The Science of Romanticism : Looking for Nature

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ABSTRACT

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If most curricula keep Art and Science in separate fields, history does not make such a distinction: Romanticism can be described as a scientific branch that grew to correct the mistakes and exceed the limitations of 18th century sciences. In reaction against the old traditions, the sciences of the Enlightenment separated the factual from the moral, and represented man and nature in terms so general and abstract that the particular and the concrete were practically excluded. The scientific spirit also reduced man and nature to a simple duality, an active and a passive principle. To the romantic those exclusions and simplifications prevented the individual from experiencing the full potential of his relation with external things. Romantic philosophy emerged in part to correct the scientific worldview by conceiving of a more inclusive system that could take into account the 'true' depth of man and nature and their relationship. Revising by combining the diverse scientific movements, the romantic reinvented not only the world's metaphysical being but also the self's mental faculties, thus permitting the human subject – in theory – to associate with his environment, and himself, once again. In reality, however, the romantic performed exclusions similar to those of his scientific counterpart, for his poetry failed to perform the idealization of actuality by which the romantic subject was supposed to associate fully with his surroundings. Only through a trick of the gaze could the romantic make the world appear like the ideal which alone he thought worthy of his imagination.

CONTENTS

PROLOGUE

It is a mistake, says Walter Pater, to confine the words "classical" and "romantic" to specific historical periods, for they "define two tendencies really at work at all times in art" ("Classical" 22). Pater's classicism includes all "conventional" or familiar representations of "absolute beauty" (21). Born out of "the cool and quiet of other times," classical beauty might not surprise us, but it will "at least never displease us." Romantic beauty, by contrast, comes out of so "remote" a place that its "strangeness," conductive to "new impressions . . . and new pleasures," is likely to verge on the "grotesque" (21-23). Though the classical and romantic approaches to beauty follow opposite paths – familiar versus unfamiliar – they exist in a state of equilibrium: if one dominates for a time, the other is sure to take the lead once again as soon as new conditions favourable to its development present themselves (22). So we can be reassured that no matter how hard the times, a classicist, or a romantic, is at work making our world a more beautiful place.

In his "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance*, published 20 years before the aforementioned essay, Pater seems to contradict the universality of artistic beauty by presenting modernity in such bleak terms that the very idea of beauty becomes a luxury, if not an impossibility. The "tendency of modern thought," he first points out, is to relativize – "to regard all things and principles of things as inconstant modes or fashions" (233). While this relativism does not prevent Pater from being as eloquent as certain in his subsequent description of our physical and perceptual lives, it nevertheless operates in the sense of utter isolation that renders Pater's account so antithetical to aesthetic considerations. Besides Locke's empirical relativism, the scientific spirit, with its mechanical power of dissection, also contributes to making Pater's modern world uncongenial to beauty. Yet, beauty is not

Pater's chief concern in his "Conclusion." Most critical is the scientific dissociation of the human subject from outer things; analytic reasoning indeed transforms even the most ordinary things into distant, intangible abstractions. Beauty becomes an object of concern in the effort to salvage the contact between the self and the world, for, concludes Pater, beauty alone, *romantic* beauty to be exact, can deliver us from our confinement to scientific truth, and doubt.

In the "Conclusion," man*, the *physical* being, is "but a combination of natural elements" (233). "But those elements," Pater is also careful to indicate, "are present not in the human body alone: we detect them in places most remote from it." Not content with merely equating man and outer nature on account of their sharing the same "elements," Pater then obliterates all distinction between the two by indicating that those elements move freely across the highly pervious membrane that, as ordinarily conceived, separates man from his environment (233-34). Like a running stream, we exist in a state of flux as a constant flow of molecules crosses and re-crosses our borders and defines and redefines our physical being.

This particular view of man, and of his relation to nature, is a product of the scientific revolution. It is "science," Pater himself acknowledges, that anatomizes all things, including man, to discover their elementary parts as well as the forces that govern their motion. The scientist, moreover, does not distinguish the inert from the organic, objects from people, since both belong to the same physical reality wherein all parts cohere into one unified whole. And beauty is no exception: it is just one more thing to dissect until it loses its boundaries and fades away into the great mechanical universe.

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* Well aware of the political incorrectness and distractive effect of sexist language, I nevertheless choose, for simplification's sake, to use "man" as a generic noun referring to both genders.

After describing the self's physical relation with his surroundings and showing that no such relation exists so far as the self and the external world are indistinguishable, that is, so far as there is no 'exterior' to come in contact with and relate to, Pater turns to our *perceptual* relation with our surroundings, asserting, again, all but its impossibility. If, in physical life, it is the absence of delimiting surface that prevents us from interacting with the world, in perceptual life, it is the presence of an insuperable barrier that produces the same dissociative effect.

Adopting Locke's sceptical empiricism, Pater challenges even our most ordinary assumptions as he traces the origin of our perceptions and shows that, every step of the way, what we perceive resembles less and less the things themselves. "At first sight," Pater begins, "experience seems to bury us under a flood of objects, pressing upon us with a sharp and importunate reality, calling us out of ourselves in a thousand forms of action" (234-35). But when we take the time to reflect, we soon discover that the apparent "sharpness" and "solidity" of external "objects" is not real; it comes from "language," which, as Berkeley explained over a century before Pater's birth, gives unity to individual things by grouping together diverse sense data into one concept, one appearance. Besides being more complex in reality than in appearance, our impressions are also more "unstable, flickering, [and] inconsistent." Again, it is language, with its fixed definitions, that creates the illusion of order and permanence.

After speaking of the world as it really is underneath the accretions of language, Pater then retracts and withdraws into the confines of the human subject, claiming that the complexity and changefulness of our impressions do not in fact tell us anything about the external world: the human subject is an "individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world." Even freed of the distortions of language our

impressions remain false, i.e. other than the things themselves. Enclosed by "that thick wall of personality," we can only "dream" of an exterior. And as if such isolation was not distressing enough, "that thick wall," Pater further describes, is not even present to our minds. According to the scientific doctrine of infinite divisibility, each impression is so infinitesimal that "it has ceased to be" before our brains "try to apprehend it." Not only are we *physically* isolated from external objects by our confinement to our "personality," but what personal (or subjective) things we are conscious of do not even belong to the present. We are also *temporally* isolated.

From unified to complex, constant to changeful, objective to subjective, and, finally, present to past, Pater's phenomenal world draws us further and further away from the things themselves, until it leaves in our hands only a vanishing substance that is not, in fact, substantial at all. We cannot trust our own eyes, nor even our more powerful instruments of observation. First, our eyes tell us that we are surrounded by objects detached from us, but our scientific instruments tell us that no such objects exist since the physical universe is a flux of molecules that know no boundaries. Upon closer examination, however, that corrected worldview turns out to be just as wrong as the first, for our empirical minds tell us that what we perceive, by naked or aided eye, tell us nothing about the world itself but only about the world as we imagine it, and only as we remember it.

In such a tenuous world, where what little there is to grasp slips every time through our fingers, aesthetic considerations might appear futile, even ludicrous. Pater, nevertheless, brings his book to a close by presenting the search for romantic beauty as the one key to a substantial life, the sole means of exercising and developing our sensitivity to "what is real in our life" (236).

To know the world itself is a luxury we cannot afford; just to *feel* the world is a challenge enough. So we need first to spend all our energy in "one desperate effort to see and touch," hoping to seize immediately those fragments of experience that otherwise escape our attention. Customs and habits, Pater warns us, can only interfere with this "desperate effort to see and touch": "habit is relative to a stereotyped world, and meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike" (236-37). Habits, like language, blind us to the actual diversity of our impressions: "What we have to do is to be for ever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions . . . [and] what is only conventional . . . has no real claim upon us" (127-38). We must, in short, seek to see and touch the new, the unfamiliar – the romantic. Art, because of its concern with passions rather than reflections – more precisely, *romantic* art, because of its concern with *new* passions – stands out as the choice teacher to help us practice and develop our ability to feel and grasp those fugitive moments of experience:

> For our one chance lies in expanding that interval [life], in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time. Great passions may give this quickened sense of life, ecstasy and sorrow of love, the various forms of enthusiastic activity, disinterested or otherwise, which come naturally to many of us. Only be sure it is passion – that it does not yield you this fruit of quickened, multiplied consciousness. Of such wisdom, the poetic passions, the desire of beauty, the love of art for its own sake, has most. For art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake.

Pater's vision of the human subject isolated not only from the world of objects but also from his own sensations is a product of the scientific spirit that flourished during the

Enlightenment and still endures. Art, in the "Conclusion," emerges in response to the dissociative effects of the scientific revolution as it offers a kind of experience that avoids analytic reasoning while promoting a "disinterested," sensuous apprehension of things. In the present enquiry I propose to examine, more particularly, the emergence of the romantic movement in terms of the "desperate effort" to re-establish the contact between man and nature. Briefly, such inquiry will present the romantic thinker and poet as a revisionist scientist who corrects the mistakes of his predecessors by an ingenious act of self-deception. But first, it is necessary to turn to the Enlightenment and clarify how the sciences can be held responsible for man's dissociation from nature.

CHAPTER I : THE 18TH CENTURY SCIENCES, AND THEIR DISSOCIATIONS

Each historical moment, I believe, is marked by a number of associative trends, but some of them are more dominant than others, just as some of their effects come to be regarded as more dissociative than others by the succeeding generations. During the Enlightenment, the sciences had just such a dominant and lasting effect. As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, the romantic movement arose in reaction against the scientific modes of bringing man and nature together. Yet, while many romantics condemned analytic reasoning for its artificiality and the empiricist philosophy for its subjectivism, they also borrowed heavily from those same scientific methods and theories to develop their own associative process. In the end, only my argument, its coherence, depth and rhetorical power, but, more importantly, its ability to shed an instructive light on Romanticism, will confirm the validity of my premise, which states that the primary modes of association discovered by the 18th century rational and empirical sciences were perceived by the post-Enlightenment as causes of dissociation, thus making the search for a new path to nature an overriding priority for 19th century poets and thinkers.

LANGBAUM'S *THE POETRY OF EXPERIENCE*

Paradoxically, I choose to begin with Langbaum's *The Poetry of Experience* because it is the least objective of the critical works that will be included in this survey of histories of the Enlightenment. In his introduction, Langbaum looks at the 18th century scientific spirit with a strong romantic bias that serves him to (over)stress the difference between the Enlightenment and what comes after. Thus, Langbaum tends to reduce the sciences to their dissociative effects, while ignoring the fact that the scientific revolution was *associative* in aim

as well as a useful reference for romantics in the elaboration of their poetics. Yet, it is precisely this prejudice that makes Langbaum a proper starting-point for this study on man's relation with nature, for his book presents the Enlightenment as the moment when this relation became problematic and the post-Enlightenment as a period obsessed with the search for a solution. Despite its oversimplifications, Langbaum's representation of the scientific spirit offers us a valuable method by which to interrogate the sciences and identify their dissociative effects.

THE SEPARATION OF FACT FROM VALUE

The crux of Langbaum's argument is that "the literary movements of the 19th and 20th century" all share the same view of "the world as meaningless" and all write in "response to the same wilderness" (11). "That wilderness," he tells us, "is the legacy of the Enlightenment, of the scientific and critical effort of the Enlightenment." The world the 18th century bequeathed its descendants is wild because it lacks a certain, deemed essential, sort of meaning. Immersed in a strange and estranging environment, literary men and women turn to their art to address, and possibly rectify, their predicament. But what special meaning disappeared in the course of the 18th century? What facet of humanity no longer finds its equal, or its complement, in the enlightened world? In one word: the moral. And what caused its disappearance? The sciences.

Speaking of the Scottish essayist and historian Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), Langbaum describes his world as "the mechanical universe of the Newtonian world-view, a universe without so much *moral meaning* as would render it even hostile" (my italics 14-15). The Enlightenment, Langbaum explains, "in its desire to separate fact from the values of a crumbling tradition, separated fact from all values," thus begetting a world that is "something

unlike ourselves, something unalive" (24). Man, in the 19th and 20th centuries, feels dissociated because his world is "unlike" himself: it is a "mechanical" world of dead ("unalive") and equal facts, a world that does not speak to his moral being.

Although Langbaum is not entirely wrong in characterizing the Enlightenment as a rejection of "moral meanings," his reading is an obvious simplification, for the 18th century had its moral philosophers, such as Hume and Shaftesbury, who sought to secure moral judgment by, for instance, linking it to aesthetic appreciation. This said, insofar as Langbaum speaks strictly of the mechanical (and not moral) sciences, his account of the 18th century substitution of the factual for the moral merits our attention.

Langbaum's denunciation of the sciences founds itself in a specific, not to say romantic, mode of associating the self with the world. Man, in his view, would associate with his surroundings by seeing them primarily in moral terms, and not merely as physical objects. Although Langbaum does not define 'the moral' beyond its opposition to 'the factual,' moral association appears to function on two general bases: on the basis of identity (man and nature being both inherently moral), and on the basis of complementarity (nature being a moral text, man a moral reader). According to this twofold association, the separation of fact from value during the Enlightenment has two dissociative effects. First, it dissociates man from nature by doing away with their ground of identity and complementarity. Second, it dissociates man from his own moral being, since, unable to read the world in moral terms, he cannot express his full moral dimension. Langbaum hints at this last dissociative effect in his reference to Carlyle's "total crisis of personality" (15), during which the Scot lost all "desire to live" in a universe devoid of moral meaning. Carlyle's despair suggests that the problem of dissociation has profound existential

implications: the self cannot endure outside a morally informed environment; or, more generally, the self cannot endure without an environment to associate with.

Now that Langbaum's view on the dissociative effect of the 18th century scientific spirit has been clarified, we must turn to a secondary and largely understated aspect of the same spirit, its *associative* aim. In a previous quote, Langbaum indicates that the separation of fact from all values issued from a "desire" to get rid of a "crumbling tradition." This desire, he tells us, came with the realization that "value is man-made and illusory" (11). In liberating nature from the falsity of "the established order of value" (29) and, consequently, making nature's true factuality apparent for the first time, the "critical and rationalist age" of the Enlightenment performed an act that was deeply, if not unproblematically, associative. With the arrival of the scientific spirit, man no longer perceived nature through the intervention of an extrinsic ("man-made") value system; instead, as we will see in the next section, what meaning he now saw was derived from nature itself. Man's dissociation from the moral world was, in this view, a necessary evil. If he was to limit his knowledge of nature to what was objectively true, he *had* to start from the facts and keep to the facts. The artificiality of moral considerations could only hold nature at a distance.

Considering both the associative aim and the dissociative effects of the scientific revolution, we can begin to formulate the problem of (dis)association faced by the post-Enlightenment. To Langbaum, the post-Enlightenment must re-establish the connection between man and nature on a moral level above all. But if the romantics, or the Victorians, are not to repeat their predecessors' mistake by rejecting their heritage and, thereby, opening a new breach in the very act of sealing an old one, they must not be blind to the accomplishments of the 18th century. At the same time that the post-Enlightenment must restore moral value to the world, it must resist the temptation to project man-made values

extrinsic to the things themselves. The solution to the problem of (dis)association, at this early point in this study, takes the form of reconciliation: the reconciliation of (1) the old belief in the primacy of the moral with (2) the new scientific concern with factual truth. The post-Enlightenment must reconcile two modes of being in the world, two human and natural facets, which the dominant scientific discourse of the 18th century held to be incompatible.

