's poetic assessment of the state of England was composed during his own self-imposed exile. By a logic already inscribed in the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," Shelley's poetry would seem to propose that the painfully ironic condition of exile frees the poet from the actuality of the nation to imagine its future illumination. Exiled from England and thus distanced from the spells cast by God and ghost and nation, Shelley can conjure the phantoms of the idea and embark on a poetry which, if unrealizable in actuality—literally unpublishable—is perhaps redeemable by futurity.

17. But exile must also be understood as a *spatial* predicament, as the displacement from that thing or idea which one conceives or conceived of as home. Edward Said has made the idea—and, importantly, the *value*—of the form of displacement known as exile and the forms of its representation the pivot of his critical project. Said devotes a chapter of his *Representations of the Intellectual* to the topic of "intellectual exile"; and the important essay, "Secular Criticism," which introduces *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, opens with a formative discussion of the relationship between exile and culture. Most recently, Said's *Culture and Imperialism* is framed by discussions of the condition of the exile and concludes with this definition: "Exile is predicated on the existence of, love for, and a real bond with one's native land; the universal truth of exile is not that one has lost that love or home, but that inherent in each is an unexpected, unwelcome loss" (*CI* 336). While it is not my intention to liken the peculiar situation of Shelley's exile from England with, say, the Palestinian diaspora or to presume that Shelley's poetry of displacement *necessarily* contributes anything useful to those scholars and activists who are working to theorize and address the conditions of exile in the twentieth century, Shelley's poetics of exile does at any rate anticipate Said's own description of "liberation as an intellectual mission":

    > Yet it is no exaggeration to say that liberation as an intellectual mission, born in the resistance and opposition to the confinements and ravages of imperialism, has now shifted from the settled, established, and domesticated dynamics of culture to its unhoused, decentered, and exilic energies, energies whose incarnation today is the migrant, and whose consciousness is that of the intellectual and artist in exile, the political figure between domains, between forms, between homes, and between languages. (*CI* 332)

    If Shelley offers us a convergence of radical poetic, philosophical, and political discourses which is unprecedented if not unsurpassed in British literary history, it could be argued that this radical gift is indeed the result of its "unhoused, decentered, and exilic energies." Moreover, Said's own definition asks us to conceive of a "universal truth of exile" in which the relationship to "home" is severed and marked "inherent[ly]" by "unexpected, unwelcome loss." Though Said clearly seems to regard the "unhoused" condition of the exile to represent an epistemological, cultural, and political advance over the various cultural and political nationalisms that persist in the wake of decolonizing struggles, what Said describes as the "universal truth of exile" is nonetheless predicated on the existence of a "real bond with one's native land." What the exile's loss of a "real bond with one's native land" teaches us is that the experience of exile is as temporal as it is spatial, a temporality that is opened up in the very space of the (now lost) home.

18. For Said the temporality of this relationship is characterized by the language of love and loss: "exile is predicated on the existence of, *love for*, and a real bond with one's native land" (*CI* 336). To regard the

condition of the exile as the condition of the lover poses an interesting problem in the case of Shelley, not simply because of his ambivalence to the England he had left behind, but because of his own conception of love. In his fragment "On Love," written in the wake of his translation of *The Symposium* and bearing its influence throughout, Shelley prefaces his definition with an autobiographical account of the writer as an exile from the "sympathy" of countrymen. Here, however, the domain of countrymen extends to humankind itself, the very humankind to which the poet had hoped to "bind" himself through "love" in the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty":

> I know not the internal constitution of other men.... I see that in some external attributes they resemble me, but when misled by that appearance I have thought to appeal to something in common and unburthen my inmost soul to them, I have found my language misunderstood like one in a distant and savage land. The more opportunities they have afforded me for experience, the wider has appeared the interval between us, and to a greater distance have the points of sympathy been withdrawn. (473)

"I have found myself understood like one in a distant and savage land": or, in other words, like an exile forever severed from the bonds, the "points of sympathy" that would consitute a community. However much the subsequent definition of love owes to Aristophanes's discourse in *The Symposium*, it is presented as a definition written by a lover in exile:

> [Love] is that powerful attraction towards all that we conceive or fear or hope beyond ourselves when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void and seek to awaken in all things that are, a community with what we experience within ourselves. (473)

For Shelley's lover, the condition of exile is not, as Said would have it, "predicated on the *existence* of ... a real bond with one's native land," but on the originary absence of such a bond: "one's native land," in other words, is predicated on exile; it is a love-effect produced from "the chasm of an insufficent void."

19. To assert that the nation is an imaginary projection or ghostly conception is, by this late date, old news. Indeed, as any reader of Coleridge's *On the Constitution of Church and State* can attest, it was old news by 1829. But judging by the volatility of recent debates and events, it is certainly also the case that the ideological question of the origin of the nation is no more settled now than it was for Coleridge or Shelley. I believe that to come to terms with the nature of Shelley's commitment to "liberation as an intellectual mission" one must come to terms with the implications of his insistence that one's *relationship* to one's "native land" necessarily takes the form of a *spell*. This would render exile a fully ironic condition—close perhaps to what de Man in "The Rhetoric of Temporality" calls "absolute irony" (216)—if we understand irony to be a permanent disjunction between modes of knowledge which is registered subjectively as loss or displacement.