This initial formulation of the problem of (dis)association makes necessary a more thorough investigation of the sciences than Langbaum can offer. Such investigation will first show that the scientific movement is not as unified as Langbaum makes it seem. It is a plural movement wherein two complex and contrary trends play on one another in a dialectical fashion. One obvious result of this plurality is to complicate the task of the post-Enlightenment by multiplying the dichotomies to be reconciled, not the least of which is the empirical dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity. Another important result, which will be evident in the next chapter, is to relegate the reconciliation of the moral and the factual to a supportive status, in that this task (primary to Langbaum) will become merely the means by which the romantic will resolve the other, perhaps more urgent, oppositions. Hopefully, the plurality of scientific trends does not only complicate things, for it also provides the post-Enlightenment with many alternative paths to the world, thus facilitating the romantic task of reconciliation. It is indeed by combining those paths that the romantic will discover a new mode of association more inclusive than its 18th century antecedents.

CASSIRER'S *THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT*

In *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, Ernst Cassirer refines Langbaum's conception of the 18th century scientific spirit by cautioning his reader against reducing "the idea of intellectual progress" that prevailed at the time to a mere "extension of knowledge

indefinitely" (5). The accumulation of facts upon the external world, Cassirer asserts, is in reality "merely apparent," for a second movement of much greater import progresses *inwards* to appraise "the nature and potentiality of thought itself" (4). In other words, all scientific investigations proceed from a "common center of force," and what appears like an "extension of knowledge indefinitely" is primarily a means of making that "center" shine and be seen. "When the 18th century wants to characterize this power in a single word," observes Cassirer, "it calls it 'reason'. 'Reason' becomes the unifying and central point of this century, expressing all that it longs and strives for, and all that it achieves" (5).

Another caution is now required, for the relegation of the quest for factual knowledge to a supporting status should not be interpreted as a depreciation of the need to associate with the external world. As it will become clear in the course of this section and the next, the 18th century fixation on Reason leads to the world in two contrary fashions. While the rational scientist (for lack of a better term) considers his power of Reason to be akin to the supersensible power that informs all of nature, the empiricist fuses with two interchangeable worlds by adopting a self-critical stance on rational knowledge. This reading somewhat differs from Cassirer's. He confuses, in his description of the inner movement, "intellectual self-examination" (4) with the uncritical desire to feel the "essentially homogenous formative power" (5) at the origin of thought. While both movements proceed inwards, I associate the former with empiricism and its sceptical approach, and the latter with the rational sciences and their faith in the truth of Reason.

THE RATIONAL SCIENCES

To begin with the rational approach, let me describe Reason as it was commonly conceived during the Enlightenment. Note that since scientific Reason is the direct ancestor

of the faculty of Imagination, central to the romantic mode of association, this description needs to reach a certain degree of details that will permit us, in the second chapter, to appreciate the striking affinity between the two faculties, as well as their important divergencies. Cassirer distinguishes in the rational mind four primary qualities: it is (1) universal, (2) analytic and synthetic, (3) inductive and (4) absolute as a process but relative in its results. First, universality. "The 18th century," Cassirer explains, "is imbued with a belief in the unity and immutability of reason. Reason is the same for all thinking subjects, all nations, all epochs, and all cultures" (6). Arthur Lovejoy agrees with this definition when, in a comparative study of deism and classicism, he declares that "reason, it is assumed to be evident, is identical in all men" ("Deism" 79).

The universality of Reason implicates that anything that is context specific, "[a]nything of which the intelligibility, verifiability, or actual affirmation is limited to men of a special age, race, temperament, tradition, or condition is eo ipso without truth or value, or at all events without importance to a reasonable man" (80). This conjunction of universality and rational truth throws light on Langbaum's reading of the scientific movement. 18th century scientists rejected the old moral system precisely because it was not universal, because it was "limited to men of a special age, race, temperament, tradition." The general argument at the time would have been something like the following: since all the peoples of the Earth apply different values to the things of the world, and since what is (rationally) true can only be what we *all* agree on, values must not enter into our apprehension of the world; they can only confound us.

The second characteristic of 18th century Reason, in Cassirer's terms, is that "its most important function consists in its power to bind and to dissolve" (13). With Newton Reason is no longer "a sound body of knowledge, principles, and truths," as it was with Descartes

and his deductive approach. Instead, it is an operative faculty that *produces* knowledge through a two-step process of analysis and synthesis. First, Reason "dissolves everything merely factual . . . into their simplest component parts." Then, it binds "the dispersed parts" into "a true whole" again (13-4). Only once it has recombined the dissolved parts into "a true whole" can Reason "understand this structure because it can reproduce it in its totality and in the ordered sequence of its individual elements" (14). In a profound sense, Reason achieves knowledge by re-enacting the Creation, that is, by forming an ordered whole out of a mass of confused elements; in contrast, the romantic Imagination, as we will see, is not content with simply imitating the original creative act, for it strives to outdo the Creation. And because Reason is an operative faculty and not "a sound body of knowledge," it can be known, or made to shine, strictly in the act of reasoning. This explains why rational man, to grow aware of his power of reason, must maintain his inquisitive gaze outwards, towards nature. Knowing the outer world is his sole means of discovering his inner faculty to penetrate matter and expose its structural unity.

The third characteristic of Reason, its inductive method, derives from the priority of synthesis over analysis. "For the function of unification," Cassirer explains, "continues to be recognized as the basic role of reason" (23). The dissolution of the object into its constituent parts is important insofar as it leads to the ultimate task of unifying those parts into "a true whole." It is not by breaking the object apart but, rather, by putting its parts back together that Reason produces knowledge and affirms its ability to recreate the world of things. Thus, although reasoning involves of preliminary phase during which the object is divided into its many parts, "the discursive form of knowledge always resembles a reduction; it proceeds from the complex to the simple, from apparent diversity to its basic identity" (23). The inductive approach, furthermore, does not apply to individual objects alone. The universe *in*

its totality can be reduced to one "single universal rule" (8). What need be discovered is the one elementary constituent that composes all things and the one universal law that determines all possible combinations. If analytic reasoning starts on the level of experience, of "apparent diversity," it moves therefore beyond it, towards a non-apparent realm of absolute identity and permanence.

"The structure of the cosmos," Cassirer remarks, "is no longer merely to be looked at, but to be penetrated" (11). The inductive movement from "looking" at the surface of things to "penetrating" their non-apparent depth will become a common trope of romanticism. But while the rational scientist identifies depth with the laws governing the surface, the romantic will link depth to an ideal world of which all superficial things, including their laws, are imperfect manifestations.

The fourth and last characteristic of analytic reasoning comes from the fact that the datum of experience, upon which the scientist depends to derive his generalities, is always incomplete. "Analysis knows no absolute end" because "future observations" will forever subtilize our perception of the surface of things (Cassirer 53). What now appears as the most elementary constituents will appear tomorrow as "further reducible to simpler natural phenomena." And because inductive analyses begin with provisional quantities of particulars, they can only lead to provisional, and therefore false, laws or principles. This falsity manifests itself in a process of endless revision at no point of which can the scientist affirm that he has found the "basic identity" of all things. Man's knowledge of the non-apparent realm of absolute identity and permanence can thus never surpass his own limitations as an observer – a rule the empiricist will extend and the romantic try (and fail) to circumvent.

"Such a relativity," Cassirer urgently points out, "does not imply any sceptical perils in itself. . ." (22). The ellipsis in this last quote marks the point where my view begins to differ from Cassirer's. He explains the absence of "sceptical perils" by arguing that perpetual revision is "merely the expression of the fact that reason in its steady progress knows no hard and fast barriers, but that every apparent goal attained by reason is but a fresh starting-point" (22). In other words, inductive analysis is valid because each revision, however provisional, moves the scientist one step closer to objective truth, and because "no hard and fast barriers" can put an end to this procession. I find this view unsatisfactory for the reason that it situates the moment of association with nature at a point infinitely distant in the future. The scientist approaches the truth of things, but he never attains it. I propose to read Cassirer more closely than he appears to read himself, and so subordinate this endless procession towards the external world to the instant apprehension of the power of reasoning. The outward journey, the "extension of knowledge indefinitely," is secondary because relative to man's limited power of observation. On the other hand, the inward journey, the intellect's apprehension of its own "common center of force," is primary because Reason, a faculty *known by its function* and *not by its results*, operates in accordance with the true unity underlying all particulars. In other words, even if Reason attains in its "steady progress" only provisional results, it is objectively and absolutely valid as a formative power that combines parts into wholes. In the rationalist's view, nature truly is a unified whole, and Reason functions in total harmony with this idea of unity. What matters is therefore not so much the supersensible law or principle behind apparent things, but the suprasensible power that unifies the world from 'above.' All that rational man can *truly* know of the world is the formative power (or unity) implicit in the order of things. In the end only this power is real and worthy of being associated with, whereas parts and wholes are illusory.

The implications of this last point are momentous. Owing to our limited power of perception, to our inability to perceive all particulars, only the unseen can be real and certain to us. Partially disclosed, the seen matters not in itself but as a means of discovering the unseen. The romantic, far from being disheartened by the partialness of his perceptions, will capitalize on it to outdo the rational scientist and make the unseen – visible. He will do so, in brief, by using 'partial' in its every sense, to refer both to an 'incomplete' and a 'biased' perception. Whereas the incapacity to see all things is a limit to the scientist, to the romantic it will be an opportunity to idealize the phenomenal world by choosing what is seen and what is not.

With the four characteristics of 18th century Reason just outlined, we can return to the problem of (dis)association and clarify the associative and dissociative trends of analytic reasoning. I argued above that the rational scientist associates with nature not by seeing the physical world or knowing its laws, but by discovering within himself a faculty equivalent to the power that informs the universe and gives it unity. Rational association thus proceeds through the re-enactment of the Creation, a performance wherein the human subject plays the not so minor role of the Creator himself. Note also the profoundly dynamic nature of this associative process, for it is only through action, through perpetual dissolution and unification, that the scientist grows aware of his ability to inform nature from without.

The constant repetition of the rational act is ensured by the fact that there are always more particulars to combine. Every new datum of experience, so long as it is not yet integrated into the existing model, threatens man's capacity to unify all things. The man of science must therefore constantly pursue those fugitive fragments of experience and prove himself, over and over again, his power to bring unity to the world.

An interesting paradox inhabits the rational mode of associating man with nature: the rational scientist makes himself at home *in* the world as he imagines himself *outside* the world in the act of bringing it into existence. Although romantic association (in theory) entails a similar re-creation of the phenomenal world from an out-worldly position, the romantic's concern with the sensuous, with making the unseen visible, ensures that the human subject, at the end of the associative process, returns to the world and never has to leave it again.

The dissociative effects of the rational worldview are numerous. Besides the absence of moral values, I identify three main exclusions: (1) the passive in man and the active in nature, (2) the physical, and (3) the particular. First, man's primarily active role in the process of analytic reasoning rules out, or minimizes, that side of his which relates to the external world through *passive* reception. That passivity can take two complementary forms: the self's direct (pre-reflective) perception of the world, and the world's many and various influences on the self. Rather than yielding passively to the deconstructive and reconstructive power of Reason, nature now becomes the agent of transformation as it impacts upon our senses and thoughts and alters our subjectivity. Empiricism concerns itself specifically with such effects of external factors on the human subject, and so does Romanticism by underlining the significance of our immediate impressions and the need to make those impressions congruent with our ideas (or ideals).

Besides the active in man and the passive in nature, analytic reasoning also excludes, or downplays, the domain of the *concrete* and *particular*. As stated above, the rational scientist recognizes that his perception of the physical world is limited and problematic, so he associates with nature by indirection as he discovers his reflective ability to look through the

surface of things, beyond the physical and the particular, where he apprehends the general and suprasensible power that unifies all things. If this inductive, roundabout mode of association aims at compensating for the self's limited perception, it has the perverse effect of relegating the visible – the physical and the particular – to a secondary status, to mere appearances of a more fundamental, yet more abstract, reality.

George Eliot, in her essay on Wilhelm Heinrich von Riehl, condemns precisely this elevation of generalities above particulars when she associates "wide views" with "narrow observation" (268). Generalities like "the people," "the masses," "the proletariat," and "the peasantry," Eliot explains, "indicate almost as small an amount of concrete knowledge – that they are as far from completely representing the complex facts summed up in the collective term" (268). To generalize, in other words, means *to reduce* "concrete" and "complex facts" to an abstraction that, although comprehensive, excludes the infinite particularities that characterize each fact. Thus, supposing a man of comprehensive knowledge, familiar with such diverse subjects as manual labour, engineering, travelling, railroads and shareholding, Eliot asserts that his "very expanded views as to the multiplication of railways in the abstract, and their ultimate function in civilization" are superficial ("narrow") to the same degree that they are general ("wide") (267-8). Chapter III, interestingly, will show that a romantic like Byron uses the superficiality of generalizations to exclude particular reminders of death and decay and so idealize his world.

While the inductive method entails the erasure of particulars in the world, the universality of Reason excludes what is particular about the human subject. From a rational viewpoint, anything that is specific to this or that culture, epoch or nation, or to this or that personality, can only disrupt the reflective act and divert human comprehension from the path to truth. It is thereby never this or that person who associates with this or that particular

object, but rather man in a generic form, Rational Man, who associates with an abstract force. Although the universality principle protects the rationalist against the old tendency to read the world in man-made (or idiosyncratic) terms, it does so only at the great cost of dissociating the individual from all that makes him or her an individual: his particular personality and situation. The rational scientist, in short, is a "featureless observer" (Daston 22).

Lorraine Daston further remarks that the suppression of the idiosyncratic, necessary to attain the ideal of "aperspectival objectivity," serves a social purpose as it permits "communication, comparison, and accumulation of results" "across oceans and continents." Suppression is necessary to establish a scientific community that, as a whole, can surpass individual limitations, just as the subsumption of many particulars under one concept is necessary for that same community to discover what lies beyond individual surfaces. Man, it appears, cannot know what unifies all things without being himself unified, as a subject, with every other man.

In sum, in the effort to free all human beings of external influences, cultural or natural, in the effort to bring all human beings in contact with the same one and true reality, rational scientists subordinate all that is particular, physical and passive in the self, as well as all that is particular, physical and active in the world, to a mental faculty that, by virtue of its capacity to recreate all things in the theatre of the mind, elevates humanity to a level of abstraction where at last it can feel at home in the world. This description of the scientific fusion of man with nature permits us to refine the problem of (dis)association by adding to the opposition of moral value and objective truth, three more oppositions that the post-

Enlightenment must learn to reconcile: the particular versus the general; the physical versus the superphysical; the passive versus the active.

The poets and thinkers of the 19th century must discover a mode of association that, while emphasizing the tangible and the immediate, recognizes the human inclination to view nature in abstract terms, that is, through the lens of reflectivity; and, as if the task was not yet difficult enough, they must conjoin that research with considerations of the moral in both man and nature, making sure, however, not to violate the rule of objectivity. In the next chapter, we will see how the romantic movement developed in response to this challenge and with what great ingenuity romantics like Schiller, Shelley, Coleridge, Byron, and Wordsworth, nearly succeeded in reconciling so many different and contrary dimensions into one coherent and unified system. Interestingly, in place of complication, the return to the moral will be shown to be the key facilitating factor in the romantic quest for a new mode of being with nature.

CLASSICAL EMPIRICISM

Classical empiricism developed side by side with the rational sciences. "Thought," Cassirer indicates, "cannot turn toward the world of external objects without at the same time reverting to itself; in the same act it attempts to ascertain the truth of nature and its own truth" (93). Again, it is crucial not to confuse the self-critical trend of empiricism, where "thought" assesses "its own truth," with the inward movement implicit in rational investigations, where "thought" returns to its "common center of force" to sense its affinity with the force by which all things cohere. As it will be clear in the following paragraphs, the empirical mind traces the origin of our perceptual world. If it concerns itself with Reason, it is not to feel its power uncritically, but to discover its context, the factors that determine its

function and functioning and make us see and think the world in a particular way. Accordingly, empiricists view all scientific (and even common) preconceptions as something peculiar, something that demands an explication. Locke, for instance, examines the starting point of scientific knowledge, i.e. perception, or the common belief that we really see what we think we see. Hume, instead, examines the axiom of uniformity of nature, that is, the scientist's assumption that stable laws govern phenomenal events and guarantee their recurrence under the same conditions. In assessing the empirical truth of such preconceptions, empiricists like Locke and Hume not only question the scientific mode of association; more importantly, they evolve their own two paths to association, but not before revising what it means to be 'a self' in 'the world.'

That revision, which became predominant after the mid 18th century, taught two contrary things to the romantic and the post-Enlightenment. Above all, the empiricist taught that the human subject is confined to his relative viewpoint. Yet, by stressing that the mind perceives what it in reality creates, the empiricist also provided the romantic with an escape route out of his confinement: through the creative power of his imagination.

To begin with the Lockean trend of empiricism, Jules David Law identifies the Molyneux Question as its "central problem" (15). This question first appears in Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, published in 1689, only two years after Newton revolutionized the scientific world with his *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* and its inductive approach. Locke formulates the Molyneux problem as follows:

> Suppose a man *born* blind, and now adult, and taught by his *touch* to distinguish between a cube, and a sphere of the same metal, and nighly of the same bigness, so as to tell, when he felt one and the other, which is the cube, which the sphere. Suppose then the cube and sphere placed on a table, and the blind man be made to see: *quaere*, Whether *by his sight, before he touched them*, he could now distinguish and tell which is the globe, which the cube. (187)

This question, by all appearances simple, explodes into a virtually infinite number of sub-questions: what would a person born blind, upon suddenly gaining his visual faculty, see? would his past knowledge, acquired on a tactile level, allow him to distinguish visual forms? or would those forms be so novel that he could not rely on his past experience? more generally, is the world we perceive by touch congruous with the world we see? do we perceive the world just as it is, objectively, or do we perceive it through the distorting lenses of our sense organs? if the worlds of touch and sight are intrinsically different, how can we explain the application of a tactual quality like 'depth' to a visual field that is essentially flat? what reflective process underlies this application? what reflective process allows us to form one perceptual whole out of different kinds of sense-data? finally, if the former blind can "distinguish and *tell* which is the globe, which the cube," if he can speak of visual forms, even though his words have so far referred strictly to the tactual, does that imply that language need not be congruent with the things it signifies? Cassirer would subsume all those inquiries under "the general question as to whether sense as such can produce the physical world which we find in consciousness" (109).

All empiricists have, more or less, the same answer to this question: "sense" alone cannot "produce the physical world which we find in consciousness," for "the world as it appears to common sense is interpreted as a combination of sensory and inferential

judgments, transformed into habits and spontaneous associations that escape our attention" (Law 21-22). As a rule the empiricist describes this conversion of the raw material of our senses into "the world as it *appears* to common sense" in terms of '"reflection' acting upon 'surfaces' to produce 'depth'." In other words, the depth (we think) we see is invisible, and becomes visible only through "the mediation of judgment." This image can be taken both literally, meaning that the depth of our visual field is not actually seen but only reflectively derived, or symbolically, meaning that what knowledge we have of a (deep) force or ideal that would lie behind the surface of things is, in reality, a mental construct.

The crux of Law's argument is that in the course of its development empiricism is increasingly concerned with the function of language as "the *chief* normalizing factor in human experience" (13). Empiricism, he argues, "moves systematically and reductively from accounts of visual sensation to accounts of language" (3): for example, from accounts like Locke's, in the second book of his *Essay*, where he explains how the mind can mechanically derive "a convex figure of a uniform colour" from "a flat circle, variously shadowed, with several degrees of light and brightness" (186), to accounts like Berkeley's, in section XLIX of his *Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*, where he describes the perceptual implications of having the same name to refer to different sense ideas. In both cases, empiricism gives a formidable blow to Newton's inductive method by showing that our perception of the particular and physical, upon which the rational scientist depends to abstract his suprasensible vision of unity, is always already mediated by external factors. What the scientist 'immediately' experiences and observes (long before he begins to reason) is not the phenomenal world itself, but a reflection of this world.

Hume, in the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, is not so much interested in the mechanics or linguistics of visual perception as with a specific assumption that

underlies our perception of the phenomenal world. In Cassirer's terms, Hume enquires into the foundation of "the causal principle," "the one inference from effect to cause" to which "all rational knowledge is reducible" (106), and concludes that this inference "is not based on certain universally valid and necessary principles of reason but that it is derived from a mere instinct of nature." In the *Enquiry* Hume indeed argues that all reasonings of matters of fact are irrational because the idea of causation predetermines perception, at the same time that perception predetermines this idea (366). That circularity, thanks to which we have a sense of the world as a coherent whole and not a mass of disconnected events, would be "a species of natural instincts, which no reasoning or process of the thought and understanding is able either to produce or to prevent" (339). This form of sceptical empiricism implies that there is nothing suprasensible, or rational for that matter, in representing nature as a uniform whole and particulars as manifestations of the same unity. If humanity tends to read the world in general terms, it is not because we are endowed with a special faculty akin to the force that informs all of nature, but simply because *survival* requires that we read the world in such terms.

At a first glance, the trends of empiricism appear to be predominantly invested with dissociation. Empiricists, after all, spent most of their energy demonstrating that man's sensory relation with nature is highly mediated by a number of subjective factors. At least five factors of mediation were variously identified: (1) our instincts, (2) language, (3) customs and habits, (4) the intrinsic structure of our sense organs and (5) our emotions. (For 18th century considerations of the influence of human emotions on perception, see Cassirer on Etienne de Condillac's *Treatise on Sensations* [102-4].) In the wake of those revelations, the rational sciences found their ground of legitimacy significantly weakened. Not only did

empiricists prove the data of experience to differ from the world, but they also deprived Reason of its superior and gold-like status by making it a mere by-product of primitive and irrational drives. From an empirical viewpoint, so long as man believes in his ability to perceive the objective world, so long as he considers himself to be a subject detached from nature and able to know its parts in the act of recreating them, association will always be dissociative.

Born in a world where objectivity has become a vanishing dream, the romantic, who will not let go of this dream, will strive to find a way around subjectivity to return to a state wherein his thoughts and impressions are in complete harmony with what is, in his view, really out there. It is, ironically, the empirical method itself that will suggest new ways of associating which, together, and given the right romantic spin, will make the old dream of objective perception *seem* true.

Empiricism offers two interchangeable modes of association. Unlike the rational scientist, the empiricist does not seek to know the truth behind the natural world, or to find within himself, in the act of recreating this world, a transcendental force. Instead, the empiricist associates with his surroundings by either (passively) letting the world make an impression on him or (actively) using his representations as a channel to interact with the world*. I call the former mode 'association by contraction,' the latter 'association by extension.'

Association by contraction is implicit in the premise to the empirical enquiry, the view that our perceptions are determined by a world of factors. This mode of association necessitates a revision of what we ordinarily mean by 'the world,' for the world is no longer

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* Those two worlds are not identical: the first comprehends those factors that determine perception, the second those actual things which we do not actually see.

something out there waiting to be known: it is now something *in here* that constantly affects, whether we will it or not, our relation with external things. Man, in this view, contracts to a point without surface where an indefinite number of forces converge to make him the subject he is. Thus, if the rational scientist acts upon and penetrates the world, the contracted empiricist is penetrated by it, by that infinite life-force which defines him, defines his perceptions of nature, even his self-representation and the way he thinks he associates.

Association by extension proceeds contrariwise to the former mode. The self now expands to include within its periphery all the subjective factors found to determine its representation of the world. Those factors operate, so to speak, as extensions of the self, appendages with which we can touch, hold and mould the world. As Cassirer explains, by this new conception, "[t]he 18th century advances beyond this negative characterization and evaluation of the affects" (105). The affects, just like any other mediating factor, are no longer seen as having a "negative" dissociative effect because they are "the original and indispensable impulse" by which man moves towards and acts upon the world. Representation, rather than being valued in proportion to its degree of accuracy, is now considered to be always true and valid insofar as it originates in a genuine interaction between the subject and the object. Falsity merely indicates that the subject was actually and actively present in its encounter with the object. The representational act, consequently, ceases to be a means of knowing the world or knowing one's capacity to inform the world in its objective truth. It becomes a means of being in the world by way of impressing its objects with one's subjectivity.

As a rule, neither of the two empirical modes of association eliminates the dissociative effects observed in the rational sciences. Owing to their primarily critical approach, empiricists tend merely to reverse the terms of the problem of (dis)association;

that is, they associate where scientists dissociate and dissociate where scientists associate. To illustrate, while Newton's inductive method disembodies man to elevate him into a realm of unity and permanence, Hume's sceptical empiricism brings man and his high ideals down to the level of his instinctual drives. While rational sciences subordinate the particular and the physical to the abstract, empiricism traces the origin of abstractions back to the influence of particular factors, physical and/or cultural (although the empiricists here discussed speak of man in general, their interest in the subjective determinants behind our worldviews clearly points to a detailed analysis of *particular* sources of influence). Finally, if, to scientists, the tangible is secondary in at least two respects – it is merely apparent and incompletely so – to empiricists, the tangible is primary in two complementary ways: as an instrument by which we can reach and affect the world, or as a world in itself that constantly affects us.

Despite the fact that 18th century empiricism defines itself to a great extent by opposition to the rational sciences, reinforcing thereby the same set of antitheses, and despite the fact that the empiricist is just as distrustful of moral absolutes as his rational contemporary, the movement initiated by Locke merits our attention because it proposes new ways of looking at the complex of interactions between the self and the world. In negating objectivity and breaking the conventional harmony between the world and our thoughts and senses, the empiricist might not solve the problem of (dis)association (to some extent he in fact aggravates it), but at least he accomplishes the all-important task of discovering that region where the self and the world actually meet, interpenetrate and determine one another by a continual exchange of their active and passive roles.

The next logical step would be the reconciliation of this subjective mode of association with the objective mode it proved false and replaced. Chapter II will demonstrate how the romantic achieves such fusion of opposites by first conceiving of a moral ideal that

is both real and perceptible, yet not actually present, and by seeing in poetry a special space to realize this ideal and make objective what is in fact subjective, actually present what is a construct of the mind.

AESTHETICS

In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* Terry Eagleton speaks of a rather late manifestation of the rational sciences that emerged at the turn of the mid-eighteenth century: the Aesthetic movement. Considering "the divergence of the paths followed by the intellect in its attempt to encompass all of reality" (Cassirer 5), it was inevitable that some 18th century thinkers would apply the principles of analytic reasoning to "the region of human perception and sensation" (Eagleton 13). Although Aesthetics remains within the scope of the rational sciences, its concern with the subject, with "how the world strikes the body on its sensory surfaces," suggests that this movement came into existence in part as a response to the empirical inquiries into that region where man associates with the world by being impressed (struck upon) by it. Notably, a specific branch of Aesthetics saw in the physical contact between the self and the world a solution to the separation of fact from moral value, a solution of great import for the romantic's apprehension of the moral ideal.

First, in the wake of empiricism, "the absolute monarch of Reason" had to reaffirm its "legitimacy" by showing that "even the 'rabble' of the senses" could yield to its dominating gaze (Eagleton 14). Yet, the material of the senses was not just one more thing to dissolve and bind again. It was precisely what made *all* things accessible to the rational mind, a condition without which Reason would be altogether helpless to prove its affinity with the creative power at work in the universe. Rationalizing human affects was therefore a matter of survival for the rational sciences. Crucially, on its journey to the affects, the rational

mind eventually encountered its own boundaries, and to travel across them, it was forced to compromise itself and develop a new form of rationality, along with a new mode of rational association.

Before turning to Eagleton's description of Aesthetics, let me first clarify the reasons why an "enquiry into they very stuff of passion and perception" (14) took the form of a study of the beautiful, or, in Kant's terms, of "the liking that determines the judgment of taste" (I.II.204). Aesthetics differ from rational judgment because art appreciation does not involve a *reflective* anatomy of the object to discover the one law that unifies its constituent parts. As Kant famously remarks, "a judgment of taste is not a cognitive judgment" (I.I.203). We judge, for instance, a painting *un*reflectively as the visual image impacts upon our senses and generates an instant emotional response of pleasure or displeasure. Besides, the "determining basis" of this judgment "*cannot be other* than *subjective*" (I.I.203), for the term 'beautiful' or 'ugly' does not qualify the object itself: it qualifies the subject's emotional response to the object.

How can Reason account for such subjective, not to say irrational, apprehension of the world? How can it explain the source of aesthetic pleasure? If the rational mind succeeds in rationalizing aesthetic judgment, if it comes to understand, in its own terms, what makes an object beautiful to our eyes, Reason will have passed its most challenging test so far and reaffirmed, once again, its right to rule.

The rationalization of aesthetic judgment is a challenge to the extent that Reason cannot proceed as it ordinarily does. What makes a painting beautiful resides on its surface. It is therefore not to be understood through penetration by discovering an unseen reality, a basic unity, concealed behind (or inside) the paint. Accordingly, Eagleton observes that

> Aesthetics is born of the recognition that the world of perception and experience cannot simply be derived from abstract universal laws, but demands its own appropriate discourse and displays its own inner, if inferior, logic. (15)

The "logic" of Aesthetics is "inferior" because it deals with the mere surface of things. To know the source of aesthetic pleasure, Reason must learn to flatten its ordinary conception of the world: rather than derive depth from surfaces, the general from the particular, it must bring depth to the level of surfaces, the general to the level of the particular. It is that bringing together of the seen and the unseen which, from a rational viewpoint, makes a painting beautiful. Interestingly, it is a similar reunion of surface and depth, the real and the ideal, that makes poetry – romantic.