20. Thus, while I do believe Shelley's "intellectual mission" and poetic project are indeed closely linked to their "exilic energies," the consequences of his work are such that they offer none of what Said has called, in reference to Eric Auerbach, "the executive value of exile"(*WTC* 8). What this means is that by the time of Shelley's last work the very exile of the idea, the position from which the "frail spells" of ideology had been demystified—indeed, the very possibility of demystification—no longer stands outside ideology's own purview. The result is that Shelley's poetry comes to recognize exile as yet another in the extending line of "spells": the poetry, we might say, ironizes the ironic position of exile. It refuses to make the ironic condition of exile into the privileged epistemological position from which a cosmopolitan clerisy might emerge. A concomitant result is a radical poetry which reflects upon the very production of "spells" and "spelling." Whether one wants to describe this development in Shelley's

poetry, a development legible as early as "On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery" and certainly inscribed throughout *The Triumph of Life*, as an event on the order of an epistemological break from his earlier critical idealism or as a tightening or torquing of that idealism to its breaking point is beyond the scope of this discussion. What I am interested in exploring in what remains of my essay is what happens to both idea and actuality, to both nation and spell in two passages from *The Triumph of Life*.

21. I am interested first in the scene in which the poet-narrator encounters the "triumphal pageant" that accompanies the conquering chariot's advance: "where'er / The chariot rolled a captive multitude / Was driven"(ll.119-20). The list of those imprisoned to this "triumphal pageant" is an extensive one:

> all those who had grown old in power
> Or misery,—all who have their age subdued,
>
> By action or by suffering....
>
> All those whose fame or infamy must grow
> Till the great winter lay the form and name
> Of their own earth with them forever low— (ll.121-27)

The scope of enslavement is such that only the "sacred few" can be said to escape it; and the poet's account of the "sacred few" is worth noting:

> All but the sacred few who could not tame
> Their spirits to the Conqueror, but as soon
> As they had touched the world with living flame
>
> Fled back like eagles to their native noon.... (ll.128-31).

The lines rearticulate a structure we have identified in Shelley's earlier poems: all those touched by the worldly actuality of power, whether philosopher or statesman or theologian, are enslaved to the "Conqueror." Only those who managed to flee the world and to place their thought in exile, namely Christ and Socrates, have successfully avoided this defeat. Christ and Socrates belong to this sacred group of exiles because, as de Man put it, "they are mere fictions in the writings of others" (*RR* 97). In the poem, moreover, they are not named as such: Socrates and Christ are referred to as "they of Athens and Jerusalem," a metonymic identification which figures them in terms of their displacement.

22. But the status of exile in this reading of the "triumphal pageant" is altered in the course of the poem by the poet-narrator's encounter with the figure of Rousseau or, more accurately, "what was once Rousseau." This disfigured Rousseau explains to our narrator that "all who gaze upon this spectacle will be turned from spectators to "actor or victim in this wretchedness." Thus, one of the principal effects of this "turn"—from which no spectator is exempt—is the erasure of the difference between actor and victim.

23. "What was once Rousseau" then recounts to the poet the story of his own entrancement:

> Thou wouldst forget thus vainly to deplore
>
> Ills, which if ills, can find no cure from thee,
> The thought of which no other sleep will quell
> Nor other music blot from memory--

So sweet and deep is the oblivious spell. (327-331).

This spell is powerful and delightful enough to erase the very potential of personal memory and of ethical judgment. "Oblivious" works as adjectives often do in Shelley's poetry: the spell manufactures forgetfulness because, *as a spell*, it is itself "oblivious." This obliviousness extends to Rousseau's distinction between past and present and, at the very moment of its recalling, returns the poem to the present tense: "Whether my life had been before that sleep / The Heaven which I imagine, or a Hell / Like this harsh world in which I wake to weep / I know not" (ll. 332-335). The effect of this spell is thus deep enough to "confuse sense" and to unground all knowledge. *The Triumph of Life,* both poem and pageant, is thus the triumph of actuality and the disappearance of idea and exile from their place in Shelley's critical neoplatonism; and it marks the awareness in Shelley's poetry of the consequences of irony as permanent parabasis, one of which is the permanence of ideology. "Spelling" is in this sense far from frail: it implies a condition, a "turn" or "fit" for which there is no outside, no recovery. To call this poetry radical is to suggest that it delivers poetry itself to its radical, to its own vacancy where the phantoms that may burst from their graves do so not in order to "illumine our tempestuous day" but, by the "kindling of inextricable error," cast a spell of "light more dread than obscurity." The effect of this dread bright light is the voiding of all "frail spells" and the awareness of their necessity.

24. To those who continue to be committed to the historicist project that has come to dominate the Anglo-american study of romanticism, my reading will doubtless appear as yet one more example of the "frail spell" cast by the "romantic ideology," which in the contemporary context may well be but another name for deconstruction. But sustained attention to the *workings* of Shelley's texts disclose something more than the representations of their age or the literary displacements of the empirical condition of exile; Shelley's texts are limit cases of poetic thought and practice in a Romanticism which may well be far from exhausted *conceptually*. The *continuing* power of Shelley's most demanding work resides in its ability to reckon with the political as well as poetic implications of an epistemological irony so extensive that it disqualifies the claims of any clerisy to escape it, including the clerisies of contemporary criticism.

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