In Eagleton's view, Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* (1750) represents the first significant realization of "this delicate balance" (15) of surface and depth. Realizing that "the elements of aesthetic representation resist that discrimination into discrete units which is characteristic of conceptual thought," Baumgarten develops a concept of "organic" unity, a "unity-in-variety" (15) where "[e]ach aesthetic particular, in the very act of determining itself, regulates and is regulated by all other self-determining particulars" (25). The dual nature of the "aesthetic particular" – the fact that it is a part distinct from all other parts, at the same time that it receives its distinctness from the whole of parts – results from the "fusion of general and particular." In other words: as "unity" (the general) fuses with "variety" (the particular), the part becomes a sign for the whole and the whole a sign for the part, which means that the part can no longer be (reflectively) extracted from the whole without altering every other part and losing, as an effect, the source of its particularity. The beautiful, in art and nature,

stands for those surfaces that illustrate such a complete interpenetration of each part with the whole.

If the faculty of Reason is to preserve its kinship with the suprasensible, it cannot humble itself to deal with such lowly surfaces, however beautiful and deep-like. Baumgarten must therefore complement his theory of "unity-in-variety" with a special faculty, the Aesthetic faculty, capable of organizing sensuous things "in a manner akin to (if relatively autonomous of) the operations of proper reason" (16). Thanks to this faculty we can also feel "instantly on the pulses" a "kind of ideality [that] informs the sensuous world" (17), an "ideality" that partakes both of "the generalities of reason" and "the particulars of sense" (15).

Aesthetic judgment, it cannot be overstated, is pre-reflective. Unlike scientific unity, which maintains the connection between elementary parts and can be abstracted only in the act of dismantling those parts and putting them back together again, aesthetic unity resides in the parts themselves, in each and all parts as they combine to form an indivisible whole. Any attempt to reflect upon an organic composition can only result in the destruction of its organicity. Aesthetic cognition thus apprehends its ideal of unity through the instant perception of each and all parts, well before analytic reasoning ever begins to break up those parts.

Aesthetic philosophy is important with regard to the problem of (dis)association because of its concern with reconciliation. Baumgarten's theory of the beautiful makes the ideas of Reason and the realm of the tangible and particular entirely compatible. Yet, by effecting this reconciliation on the *surface* rather than in the depth of things, and by introducing a new faculty that apprehends the world *immediately* and *affectively* rather than

reflectively, Aesthetic theory departs from the rational sciences to join empiricism in studying those aspects of the man/nature relationship which scientists ignore or relegate to a secondary status. Romanticism, also striving at reconciliation, will not only have recourse to a faculty very similar to the Aesthetic faculty, but its poetics will prioritize the act of surfacing, of bringing the moral ideal to the surface of our senses.

Also important in Baumgarten's Aesthetics is the special role art is called to play in the process of reconciliation. The beautiful object, as we saw, differs from other objects because of its interpenetration of parts. When a person's sensory organs come into contact with an organic surface, that person experiences a "kind of ideality" akin (albeit inferior) to both the faculty of Reason and the general unity that normally remains concealed behind surfaces. Art, in this view, is like a mirror through which the human subject can *instantly* recognize in 'outer nature' a reflection not only of his 'inner self' but also of the 'unseen force' that informs all natural things, beautiful and ugly, human and other. The romantic, we will see in Chapter II, endows his art with a similar associative power. Only in poetry can he bring together the superficial and the deep, the real and the ideal, the subjective and the objective, and, ultimately, the self and the world.

Lastly, aesthetic philosophy also provides an avenue worth exploring for the assignment of moral value. Instead of relying on a ready-made value-system, judgment of taste (as defined by 18th century aestheticians) assigns value on the basis of the self's pre-reflective, emotional response to sensible objects. The affects thereby provide a means of assigning value that, on account of its immediacy, seems free of the biases of "a special age, race, temperament, [and] tradition" (Lovejoy, "Deism" 80). 18th century moral philosophers like Hume and Shaftesbury realized the great potential of aesthetic judgment for the attribution of moral value, so much so in fact that they framed their moral faculty, even

described its operation and established its truth, by explicit reference to sensuous or aesthetic apprehension. Linda Dowling speaks of how Shaftesbury, in response to a "sudden, anguished sense of history gone meaningless" (4), bypasses the 18th century rejection of innate moral ideas by making "moral sense . . . operate as do the five physical senses in the empirical world of sensory data, registering ethical impressions with all the immediacy and vividness of the taste of salt upon the tongue or the touch of fire upon the skin" (8). Similarly, Richard Norman explains that one of Hume's strategies is "to compare moral approval with the perception of beauty, and to suggest that since the latter is a matter of sentiment and taste, the former must be likewise" (90).

The conjunction of aesthetic with moral judgment, here primarily symbolic (or comparative), becomes literal in romantic philosophy, where sensuous impressions *are* the only authority for attributing moral value to the things of the world. Romanticism differs from Hume and Shaftesbury's moral philosophy in one more respect. Whereas the two philosophers seek to establish a ground of certainty for moral judgment, the romantic is not content with mere attribution of value. His goal is far more ambitious: he wants to live in a world that is not only morally informed, but morally perfect! Poetry, he believes, holds the power to recreate the world and make it congruent with the Good.

Since Aesthetics is a branch of the rational sciences, the rational scientist, we can now affirm, associates with the world in two distinct ways. In the first, his analytic gaze penetrates the surface of things not so much to expose the unseen unity that holds all parts together as to discover, through this exposition, his affinity with the supranatural power at the origin of that unity. In the second, of a lower kind than the first, his gaze travels the surface of things until he discovers a certain materiality that *feels* like it was informed by the

same supranatural power. Note the complementarity of those two modes of association. With regard to man: whereas Newton prioritizes the supraphysical and the reflective, depth and activity, Baumgarten prioritizes the physical and the affective, surface and passivity. With regard to nature: Newton takes it to be passively and generally informed; Baumgarten, by contrast, deals with the particulars of nature as they actively impact on the body's sensory receptors. Due to this complementary, the rational sciences join the empirical movement, equally dual, in its desire to encompass as many facets of the self/world relationship as possible. This remark should not, however, blind us to the fact that both the scientific and the aesthetic mode of rational association fail to include the particularities of the human subject, for like Reason, aesthetic cognition is conceived to be universal: "a judgment of taste," to quote Kant, "must involve a claim to subjective universality" (I.VI.212).

THE (DIS)ASSOCIATIONS OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The Enlightenment contains a number of (dis)associative movements, some contradictory, some complementary, and some with identical concerns. Together, those movements constitute a complex dialectic of man's place in the world. Empiricism evolved in parallel with the rational sciences by questioning their ground of analysis, a critical approach that produced two interchangeable modes of association: in the extended mode, man fuses with the world by using his words and habits, emotions, instincts, and sense organs, as appendages by which he can leave a subjective imprint upon his environment; in the contracted mode, it is the environment, physical and cultural, that leaves an imprint on man by determining how he perceives the external world, and himself. Threatened by those views, the rational sciences complemented their intellectual pursuit of the "basic unity" with a new path to association, Aesthetics, a movement which permitted rational man to fuse with

his surroundings on the sensuous level. Caught in such dialectic, association defines itself largely in response to dissociation, only to become dissociative in its turn and lead to new (dis)associations.

The post-Enlightenment must discover an associative process that escapes this vain circularity by virtue of its economy and all-inclusiveness. Poets and thinkers must develop one unified system that reconciles the many aspects of man and nature and their relationship. They must join: the emotional to the reflective (the immediate to the mediated; the passive to the active), the sensible to the supersensible (the particular to the general, the concrete to the abstract), and the factual to the moral. Arguably, the greatest achievement of the 18th century was the realization that the old moral system was a human construct and not an absolute. Despite their diverging views, empiricists and rational scientists agreed at least on the need to separate fact from all values and develop a new world representation free of moral biases. Yet, as their disagreements also suggest, the universe, once cleansed of moral contamination, had not grown any less problematic. The post-Enlightenment inherits a world not just in want of moral meaning but fractured with antitheses, a world so complex that the very thought of associating with it confounds more than it comforts.

The problem of (dis)association might arise from the simple fact that *association always begins with representation*, with a particular conception of the 'the world' and 'the self'; and if history has taught us one thing, it is that no representation, however economic and all-inclusive, lasts eternally.

CHAPTER II : THE THEORY OF ROMANTICISM, AND ITS ASSOCIATIONS

In the face of a world rife with exclusions and fractures, Romanticism* emerges out of the effort to reconcile two contrary worldviews. While the romantic adopts the new empirical view that confines the self to his subjectivity, he strives to restore the old view that endows the self with the ability to know and connect with the world objectively. It is precisely this merging of the objective and the subjective, the old and the new, that gives Romanticism its inclusive, associative character.

Two distinct spheres of romantic thought must be distinguished: theory versus poetry. In his theoretical works, the romantic devises a mode of association that includes each of the scientific modes analyzed in the previous chapter at the same time that it re-establishes the longed-for connection between the factual and the moral. The 'moral ideal' is in fact the key concept that permits the romantic to integrate (in theory) the multiple facets of the self, the world and their relationship. The present chapter will examine this extensive integration by looking at a number of theoretical works and notions characteristic of Romanticism. Using Schiller's essay "Naïve and Sentimental Poetry" (1795) as a primary work, to be complemented by Wordsworth's "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" (1802), Shelley's "Defence of Poetry" (1820), and Coleridge's notions of Reason and Imagination, partly described in *Biographia Literaria* (1817), I will first define romantic association as an ambitious reflective process whose aim, in revising not only the world's metaphysical being but also the self's mental faculties, is to overthrow subjectivity from within.

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* In this chapter and the next, the terms "the romantic" and "Romanticism" refer to a particular conception of knowledge and perception that I detect in the works (the poetry and theory) of Schiller, Shelley, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Byron. They should not, therefore, be read as generic terms inclusive of the romantic movement as a whole (assuming, of course, that such a whole actually existed).

The romantic adopts in his poetry a mode of association different from the one outlined in the essays. Chapter III, a study of Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage" and Byron's "Childe Harold," will demonstrate that the theory of romantic association is – in practice – a mere trick of the gaze. What is supposed to be a total refashioning of the surface of things, to make that surface congruent with the true moral ideal, turns out to be a highly selective process wherein the gaze focuses more and more on beautiful objects or moves in a way that confuses the image of ugly objects. Both tricks have the same outcome: the romantic observer fuses with his environment as he excludes unpleasant particulars from his field of vision, thus making subjectivity, the ability to modify one's perspective, the means towards a reality that seems true, good, and beautiful, only to the extent that it is partly or un-clearly perceived.

SCHILLER'S THREE HISTORICAL STAGES

Schiller's "Naïve and Sentimental Poetry," a work Lovejoy calls of "revolutionary significance" ("Schiller" 219) and describes as the one cause that gave German romanticism its "immediate and decisive impetus" ("Discrimination" 243), is a monumental work of reflection that rewrites human history from the perspective of a dissociated person desperate to associate again, yet aware that what was lost – is lost. Schiller identifies three stages in human history: (1) the naïve stage, (2) the reflective stage, and (3) the sentimental stage.

THE NAIVE STAGE corresponds to a period in the past when man's world representations coincided perfectly with his immediate perceptions. At that time, he exists in a state of internal and external harmony. Internally, his "feeling and thought," "[s]ense and Reason," "passive and active faculties," functions in a state of "undivided sensuous unity and as a unifying whole" (111). In other words, he thinks what he feels and feels what he

thinks, for his reflective power does not yet transform (i.e. interpret) the material of his senses; it merely expresses that material just as it is, without altering its sensuous and actual qualities. Externally, what he thinks and what he feels reflect accurately, unmediatedly, the actual and necessary nature of his contact with the sensible world.

Although the naïve man thinks, he exists in a sort of pre-reflective state where thought 'copies' rather than 'reflects upon' the material of the senses. Whatever reflective process there is at this stage, it does not derive depth out of surfaces or penetrate the surface of things. It stays on the surface and remains at every point congruent with it. The naïve poet, accordingly, "limits himself solely to imitation of actuality" (115). His interactions with the external world take place strictly on the level of "sensuous truth" (112). And since the totality of his being is an "undivided sensuous unity" in permanent and immediate contact with the sensuous world, he has no desire and even less the ability to associate on an abstract or supersensuous level. In such a perfect state of association, the naïve poet does not need to idealize experience and transport his reader into a realm where association can be more complete than in actuality: "at that stage man still functions with all his powers simultaneously as a harmonious unity and hence the whole of his nature is expressed completely in actuality. . ." (111-12).

THE REFLECTIVE STAGE begins with the emergence of a new mental faculty. Although Schiller refers to this faculty in diverse ways – he calls it "reason" (148), "reflective understanding" (154), "fantasy" (110), or "faculty of ideas" (155) – his many terms can all be subsumed under the notion of reflection, or the ability to reflect upon one's sensuous impressions and so depart from them. Because its chief characteristic is its "unconditional freedom" (156), the new faculty of reflection creates in the mind a world of abstractions that do not necessarily correspond to the phenomenal world. In fact, with his "freely functioning

understanding" (155), the reflective man builds himself a second nature made of "arbitrary and artificial forms" (106). The crux of Schiller's argument is that as he enters into his new "artificial environment" (101), man leaves behind the naïve state of sensuous harmony. The ability to reflect upon himself and nature has broken the relation of identity between feeling and thought, for it mediates *between* man's sensuous contact with nature and his representation of the material arising out of this encounter. At the reflective stage, man exists in a profoundly dissociated state: he no longer thinks what he perceives nor perceives what he thinks; while his body inhabits nature, his mind inhabits a world of its own making.

The affinity of Schiller's account of the reflective stage with the empiricist's view on perception cannot be overstated. Just like Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, Schiller underlines the lack of congruence between what we actually perceive and what we think we perceive. His faculty of reflection transforms nature (as it appears to our senses) in the very act of apprehending it, thence isolating the thinking subject from the objects that surround him. And just like empiricism, Schiller's subjectivism confronts head-on the scientific worldview which assumes the material of the senses to form a valid ground for the analytic processes of the mind. Although Schiller does not condemn the rational sciences as explicitly as Shelley and Coleridge do in their own theoretical writings, his critique of "the empty faculty of representation" (110) and his warning about "the dangerous guidance of . . . Reason" (148) cannot fail to remind one of the empiricist's denial of the truth of scientific abstractions.

Notably, insofar as Schiller's conception of knowledge and perception criticizes the scientific worldview on account of its artificiality, his understanding of the positive sciences is superficial because it ignores the fact that a scientist like Newton, who recognizes the limits of human perception, associates with nature not by representing it, not by knowing it in its objective truth, but by discovering within himself a force equivalent to the one that informs

all natural things. As we will see, romantic philosophy appropriates this 'deeper' mode of association to develop its own associating process, and its criticism of scientific abstractions is essential if only to free a space for its own artificial abstractions.

While the naïve and reflective stages represent two actual states of human existence, THE SENTIMENTAL STAGE represents a movement *towards* an ideal state. According to Schiller, under the conditions of reflection, the sentimental man seeks to retrieve the naïve state of sensuous unity that preceded his fall into artificiality (154). Yet, he knows he "cannot now go back" (153). Reflection is here to stay and only a path forward – towards that point infinitely distant from what is actual, a point where art becomes absolutely complete and perfect – can lead him back to nature. The sentimental phase thus arises out of the combination of the naïve and the reflective: it arises out of the attempt to reflect oneself back into the state of pre-reflective contact with nature. To illustrate, weighed down by the load of his thoughts, Schiller's sentimental man is incapable of rising up again to the surface of things, so he lets himself sink willingly into the infinite darkness below, towards the very bottom of things where he hopes to find another surface.

Recalling Baumgarten's notion of organic unity – the fusion of the general and the particular – the aim of the sentimental journey is to discover a space where depth and surface, reflection and sensation, can be harmonized so as to bring the whole self into contact with the true nature of things. It is crucial to remark that this quest represents an attempt to return to the old state of human existence, when perception was not yet problematic, but under the new conditions created by the emergence of empiricism and its description of perception as a reflective process isolating the subject from the things themselves. The romantic or sentimental movement, as Langbaum indicates, "would present a curious paradox in that it would have been created out of the rejection of tradition and the

preoccupation with its loss" (37). Although Langbaum refers strictly to the loss of moral value, we can revise his moral approach and define romanticism as a movement created out of the rejection of objectivity and the preoccupation with its loss. Romanticism emerges with the birth of the subjective view, yet while the romantic recognizes the inescapable condition of subjectivity, he obsesses about the loss of objective relations with his environment*.

As my reading of Schiller's essay so far indicates, the romantic "movement toward objectivity" (as Langbaum puts it) does not begin ultimately with the subject's isolation from an objective ground for attributing "values" to the world; more tragically, it begins with his isolation from the world *in every sense*, morally as well as physically. To the romantic the world is simply nowhere to be seen. In such extreme solitude the attribution of value can hardly be a priority. Thence, as Langbaum momentarily concedes, "the imposition of values on the external world" is not an end in itself; it is merely the means "through" which the romantic seeks "a new principle of connection with society and nature" (28). Precisely, the romantic reconciles sense and thought, and finds a natural surface upon which to effect this reconciliation, by conceiving of a 'moral ideal' that would exist behind the surface of things while being potentially congruous with that same surface.

ROMANTIC ASSOCIATION

Simply put, the problem faced by the romantic conception of the mind consists in finding a form of thought congruent with the finitude of the sensuous, and a form of sensuous material congruent with the infinitude of thought. The double romantic problem

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* With his typical overemphasis on the moral, Langbaum thereby concludes:

> No sooner had the 18th century left the individual isolated within himself – without an objective counterpart for the values he sensed in his own will and feelings – than romanticism began as a *movement toward objectivity*, toward a new principle of connection with society and nature through the imposition of values on the external world. (my italics 28)

requires a double answer, thence the two steps of romantic association: in the first phase, the romantic finds an idea towards which actuality, the world as he senses it, proceeds; in the second phase, he finds a sensuous space wherein he can reshape actuality to make it coincide with this idea.

PHASE I: PERCEPTION

Schiller describes the first phase of romantic association when he says of the sentimental poet that "[h]e reflects upon the impression that objects make upon him, and only in that reflection is the emotion grounded which he himself experiences and which he excites in us" (116). In reflecting upon his impression, the poet derives an "idea" to which the sensible object is taken to refer. The essay "Naïve and Sentimental Poetry" begins with an illustration of such referral:

> There are moments in our lives when we dedicate a kind of love and tender respect to nature in plants, minerals, animals, and landscapes, as well as to human nature in children, in the customs of country folk, and to the primitive world, not because it gratifies our senses, nor yet because it satisfies our understanding or taste (the very opposite can occur in both instances), rather, simply because *it is nature*. (83)

Here Schiller reflects upon the impression that arises from our perception of natural objects – vegetation, children, and the like – and he comes to the conclusion that those objects touch us because they represent an idea: "*nature*." Despite its illustrative power, this quote can be misleading insofar as it shows two kinds of referral: one is immediate (i.e. pre-reflective), the other mediated (i.e. reflective). On the one hand, the poet speaks of the immediate effect natural objects have upon us: how they inspire love and respect on account of our seeing in

them, almost without our noticing it, an idea and not just a sensuous appearance. On the other hand, as he *reflects* in the act of writing upon this immediate experience and so brings to his own and his reader's awareness the idea we all perceive unconsciously, Schiller presents an entirely different mode of apprehending the idea. Unfortunately, Schiller does not clearly differentiate between these two modes of apprehension, a situation which causes some degree of confusion when we try to map out the mechanics of romantic association. As the ongoing analysis will evidence, romantic association starts – in theory – with the immediate perception of ideas, while reflection is relegated to the second phase so as not to jeopardize the immediacy and, therefore, the truth of the perceptual event.

Regarding the idea that arises out of this event, Schiller's analysis of the origin of our love and respect for natural objects tells us at least four of its characteristics. First, in using the plural first person ("we" and "our") Schiller implies that the idea of 'nature' is *universally perceived*. This same universality is also apparent when he remarks that our interest in natural objects is not a matter of "taste." In a later passage, he makes this point unequivocal: "nature will always have something of this effect [i.e. inspiring love and respect] even upon the most unfeeling," since "we are all without distinction, regardless of the distance between our actions and the simplicity and truth of nature, impelled to it in idea" (86). Second, the idea is *supersensible*. Schiller indeed makes sure to indicate that our affection for natural objects does not originate in sensuous experience (the idea of nature arises "not because it gratifies our senses"). Another quote draws a similar line between the realm of ideas and the world of sensible objects: "It is not these objects, it is an idea represented by them which we love in them" (84-5). Third, the idea is *not apprehended by our understanding* ("not yet because it satisfies our understanding"). Understanding here signifies "the freely functioning understanding" (155) responsible for the dissociation of thought from sense in the reflective

stage; our understanding comprehends all cognitive processes that apprehend the external world by translating it into "arbitrary and artificial forms" (106). Clearly, the ideas perceived intuitively must not be confused with those highly mediated forms, for, as will become evident, those ideas are necessary and natural constituents of the external world. Finally, ideas *emerge only upon contact with the sensible world.* Although Schiller takes much care to distinguish ideas from sensible things, such distinction is required just because of the close relationship existing between the ideas and the objects that refer us to them. We can perceive ideas only to the extent that we can perceive things and that we can be impressed by them and directed, as a result, towards the supersensible realm of ideas.

According to the Schillerian model, natural objects touch us not only because they make available to us universal and supersensible ideas distinct from the concepts of understanding. Above all they touch us because they refer to more than mere ideas: they refer to an *ideal.* Schiller thus tells us that the child is

> a lively representation to us of the ideal, not indeed as it is fulfilled, but as it is enjoined; hence we are in no sense moved by the notion of its poverty and limitation, bur rather by the opposite: the notion of its pure and free strength, its integrity, its eternality. (87)

We see in every other natural object the same vision of "our highest fulfilment in the ideal" (85). Crucially, Schiller identifies this ideal with the state of association we supposedly enjoyed before the advent of reflection. Speaking of various living and non-living characters found in most common forests – "a modest flower, a stream, a mossy stone, the chirping of birds, the humming of bees, etc." – he exclaims: "*They are what we were*; they are what *we should once again become.*" In ideality man does not give free rein to his faculty of ideas; he does not surround himself with artificial forms in the very act of reflecting (upon) nature. In

ideality man is nature again, living in "a state of innocence, i.e., in a condition of harmony and of peace with himself and with his environment" (147). The pleasure we obtain from contemplating nature, and the love and respect we devote to its varied forms originate in the revelation of this ideal state of internal and external unity. As we look upon landscapes, children, or country people, we get a glimpse of a life that is no longer ours, a life where both sense and thought harmonize with each other as well as with "the simplicity, truth and necessity of nature" (110).

The first phase of romantic association consists in the perception of this ideal. The ideal itself, as a concept, emerges from the need to answer one half of the problem faced by romantics: the need to find a new kind of thought congruent with the sensuous. First, in the act of perception, the sensuous object and the idea it represents are as inseparable as the signifier and the signified in Saussure's linguistic theory. As above noted, the perception of the ideal requires the perception of a sensible object; inversely, the impression that objects make upon us can only be understood by considering the ideal they signify. "Romanticism," Langbaum thereby remarks, "is both idealistic and realistic in that it conceives of the ideal as existing only in conjunction with the real and the real as existing only in conjunction with the ideal" (24). More significantly, compared to the scientific distinction between the surface of things and the law that governs it, a distinction that establishes a difference in *kind* between a passive material and an active principle, Schiller's distinction between the sensuous (the real) and the idea(l) is infinitely less sharp to the extent that it presents only a difference in *degree*. Recalling an amalgam of Platonic philosophy and Christian mythology, Schiller describes the ideal as a "pure" and eternal ("eternity") form of which the real is a fallen manifestation ("*They are what we were*") and towards which the real should proceed ("they are what *we should once again become*"). As will be evident in the analysis of the second

phase of romantic association, the ideal is congruent with the sensuous not so much because we always apprehend them simultaneously as because the ideal can take on a sensuous appearance, or, which amounts to the same thing, the real can once again be ideal – in theory of course. While Phase I makes thought and sense congruent first in the act of perceiving them and second by relating them through a difference in degree, Phase II aims at collapsing this difference completely, thus permitting the self to literally touch the ideal behind the surface of things.

The ideal is the key concept for the grand romantic task of reconciliation. By virtue of its twofold nature – at once supersensible and, potentially, sensible – it offers a space where *thought* and *sense* can move toward one another to restore the unified state that characterized Schiller's naïve phase. More particularly, the first step towards reconciliation, i.e. immediate perception, reconciles the *physical* and the *moral* by connecting tangible objects with a moral ideal. (Whereas Schiller qualifies the idea of nature as "moral" to signify that it is "not aesthetic" [84], that it exists strictly as a mental image, I use the word in Langbaum's sense since the idea is also an image of the Good by which we judge and value all things.) Phase I also reconciles the *passive* and the *active* in the self. It achieves this reconciliation because the passive contact with the sensuous coincides with and triggers the active, albeit instant, creation of an idea. In Schillerian terms, this reconciliation represents the combination of the naïve and the reflective phase: while the contact with the sensuous world is immediate and, therefore, *naïve* or pre-reflective, the perception of an ideal distinct from the actual surface of things entails a *reflective* detachment from the sensuous.

This detachment from the sensuous, however, differs from the detachment of the reflective phase on one essential point. If reflection in the reflective phase dissociates the mind from nature by transporting it into an artificial world, reflection in the sentimental

phase transports the mind into a world that is necessary and natural in so far as it represents the Good, the ideal reality towards which all actual things should proceed. Unlike the rational scientist, who seeks to perceive the surface of things or the unseen laws and principles that determine its shape, texture, and colour, only to end up perceiving a world that never existed, and never will, the sentimental man recognizes his blindness to surfaces, but rather than consider himself forever cut off from reality, he interprets the scientist's failure to discern surfaces as a positive sign of farsightedness. In other words, if reflective man cannot conceive of nature just as it is, it is due not to his confinement to subjectivity but to the fact that while reflection does make the surface of things seem like a blur, it has this effect only because it focuses on a more distant reality situated behind the surface of things, a reality that is infinitely more fundamental, if not more real, than anything actual and sensuous. Thus, as long as reflective man stubbornly fixes his eyes upon the surface of things, his perception of his surroundings can only be confused and dissociative. To associate with the world and himself once again, he must accept the limitations of his farsighted vision; more importantly, he must learn to take advantage of his new faculty by redirecting his gaze from the surface to the depth of things.

Through this revision of the subjective predicament, Schiller realizes the impossible task of making subjective perception objective. *By introducing the concept of a moral ideal*, he turns a representation incongruent with the sensible world into one congruent with the deep and unseen reality of things. Beginning with the empirical view that portrays the human subject as completely isolated from the sensible world, Schiller thus finds his way back to a positive view, wherein the subject can know the world in its inherent truth. All this is achieved by adopting a platonic definition of truth, equating it not with the visible but with the ideal world, of which the visible is only a debased manifestation. It is therefore only by

relegating the visible to a secondary status that Schiller succeeds in making subjectivity, i.e. the inability to see, a benign condition. In fact, with his new definition of truth, subjectivity now becomes the necessary condition under which one can perceive the objective reality behind all things.

THE ENGLISH POETS

Although they take slightly different paths, English romantic poets – specifically, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Shelley – follow Schiller on his theoretical journey towards objectivity. Within the limits of the present chapter, I will direct my attention first to Coleridge's faculty of Reason and Wordsworth's analysis of the context of perception, and second to Shelley's history of the mind. Whereas the writings of the former two poets will illustrate variations on Schiller's initiatory phase of association, the writings of the latter poet will lead us further into the next and last phase.

COLERIDGE'S FACULTY OF REASON

John Stuart Mill, in his essay on Coleridge, affirms that the English poet "strongly dissents" from the doctrine of empiricism and its claim that "[s]ensations, and the mind's consciousness of its own acts, are not only the exclusive sources, but the sole materials of our knowledge" (128). For Coleridge, he explains, believes in the mind's "capacity, within certain limits, of perceiving the nature and properties of 'Things in themselves'." According to Mill, Coleridge's belief in objective perception can be understood on the basis of his distinction between two mental faculties: Understanding and Reason. The faculty of *Understanding* "judges of phenomena, or the appearances of things, and forms generalizations from these." It corresponds to the analytic and synthetic faculty which, in the

previous chapter, I referred to as scientific Reason. It is his Understanding that gives the scientist the ability to investigate surfaces ("appearances") and derive the laws or principles ("generalizations") that move the sensible world. As Basil Willey pointedly indicates, the Understanding "begins to err" when it takes its "limited theories," determined by such arbitrary factors as "a technique of experiment or a method of classification," for "absolute laws" (10). Thus, the Understanding "begins to err" when it assumes that what the mind sees and what knowledge can be learned from its perceptions are identical with the real world.

Although Coleridge's faculty of Understanding so far aligns him with the empiricist's denial of objectivity, his faculty of Reason departs drastically from this view. *Reason*, unlike the Understanding, is primary and absolute because it alone perceives truths. Similar to Schiller's sentimental man, who can comprehend instantly, on the basis of his impressions, the eternal and universal ideal concealed behind sensuous and actual things, Coleridge's Reason, explains Mill, can "by direct intuition . . . perceive things, and recognize truths, not cognizable by our senses" (128). Willey underscores the affinity of Reason with those "things" and "truths" "not cognizable by our senses" when he calls the rational faculty "the organ of the supersensuous," or "the eye of the spirit, the faculty whereby spiritual reality is spiritually discerned. . ." (10).

It is certain that Coleridge's "supersensuous" is a far broader concept than Schiller's ideals. Whereas the latter belong to a moral realm distinct from physical actuality because of their ideality, Coleridge's supersensuous truths comprise not only "the fundamental doctrines of religion and morality," but also "the principles of mathematics, and the ultimate laws even of physical nature" (Mill 129). I suspect that Coleridge's broader conception might be explained in part by his vast philosophical interests – coupled with a desire to spread Reason's sphere of influence over as wide a range of experience as possible, perhaps to

dismiss the Understanding and the sciences altogether. As for Schiller, his assault on scientific analysis is not as fierce and direct as Coleridge's, or Shelley's for that matter. While the German theorist condemns all reflective processes on the ground of their misrepresentations, he also considers reflection to be the key to association (see Phase II).

Unfortunately, the constraints imposed upon this chapter do not permit me to examine any further how Coleridge's concept of the supersensible differs from Schiller's ideals. Focusing on their two chief similarities will be sufficient to show that the English poet emulates his German counterpart by conceiving of a faculty that (1) provides the human subject with objective knowledge while (2) functioning under the conditions of subjectivity. First, the supersensible (or the ideal) is apprehended *objectively*; that is, the human subject, either through his immediate impressions or through his faculty of Reason, perceives the supersensible in its truth. In Coleridge's model of the mind, it is precisely the trueness of the concept of Reason that distinguishes it from the concept of Understanding, which can be obtained only though the intervention of a technique, an instrument, or a method.

If this distinction of Reason from Understanding on the basis of the latter's subjective nature reveals a desire to find a path to positive association, as well as a belief in the existence of such a path, it also demonstrates an empirical awareness of the subject's isolation from the external world. There is no need for Reason unless Understanding becomes problematic. There is no need for an alternative path unless the ordinary one turns out to be a dead end. Though it makes objective knowledge possible, Coleridge's model of the mind thus grounds itself in a recognition of the conditions of subjectivity, so much so that the mechanics of the faculty of Reason remain at all times within the boundaries of the subjective state.

Coleridge's rational perception of the supersensible conforms to the laws of subjectivity in two respects: like Schiller's ideals, his supersensible is not supposed to be an exact imitation of the sensible world (it is *super*sensible after all), and its apprehension proceeds from the impressions objects make upon the subject, rather than from the subject's objective perceptions. Accordingly, Mill explains that while the perceptions of Reason "are not copies of it [experience]," nor could they "ever have been awakened in us without experience . . . experience is not their prototype, it is only the occasion by which they are irresistibly suggested" (128). The "occasion" of perception, insofar as Reason is concerned, corresponds to the subjective condition: the self's sole knowledge of the external world (sensible and supersensible) comes from his "experience" of it, from his subjection to his surroundings, not from his ability to see them objectively as separate from himself. And yet, the supersensible perceptions are not limited to experience ("not copies of it"), for they are only occasioned by it.

In accord with Schiller's first step towards association, Coleridge's confrontation with the surface of things leads to an immediate apprehension of an unseen (deep) reality that is more real than the sensuous, due not so much to its *super*sensible nature as its truth. Typically romantic, that truth comes from the reconciliation of the new and the old. Whereas I have so far defined this reconciliation as the joining of the empiricist's claim that the reflective self is blind to surfaces with the positivist's belief that he can see the things themselves, Coleridge's concern with mental faculties brings me to rephrase this reconciliation of the old and the new in terms of deductive and inductive analysis. Paralleling Newton's inductive movement from particular phenomena to general principles, Coleridge's Reason somewhat begins with the material of experience to end with the discovery of absolutes. I say 'somewhat' because the Coleridgean movement from phenomena to

principle does not occur over a period of time; it is instantaneous. That immediacy results from the fact that the poet's faculty of Reason does not truly *derive* truth *from* the material of the senses. The principle of subjectivity invalidates such derivation. Because of the impossibility to rely on the particulars of experience, Coleridge must find another approach that would make it possible for him to bypass the long and highly uncertain route that leads the inductive mind from experience to truth. It is in Descartes's old deductive method – a method rendered obsolete by Locke's empiricism and replaced by Newton's inductive method – that Coleridge seems to discover the bypass he needs to make experience coincide with truth.

In the preceding chapter I quoted Cassirer's definition of Cartesian Reason – "a sound body of knowledge, principles, and truths" – which he then contrasts to Newtonian Reason – a faculty that, as opposed to containing knowledge a priori, produces it through a two-step process of dissolution and fusion. The idea of a (Cartesian) faculty that *knows* without having to derive knowledge analytically is precisely what Coleridge needs to circumvent the principle of subjectivity without violating it. But the act of bringing deductive reason back to life, especially after the iconoclastic journey across the Enlightenment, cannot be carried out unless a fundamental modification makes this faculty congruent with the new empirical spirit. It is, I suggest, by integrating the inductive into the deductive method that the poet arrives at a compromise between immediate and, therefore, unmediated access to truth and the need to ground this truth in experience – a move which finally explains why the innate material exists for Coleridge only potentially until it becomes accessible "by occasion of experience" (Mill 129).

Coleridge's faculty of Reason thus emerges out of the reconciliation of two opposite methods: the new method of inductive analysis, with its emphasis on experience as the

necessary starting point to all paths to truth, and the old method of deductive analysis, with its belief that truth, not experience, is primary. While it preserves the empirical trajectory from experience to knowledge, this reconciliation simultaneously collapses the distance between these two extremes, thus making experience coincide with knowledge so as to avoid the distortions and limitations of reflection. Furthermore, because this pre-reflective knowledge is only coexistent with experience, and no longer derived from it, it is entirely free of the distortions and limitations inherent in all acts of perception.

It becomes clear once again that Coleridge's chief aim in elaborating his faculty of Reason is to provide the human mind with an escape route outside its subjective confinement to both perception and reflection. Like his German predecessor, Coleridge restores objective knowledge while being under the conditions of subjectivity, that is, without violating the empiricist's claim that experience is our sole source of knowledge. He succeeds in reviving Descartes's deductive reasoning and makes available to the human mind "a sound body of knowledge, principles, and truths" that exceeds the bounds of experience.

WORDSWORTH'S PERCEPTUAL CONTEXT

In the preface to his *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth performs a similar revision of the new conditions of subjectivity in the attempt to restore the old conditions of objective knowledge, but instead of focusing on the mental faculties Wordsworth chooses to consider the context of perception. Despite this difference, Wordsworth and Coleridge achieve their aim by developing corresponding oppositions. While the former poet opposes an objective faculty, Reason, to a subjective one, Understanding, the latter opposes an objective context, the country, to a subjective one, the city. Like his compatriot, Wordsworth begins with the

principle of subjectivity, in his case the influence of contextual factors on perception, and moves towards objectivity by searching an ideal context where perception is absolute.

In his preface Wordsworth explains that he chose "low and rustic life" as a general subject for his new class of poetry because it represents a special "condition" that offers "a better soil" in which "the essential passions of the heart" are "less under restraint" and so "attain their maturity" (1343). In that condition "elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated," "more easily comprehended" and "more durable" (1343) than those other feelings distinctive of urban life, "where the uniformity of [people's] occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident" (1345). Most important, Wordsworth tells us that the rustic person experiences such a great a degree of intimacy with nature that his "passions . . . are incorporated with [its] beautiful and permanent forms" (1343).

In sum, rural life presents a particular set of conditions that arranges human emotions into discernable imprints of what is true ("beautiful and permanent") in nature. Here Wordsworth speaks of a highly subjective state where the observer is deeply affected by a number of external factors; and yet, that influence does not prevent the observer from 'seeing' the world objectively. On the contrary, it is by letting himself subjected to these external factors that he escapes artificiality and comes to feel within himself the true nature of things. One way of resolving the contradiction implicit in this last point, is to see the context of rural life as a 'negative context' that shields the individual against the destructive influence of urbanity. According to Jerome McGann, this Wordsworthian view of nature as a separate space where the human subject stands free from the conditions of subjectivity characterizes *all* romantic poetry: "Amidst the tottering structure of early 19th century Europe, poetry asserted the integrity of the biosphere and the inner, spiritual self, both of which were

believed to transcend the age's troubling doctrinal conflicts and ideological shifts" (68). To the romantic, nature is a world apart. Existing outside history, outside the ever-changing conditions of civilization – doctrinal, ideological, or other – it offers the only set of conditions under which the human subject can perceive things just as they are.

Like the empiricist, Wordsworth recognizes that he cannot speak of perception without considering its context, how certain conditions have certain effects upon the human subject and influence his power to perceive or misperceive. But if the empiricist considers all acts of perception to be misperceptions, the English poet adopts a different view in that he conceives of the human subject in slightly different terms. For him, man is born to live in nature. Although his perception is always conditional on the context, there is one context for which his perceptual self is specifically designed. Everywhere else his sense organs are in dissonance; they misperceive because they are not attuned. But under the adjusting influence of nature, all sensory parts come together to form a perfect harmonious whole, and the world image becomes suddenly clear and accurate. Assuming the perceiving subject to be sensitive to external factors, Wordsworth finds nevertheless a way out of the subjective predicament by subverting the empirical view from within, that is, by making subjectivity man's natural state, not something to fight against, and by imagining that a special complementarity exists between man and nature, so that upon their contact the influence of the latter would mysteriously make the response of the former congruent with reality.

Just like Schiller and Coleridge, Wordsworth merits himself the title of romantic for his revision of the empirical worldview in terms that reconcile the new subjective condition with the old belief in objective perception. Schiller claims that we are blind to surfaces because we see depths; Coleridge, that we do not need to see the surfaces themselves because we possess a special faculty that can generate truths out of the mere feeling of

surfaces; and Wordsworth, that as long as we remain within the walls of our cities and towns we are barred from the truth of things because our system of perception is intended to work in a rural environment. P. B. Shelley, the other English romantic to whom I now turn, also is preoccupied with the need to restore objectivity. But in the passages of his *Defence* I wish to bring to our attention, Shelley distinguishes himself from the other romantics in that he does not concern himself so much with perception as with what ought to follow from the perceptual act.

SHELLEY'S HISTORY OF THE MIND

Whereas Coleridge and Wordsworth adopt a synchronic approach, as their considerations of mental faculties and perceptual contexts bear strictly on the present (or a permanent) state of things, Shelley chooses Schiller's diachronic approach and tells a history wherein two mental faculties comparable to Coleridge's Reason and Understanding compete for the right to represent nature. In spite of this resemblance, Shelley's narrative differs from Schiller's in one crucial respect: to the latter it is the *birth* of a new faculty that caused dissociation; to the former it is a *reversal* in the hierarchy of existing faculties.

According to Shelley's history of the mind, the reflective faculty he calls Reason (eq. Coleridge's Understanding) has always been present, but if it is now the first in rank, it used to be subordinate to a higher poetical faculty, the Imagination (eq. Coleridge's Reason), whose function is to arrange "the materials of external life" produced by Reason into "forms of order and of beauty" (1763). Those "forms," it should be noted, correspond to Schiller's ideals; they constitute "those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered." The function of the Imagination is thus *to shape the ideal world out of Reason's knowledge of surfaces* ("external life").

The tragic reversal took place when, in the wake of the scientific revolution, the accumulation of the materials of Reason began to exceed the Imagination's power to idealize them. Shelley represents this situation of excess as an indigestion: "we have eaten more than we can digest" (1763). Such imbalance means that actuality, the way things seem to Reason, no longer corresponds to ideality, the way things ought to be to the Imagination. It also means that man's "internal world," his imaginative self, can no longer move outwards towards the "external world" in the act of idealizing it: "and man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave."

The point of divergence between Shelley's and Schiller's history of the mind arises from two different views on the dissociative state. In his account of the reflective phase, Schiller defines dissociation in terms of the lack of congruence between our understanding of surfaces and the surfaces themselves. Shelley, however, does not concern himself with our incapacity to see surfaces just as they are; instead, he is preoccupied with the lack of congruence between surfaces as they *appear* to us (to our Reason) and the ideal world we perceive intuitively (in our Imagination). In other words, while the German philosopher begins with our inability to perceive surfaces and concludes that we perceive depths, the English poet continues this chain of thought by speaking of the next logical step: the need to shape our perception of surfaces (regardless of its falsity) into depths. This elevation of the sensuous material to the level of ideal represents the second and final phase in the theory of romantic association.

PHASE II: REPRESENTATION (OR IDEALIZATION)

Schiller's concept of the moral ideal has the effect of displacing the locus of dissociation. On the one hand, it does reconnect the subject with the objective world; that is,

it reconciles (subjectivity) the perception of something other than the actual surface of things and (objectivity) the perception of the ideal reality situated behind surfaces. On the other hand, insofar as this ideal reality is not perceived directly but only referred to us upon contact with the sensuous, its apprehension occurs over a divide similar to the one existing between signifier and signified. In short, *Schiller's moral ideal does not coincide with the sensible world*: in the self, they are connected only through the intervention of a mysterious faculty that can transform sensations into truths; in the world, they are connected only by a relation of degree (one is ideal and infinite, the other actual and finite). Thus, at the same time that Phase I provides the self with the knowledge of reality, it opens a breach between our physical being, living in actuality, and our moral being, living in ideality. The first phase might well have *connected* our senses and thoughts, but it certainly did not make them identical. It is precisely this lack of total correspondence that calls for a second phase of association, whose first task becomes the discovery of a new kind of sensuous material that can be shaped into a form congruent with the "infinitude" (Schiller 116) of our ideals. Only after this discovery can sentimental man perform "the elevation of actuality to the level of ideal or, amounting to the same time, *the representation of the ideal*" (112).

When Shelley names his faculty of Imagination, responsible for arranging the knowledge of Reason, "the poetical faculty" (1763), and when he calls poetry "the center and circumference of knowledge," the poet intimates that poetry is not only the instrument by which the sensuous is to be idealized, but also the locus where idealization is to take place. Shelley, in short, believes that *poetry is the new kind of sensuous material* that can be given an ideal form. As for Schiller, not content with merely endowing poetry with the special ability to express infinitudes, he adds that only ideals deserve to be objects for poetry: speaking of Ovid's representation of Classical Rome, he observes,

> even magnificent Rome, with all its enchantments, is still (if the power of the imagination has not first ennobled it) only a finite quantity, hence an unworthy object for the poetic art which, superior to everything that actuality has to offer, possesses the right to mourn only for the infinite. (127)

In romantic theory, what characterizes the poetic space is its reconciliation of opposites. It is at once internal and external, moral and sensuous. It is a mental space with sensuous qualities. Shelley expresses this twofoldness when he speaks of the "creative faculty" as that which allows us "to imagine that which we know." "To imagine" here means to form a (1) mental (2) image, an internal construct that looks like a sensible object. And "that which we know" corresponds to those ideal forms according to which the sensuous should be arranged. In the act of reading a poem, the reader would thereby enter an ideal, yet sensuous world created out of the various impressions the poetic imagery makes upon his mind. That poetical world would seem just as real and concrete to the reader as the actual world from which the poetry, for a moment or two, removes him. Besides, to the extent that the human subject never has access to the things themselves, but only to his impressions of them, it makes no difference to him whether his impressions come from objects or words.

It should be noted that this representation of poetry as a sensuous surface with ideal qualities resembles Baumgarten's definition of the aesthetic object as a surface whose interpenetrating parts immediately evoke the unity lying behind all things. Yet, if Baumgarten holds aesthetic surfaces to belong to a lowly order because they are only *sensuous* imitations of the supreme unity that governs actuality, Shelley considers poetic surfaces to be infinitely superior to all that is related to actuality. Recalling the first phase of romantic association, Baumgarten thinks of the sensuous as a *symbol* of the unseen, something that can only refer us to the supersensible, in his case, through the power of

rational analysis. In contrast, Shelley thinks of the sensuous in terms of the second phase, as something that can represent the unseen *literally*, by embodying the supersensible in all its infinitude – so making the unseen rise to the surface of things and become obvious to our eyes. "Poetry," he concludes, "thus makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world; it arrests the vanishing apparitions which haunt the interlunations of life, and veiling them, or in language or in forms, send them forth among mankind. . ." (1764).

COLERIDGE'S FACULTY OF IMAGINATION

In Chapter XIII of his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge describes the second phase of romantic association in terms of his theory of the Imagination. First he distinguishes between two kinds of imagination. The Primary Imagination plays a part in all perceptual acts: it is "the living power and prime agent of all human perception . . . a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (167). In accord with the principle of subjectivity, this faculty illustrates the belief that even the most ordinary act of perception is an "act of creation." "The mind," Willey explains, ". . . knows its objects not by passive reception, but by its own energy and under its own necessary forms; indeed, it knows not mere objects as such, but itself in the objects. . ." (3).

The Secondary Imagination, which plays its part in the making of poetry and contrasts with the Fancy, is strikingly similar to the scientific Reason since it apprehends the external world through its power to bind and dissolve. But while its scientific counterpart aims to remake the world just as it is, the Secondary Imagination has a much loftier goal: it recreates to make things more perfect and complete: "It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still, at all events, it struggles to idealize and to unify" (Coleridge 167). When Shelley writes that poets, by means

of the Imagination, "combine" things anew as they "color" them with "the evanescent hues of this etherial world" (1763), he basically paraphrases Coleridge in indicating that the Imagination not only imitates but "etherializes" (i.e. idealizes) actuality.

Interestingly, Willey's analysis of the imaginative construct, as opposed to the fanciful construct, reinforces the link between romantic poetry and Baumgarten's organic surface. In Coleridge's poetics, the Fancy occupies an inferior rank because it creates surfaces that lack the interpenetration of parts characteristic of high poetry: "It juxtaposes images, but it does not fuse them into unity; its products are like mechanical mixtures . . . in which the ingredients, though close together, remain the same as when apart. . ." (5). The Secondary Imagination, on the other hand, creates surfaces that "are like chemical compounds, in which ingredients lose their separate identities in a new substance, composed of them indeed, but different from both" (5). If in Baumgarten's Aesthetics such organic interpenetration results from the fusion of surface and depth, particulars and generality, in romantic poetry it emerges out of "the complete reconciliation of *all opposition between actuality and the ideal*" (Schiller 153). Accordingly, the second phase of romantic association would consist in the erasure of the finite boundaries that distinguish the particulars of actuality, an act coincident with the rise of the infinite ideal to the surface of things.

ROMANTIC ASSOCIATION: A REVIEW

Before examining practical (i.e. poetic) examples of romantic association, we must review its theoretical mechanics not only to clarify its two phases and to define romanticism as a revised science, but, more importantly, to value its associative effects. Romantic philosophy takes form through a threefold act of revision: first, of our conception of *the world*, by presenting it as a corrupt manifestation of a moral ideal; second, of our conception

of *the self*, by distinguishing a mental faculty capable of perceiving that ideal; and third, of our conception of *poetry*, by investing it with the power to make the world ideal and the ideal worldly.

(1) A NEW WORLD

Under the conditions of subjectivity, one means of restoring contact with an objective reality is the relegation of the perceptible to a secondary status by introducing a higher sphere of experience which, paradoxically, can be known (or perceived) precisely because it does not belong to the visible realm. With empiricism, seeing has become synonymous with blindness. The subject no longer perceives the world; instead, he perceives only what he makes of it. However, by displacing 'the real' from the visible surface of things to an unseen depth, the romantic changes the signification of perception, for, insofar as the phenomenal world is no longer the only existing reality, and one of second order at that, the imperative to perceive (or know) the surface of things loses a great deal of its importance, but not all of it. I say 'not all of it' because perception and its correlative, the phenomenal world, still remain our sole access to the external reality. Even so, the material of perception does not have the same value to the rational scientist as to the romantic. To the latter, not only is perception incongruent with the true surface of things by virtue of the principle of subjectivity, but that true surface is not even real – since it is only an imperfect materialization of reality. Notably, by thus removing perception from reality not once but *twice*, the romantic does not aim at aggravating the subjective predicament. In fact, he aims at the very opposite: at finding a way out of subjectivity by, as it were, isolating the self from his isolation. If the surface of things is not real, why should we mourn over its loss? If subjectivity locks us away from a mere illusion, why should we feel captive?

This liberation from the subjective predicament depends on the notion of a moral ideal and its twofold nature. It is at once subjective, in that it does not actually exist, and objective, in that it corresponds to the true reality towards which all actual things should move. Like the rational sciences, romanticism distinguishes a superficial from a deeper realm: the sensible from the supersensible, the concrete from the abstract, or the manifest from the real. But the romantic revolutionizes the scientific dichotomy by turning an idea into an ideal, by associating depth not with a principle that makes the world what it is now but with a vision of the world in its infinitely distant, yet ever approaching state of perfection. While the rational scientist represents the world as a fixed whole to justify his inquiry about the present state of things, the romantic, recognizing the inaccessibility of present things, chooses to adopt a progressive worldview. If the present cannot be grasped, the future, towards which all things, including humanity, are believed to proceed, must be apprehensible to those who know where, *and how*, to look. (It is worthy of notice that the romantics did not create the progressive worldview ex nihilo. As Willey observes, romanticism is one manifestation of a general movement that, at the turn of the 18th century, began to replace the old concepts of "fixities," "mechanics," and "order," by the new notions of "flux," "life and organism," and "process" [12].)

(2) A New Faculty

If the harmony between man and nature is to be preserved, the new conjunction of the world with an ideal must be accompanied by a parallel revision of the human mind. The romantic, for that reason, also reinvents the subject by differentiating a new mental faculty variously called Reason or Imagination, depending on whether you emphasize, like Coleridge, perception or, like Shelley, representation. In accord with the moral ideal, the

Imagination (to avoid confusion with scientific reason) is both subjective and objective. It is subjective because it responds to the *impressions* objects make upon the senses and not to the objects themselves as they exist independently of the perceptual act. It is objective because out of those impressions the Imagination produces a knowledge of the true ideal of which objects are imperfect manifestations.

In sum, once the romantic has destroyed the subjective prison by showing the walls of perception to be mere mirages, he reconnects the subject with truth by conceiving of a faculty that can intuitively abstract an image of reality from those walling mirages which, after all, are our only echoes of an external reality. With no exit in sight, the romantic has no choice but to face his imprisonment and feel with his own palms and fingers and see with his own eyes those walls that stand fully erect and immoveable before him – not to give them even more concreteness but, on the contrary, to create out of the sensations arising from that contact an intermediate space between the walls and his subjection to them. Despite the fact that this space is, in some dreadful way, just another prison within a prison, it offers the romantic a blank surface upon which he can draw an ideal landscape of Goodness and Beauty, and Truth. The romantic, like Pygmalion, *believes* in his creation.

The most important implication of this escape route is the revision of the subjective predicament: the incongruity between nature and man's representation of it turns into an incongruity between ideal nature, perceived in the Imagination, and nature as we actually experience it. The problem of subjectivity becomes a moral problem, a problem not of knowing the world in itself but of making the world a better place.

The faculty of Imagination is a derivative of scientific reason. Just like Reason, which scientists like Newton equate with the *divine* power that informs all of nature, the Imagination perceives and represents a world "of a diviner nature that our own" (Shelley

1764). Speaking of Coleridge's Reason, Willey, also, affirms its divinity by calling it the "organ of the supersensuous," "the eye of the spirit, the faculty whereby spiritual reality is spiritually discerned" (Willey 10). The Imagination shares with scientific Reason also its *universality* and *truth*: Schiller, for instance, claims that most people experience the same ideal upon contemplating natural objects; Coleridge, that his Reason, a faculty intrinsic to the human mind, has the ability "to perceive things, and recognize truths"; and Shelley, that the Imagination, shared by all yet more developed in poetic minds, knows "those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered." Langbaum underscores the *inductive* character of the Imagination when he defines this faculty as an "instrument of revelation," and that revelation as "the living organic reality which the imagination perceives through immediate experience of the external world" (24). Next, "[p]ost-Enlightenment Romanticism," clarifies Langbaum, "is historically unique just to the extent that it uses for its reconstructive purpose the same scientific or empirical method which is itself unique to the modern world" (22). This last quote identifies a fifth and last similarity between Imagination and scientific reason, namely, their "*reconstructive*" power. Both faculties ultimately apprehend the world by recreating it for themselves: Reason, by creating it just as it is, and Imagination, by creating it in a more perfect form.

The Imagination differs from Reason on one essential point. The imaginative act of perception occurs *before* scientific reason begins to select and analyze. Upon contact with the sensible, the Imagination immediately derives an ideal from the raw material of perception, and only after that ideal has emerged does scientific reason begin the time-consuming task of dismantling and assembling again the sensuous material. This distinction, as already discussed, originates in the fact that the romantic faculty operates inductively as well as deductively. Although the Imagination, like the Newtonian reason, produces its ideals

by occasion of experience, those ideals are not supported by facts; they come forth intuitively and belong to a realm that exceeds the limitations of experience, or actuality. Langbaum underscores also the deductive character of the Imagination when he describes "the beauty and truth" which the romantic 'perceives' in an object as "values he has known potentially all along in himself" (26). Again, it is precisely this combination of inductive and deductive methods that permits the Imagination to bypass the long and uncertain road taken by analytic reasoning and reach its destination well before Reason even thinks of setting off.

In its immediacy of operation, the Imagination resembles Baumgarten's Aesthetic faculty, a faculty capable of detecting instantly, without having recourse to reflection, the interpenetration of parts distinctive of beautiful surfaces. Both faculties, moreover, deal with surfaces as well as depths. But if the Aesthetic faculty is still primarily passive and superficial, in that it discerns surfaces that merely seem deep-like, the Imagination actually bears on the two levels: it (passively) feels the surface of things, at the same time that it (actively) generates a deep reality that is separate from that surface. It should be remarked, however, that this distinction concerns only the first phase of romantic association. In the second phase, the Imagination strives to bridge the gap between surface and depth by creating a surface that not only seems but *is* deep.

(3) NEW POETICS

While the elevation of actuality the level of the ideal, surface to the level of depth, brings the romantic closer to Baumgarten, it distances him from such aesthetic moralists as Hume and Shaftesbury. As I explained in Chapter I, Hume and Shaftesbury restore objective value (under the conditions of subjectivity) by grounding value judgment in our immediate impressions. The romantic, in contrast, does not content himself with merely attributing

value to the world; his ultimate goal is to transform the world to make it congruent with the Good. Acutely, perhaps overly aware of actuality as a limit, he is obsessed with the idea of progress, the desire to improve things as they are, and preoccupied with action, the mind's re-creative powers. The romantic, Abrams explains,

> set out . . . to reconstitute the grounds of hope and to announce the certainty, or at least the possibility, of a rebirth in which a renewed mankind will inhabit a renovated earth where he will find himself thoroughly at home. (12)

This "rebirth" by which the world will once again be a "home" to man, takes place in poetry. After connecting, in the act of perception, the surface and the depth of things by a relation of degree, the romantic now effects the complete reconciliation of those two levels as he discovers in poetry a space where abstractions can be made concrete. The poetic space is distinctive in that it permits, in theory, the creation of an infinitude that can be not only known but also touched in the mind, and that is objectively true to the extent that it represents the one reality of which all actual things are imperfect manifestations. This space definitely bears similarities with the scientific space where reflection takes the physical world apart and put it together again. But, in the same way that the romantic distinguishes himself from the aesthetic moralist on account of his concern with progress, the poetic space differs from the scientific space in its capacity to reconstruct the world in a more perfect and complete form. If a scientist like Newton associates with nature by discovering within himself a power congruent with the one that informs the world just as it is, romantics like Shelley and Schiller associate with nature by discovering within themselves the ability to *perfect* the world. While Newton imitates God, Shelley and Schiller outdo Him. More accurately, the positive scientist fuses with nature in the act of elevating himself *above* it (as he 'godlifies' himself); the romantic, on the other hand, remains in perpetual contact with the lowly and

the sensuous since his mastery over nature serves not so much to liken himself to God, even less to prove himself greater than Him, as to situate himself *in* nature as it appears to his moral in-sight.

Because the rational scientist perceives only a fraction of the sensible, he cannot directly associate with the totality of sensuous things and must, therefore, associate indirectly through the force or principle that assembles and governs that totality. This limitation does not exist in the romantic approach, for the romantic does not care to associate with sensuous things as they are; to him, it is things as they should be that constitute reality, and he can apprehend that reality directly because (he thinks) he sees it all in the great theatre of his mind.

Associative Effects of the Two Phases

Poetry, Shelley writes in his *Defence*, has the power to reconcile opposites: "it marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change; it subdues to union under its light yoke all irreconcilable things" (1765). In terms of the associative process discussed in this chapter, reconciliation takes three particular forms: first, the reconciliation of the multiple dimensions that make up the world (i.e. the sensuous and the supersensuous, the passive and the active); second, the reconciliation of all the facets that compose the self (i.e. the moral and the physical, the active and the passive); and finally, the reconciliation of the self and the world. Simply put, the first phase of romantic association gathers all those qualities, realms, and modes, in the same instant, and the second phase in the same space.

Phase I conjoins in the instant of perception the apprehension of both the sensuous and the supersensuous. During that instant, the self is passive to the extent that the external world makes an impression upon his senses. At the same time, the self is active to the extent

that, on the basis of this impression, he derives an ideal that is not supported by any fact. In the initial phase, man's association with nature thus occurs simultaneously on two separate levels. On the level of his senses we find the equivalent of the empirical mode of 'association by contraction,' where the self is subjected to a number of external factors. On the level of his thoughts we find the other empirical mode, namely, 'association by extension,' where the self fuses with the world by representing it as other than it (f)actually is. Despite its affinity with empiricism, the first phase of romantic association remains congruent with the rational sciences since its resulting world representation corresponds to an objective reality, a reality, however, that differs from the realm of factuality because it is more real, more true, than any phenomenon.

Notably, if it is inclusive of all the various aspects of the self, the world, and their relationship, the first phase of romantic association functions within a dualist perspective that presents man and nature as inherently divided: in nature, the sensuous (actuality) and the supersensuous (ideality) occupy two distant spheres; in man, the physical and the moral coincide only inasmuch as the former refers, or transports, him to the latter. Moreover, by using the sensuous as an occasion for the revelation of the ideal, as well as by considering the sensuous to be a corrupted version of that deal, Phase I tends to minimize the importance of both the self's and the world's physical being. Phase II comes forth to correct that imbalance and collapse the internal distances that subsist in man and nature.

What converges in the moment of perception is brought to coincide spatially in the act of representation, the second and final phase of romantic association. As he recreates, in his poetry, the sensible world to harmonize it with the now not so distant ideal, the romantic also strives to make the material of the senses fully congruent with the moral ideal which, in Phase I, exists only in thought. From that representational effort would emerge a world that

is at once abstract and concrete, ideal and actual, a world whose sensible appearance no longer serves a referential function nor belongs to a secondary order. In romantic poems, the phenomenal world is the ideal, the ideal that world. The reader of romantic poetry is thus supposed to find himself surrounded by textures, sounds, colours, and odours that leave upon his senses a supreme impression of well-being because that impression confirms the reality of his moral ideal.

Phase II enacts what Schiller calls the reconciliation of the reflective and the naïve, in that it reconciles the act of representation with the immediate apprehension of physical nature. In fact, it is only by means of his representational power that the romantic can regain faith in his senses and return to nature once again. In my own terms, it is only by accepting and even capitalizing on the conditions of subjectivity that the romantic succeeds in bringing the objective world back to the surface of his senses. As early as Phase I, thanks to a special faculty that interprets (reflects or represents) the material of the senses, the self's confinement to his impressions becomes an escape path towards the reality of things. The romantic, in short, defeats the empiricist on his own ground and joins the positivist in a land where touching is believing.

CHAPTER III : THE PRACTICE OF ROMANTICISM, AND ITS DISSOCIATIONS

Romantic *practice* relates to *theory* like actuality relates to ideality, surface to depth. Romantic philosophy is not subject to the limits of practice. It explicates, with all the freedom of abstract thought, how and why association takes place, but it does not actually effect association. In keeping with the romantics studied above, who all turn to prose to justify (defend or preface) their poetry by expressing its premises and describing its effects, theory precedes practice as it sets up an abstract or ideal path to association. When we read the romantics' theoretical works, our attention is continuously directed towards the practical sphere, where poetry is supposed to actualize the idea(l)s expressed in theory. The poetic space is, in other words, a locus not solely for the moral ideal to become actuality, but also for the theory to become practice. Yet just as the moral ideal differs from actuality because of its infinitude, theory differs from practice because it does not have to effect but merely to explicate association. As this chapter will demonstrate, romantic practice/poetry is incapable of overcoming its inherent limitations to realize both the moral and the theoretical ideal. What is practical and what is actual can seem abstract and ideal only through deceit, through an act of self-effacement as the eye looks at the world while being blind to its own worldliness.

WORDSWORTH'S "THE RUINED COTTAGE"

Already important as a "normative" and "exemplary" (McGann 82) romantic poem and a clear illustration of Schiller's philosophy, Wordsworth's poem achieves its utmost significance by evidencing the failure of the romantic mode of association. "The Ruined Cottage" tells the tragic story of Margaret and her family through a variety of viewpoints.

Like the reader, the speaker is unfamiliar with that story, but the old man he encounters knew Margaret quite well and begins to narrate her fall at times in retrospect and at other times from the perspective of his earlier self, witnessing those events for the first time. By analyzing the different viewpoints, we discover two practical ways of perceiving the world. The one focuses on visual details and the other on auditory details. Importantly, to the extent that images are associated, in the poem, with surfaces and sounds with depths, the theoretical distinction between the sensible and the supersensible proves to be – in practice – a distinction between two classes of *sensible* material. Not only does the idealizing process of Phase II entail, in theory, the exclusion of actuality, but the resulting ideal is, in practice, nothing more than a partial imitation of actuality.

In his concluding address, the old man contrasts two opposite attitudes to Margaret's tragedy, attitudes that resound and shock against one another throughout his narrative. Enjoining the sorrowful narrator/addressee "no longer [to] read / The forms of things with an unworthy eye," but, instead, to "Be wise and cheerful," the old man speaks of his own "uneasy thoughts," his "sorrow and despair / From ruin and from change, and all the grief / The passing shews of being leave behind" (510-22). Yet, he also mentions how those "uneasy thoughts" "Appeared an idle dream that could not live / Where meditation was," for, in spite of all the "ruin," "change," and losses that burden Margaret's story, the "calm earth" – "Those weeds, and the high spear-grass on that wall, / By mist and silent rain-drops silver'd o'er" – "did to [his] mind convey / So still an image of tranquility" (512-24).

The contrast of "meditation" with "uneasy thoughts" correlates with an opposition between two modes of seeing: a "wise" versus an "unworthy eye." The unworthy eye, explains the old man, focuses on change in human history, the "passing" "forms of things,"

thence its grieving thoughts. Conversely, the "wise" eye looks upon those other enduring, ever returning forms that pervade nature and glitter even in "mist" and "rain." The difference between the meditative and uneasy attitudes thus comes down to a difference in the selective process among two kinds of surfaces: one that signifies transiency (or death), the other permanence (or life). Those two surfaces, it must be noted, do not represent two equal fractions of the phenomenal world. When he instructs the addressee to direct his gaze away from objects symbolic of change, the old man indicates not only a simple preference but a strong belief in the greater value of those objects that refer us to the idea of permanence. His denigration of changeful, grief-inducing surfaces is unequivocal in one of his earlier remarks, where he confesses that "the foolishness of grief" can yet at times overpower his "wiser mind" (118-19).

The two contrary viewpoints, I suggest, are two variations of Schiller's sentimental attitude. But if the wiser mind represents a full-fledged sentimentality, the uneasy mind has yet to learn to let go of the sensuous (or actual world), a remnant of the naïve stage. It is only after he has witnessed Margaret's indestructible hope that the old man gains the maturity necessary to make him a truly sentimental man. Thus, I divide the old man's narrative into two parts. The first part, a mixture of the idyllic and satirical, is told from the "uneasy" perspective of his earlier self, at the time of Margaret's story. The second part, essentially elegiac, is told from the later, "wiser" perspective associated with the moment of his story telling. Note that those two perspectives are not perfectly clear-cut: as the old man himself remarks, there are moments when no amount of wisdom can totally overcome the grief that arises from witnessing unmerited sufferings.

The early viewpoint is obsessed with losses. Even the mere "fragments of a wooden bowl," rendered "useless" by the disappearance of "a bond / Of brotherhood" between man

and nature, becomes a cause of deep emotional turmoil ("it moved my very heart") (84-92). In the following passage, the old man gives the clearest expression of the uneasy attitude, with its acute awareness of the transiency of all things:

> I see around me here
> Things which you cannot see; we die, my Friend,
> Nor we alone, but that which each man loved
> And prized in his peculiar nook of earth
> Dies with him or is changed, and very soon
> Even of the good is no memorial left. (67-72)

Such strict emphasis on death and change – even "the good" will be forgotten – is characteristic of a mind that thinks only in terms of actual surfaces. The old man, at this stage, grieves over the passing of things because he does not see beyond their surface the unseen depth where glitters the ideal of permanence. True enough, one has no reason to grieve over transitoriness unless one knows (from memories, dreams, or insights) of an alternative state in the light of which change and death appear like evils. I called the uneasy stage a variation of the sentimental attitude since I recognize that "sorrow and despair" (520) can exist only in conjunction with an ideal vision. But while Schiller is very careful to specify that the ideal, for the sentimental man, exists as a concrete thing either in poetry or at a point infinitely distant in the future, the uneasy man associates the ideal with a *past* condition, a state of things that once existed but is now lost.

Although the grieving person possesses the moral ideal of permanence, he can envision it only as a surface, more precisely, as a *lost* surface. Maybe that person does not have the moral strength to conceive of the ideal as something that should and *could* be actualized in the present. Maybe his imaginative faculty is not mature or powerful enough to

create its own sensuous space; incapable of imagining anything new, he turns to the past, to what was once seen, to interpret the present. Or maybe he is simply so in love with the sensuous that he cannot think of the ideal as anything else than something he has actually seen, touched, heard, or smelled.

In this midst of those speculations, it is the last that better accounts for the old man's uneasy thoughts. Indeed, when he deplores the severance of the "bond / Of brotherhood" between "the touch of the human hand" and "the waters" (82-88), the Armytage not only refers to Margaret's tragedy, how "Two blighting seasons" and "the plague of war" destroyed her family's livelihood in communion with nature (134-37); he also reveals his longing for a time prior to the advent of reflection, when man's association with nature was strictly naïve, i.e. sensuous ("the touch of the human hand"). His life as a hermit offers perhaps the most obvious sign of his desire to remain close to nature *as well as* of his aversion to civilization, with its artificial and arbitrary forms. Just as in Schiller's account, where the loss of sensuous harmony is inseparable from the birth of reflection, the old man's love for the sensuous (in his grieving state) cannot be distinguished from his mistrust of modernity and its correlative, reflection.

For instance, when he shows his incomprehension of what unseen forces make humanity yield to those "restless thoughts" that "turn our hearts away" from "natural wisdom" and "natural comfort", from the simple joy of listening to the "happy melody" played upon the air by "this multitude of flies" (190-95), the old man indicates much more than his inability to understand the origin of his own sorrow, for this sorrow is above all else a "thought," not an emotion. It is, in the end, his power of reflection that makes him grieve over Margaret's story and, consequently, "shut [his] eyes and ears" (196) to the sensuous beauties about him. Even so, his reflections are not arbitrary. As noted above, the old man's

thoughts, both wise and uneasy, belong to the sentimental, not the reflective phase: even grief requires an ideal. What distinguishes the uneasy from the wise thought, then, is the location of the ideal. Because of his naïve attachment to the sensuous, the (younger) old man tends to associate the ideal with a concrete object of his experience, and not with some supersensible dream situated in a vague and hypothetical future somewhere down the road to civilization.

Ironically, according to the hermit himself, this obsession with the sensuous results in a loss of contact with sensible things *in the present*. First, since the ideal is a product of reflection, and since reflection is by definition incongruous with the actual world, the ideal can only be identified with some unreachable experience, namely, a past experience. Or more simply, in expressing a naïve love for the sensuous at an epoch of reflectivity, the griever is necessarily oriented towards the past, that time when man's interactions with nature were not yet disrupted by his uneasy and restless thoughts. In both cases, the result is the same: not only does the preoccupation with the past prevent the self from enjoying the present, but the present appears like a sad and empty space in comparison to the past.

However strong his love for the sensuous, the grieving (or uneasy) person cannot escape the conditions of reflectivity. His love for sensuous things and his hatred of thought are, in fact, products of his reflection, as shown in this passage where the mind interrogates itself in a striking moment of self-distrust:

> Why should we thus with an untoward mind
> And in the weakness of humanity
> From natural wisdom turn our hearts away,
> To natural comfort shut our eyes and ears,
> And feeding on disquiet thus disturb

The calm of Nature with our restless thoughts? (193-98)

To be fully sentimental, the old man needs to detach himself from the sensuous by recognizing that although those "restless thoughts" indeed disconnect the self from the world on one level, they reconnect them on the higher level of the *super*sensuous. He must let go of the past and its harmony of finite man with finite earth, and turn to the future where lies the hope of reunion between two infinites.

Immediately after the hermit has concluded his narrative by telling of Margaret's last moments of utter solitude, we observe a sudden change in perspective. First, the narrator/addressee evinces a strange ambiguity when he mentions that "Review[ing] that Woman's suff'rings" called forth in him "grief" *and* "comfort" (496-500). Then, looking upon the cottage and the "plants," "weeds" and "flowers" that besiege and overgrow its dilapidated walls, the narrator thinks not of the incessant passing of all things but, on the contrary, of "That secret spirit of humanity" which "still survived" (501-6). With similar elation, the old man next recalls how, during his seasonal visits to the cottage, "the high spear-grass on that wall" represented "So still an image of tranquility, / So calm and still, and looked so beautiful" that "sorrow and despair / From ruin and from change" seemed, in contrast, but "an idle dream" (514-23).

This new perspective, I suggest, originates in Margaret's undying hope, "Fast rooted at her heart" (490). As both men witness, one firsthand, the other by hearsay, the endurance of her moral strength in the face of superhuman calamities – though not without a few justified moments of despair (354-55; 391-92) – they discover an as yet unseen realm of experience: "That secret spirit of humanity" which proves itself infinitely stronger than those unmerciful forces that collude, with unflagging resolve, to destroy our belief in the

permanence of things or, at least, in the possibility of reunion after separation. From Margaret's wretched life, the old man and the narrator learn that one does not have to turn to the past to find an ideal. Margaret herself, in her demonstration of supersensible strength, personifies the very ideal of imperishability. But, more importantly, she teaches them that one needs not be affected by changing, eroding, or vanishing surfaces, for a much more fundamental reality exists.

Infinite and beyond the pale of death or change, that reality merits our trust if only because our believing in it makes us good and seemingly immortal. Indeed, fearing his story to be "long and tedious," the old man defends his obsession with Margaret by elevating her to all but a divine status. Just the memory of "Her goodness," he explains, puts him still in such a "momentary trance" that he envisions her awakening from the sleep of death to join her husband "For whom she suffered" (362-75). Only his wish to preserve her humanity ("very near / To human life"), without whose limits her story would lose its tragic qualities, prevents him from portraying her as a true goddess.

Inspired by Margaret's superhuman strength, the hermit, now wiser, adopts a new attitude towards grief and thoughts. Those "mournful thoughts," perceived negatively at the earlier stage, become expressions of "A power to virtue friendly" (227-29). Reflection, likewise, becomes the sole means by which to apprehend the unseen, "scarcely palpable / To him who does not think" (235-36). On account of this change in perspective, the old man revises his interpretation of Margaret's story. In Schiller's terms: whereas the previous interpretation is "idyllic," due to its idealization of "the simple pastoral past" (147), and "satirical," because it treats of "alienation from nature and the contradiction between actuality and the ideal" (117), the second interpretation is "elegiac" in its stress on the affinity of nature with ideals (126). Where the uneasy mind sees only loss and ruination, the

wiser mind sees beauty and permanence, for unlike the former, the latter mind has the ability to see the ideals that forever shine under the veil of change. And with enough poetic talent, the wiser mind can also represent those ideals in sensuous form.

Thus, the last forty lines or so of "The Ruined Cottage" portray a world devoid of death and destruction, that is, an ideal of peace and beauty made concrete to our senses. The revision that leads to this ideal world is twofold. First, the same objects are made to refer to different ideas. In an earlier passage (302-20), the overgrowing weeds are juxtaposed to Margaret's absence and made to signify that something "was chang'd." The bond between man and nature has been broken and the "garden," an outstanding symbol of this kinship, yields gradually to "The unprofitable bindweed." At the time same, the "Daisy and thrift and lowly camomile / And thyme," no longer restrained by "the human hand," spread out disorderly and encroach on "the paths / Which they use to deck." In contrast, at the end of the poem, "silent overgrowings" are now linked, not to the absence of human care and the ensuing change and desolation, but to "The secret spirit of humanity" that endures, forever unchanged, "'mid the calm oblivious tendencies / Of nature, 'mid her plants, her weeks, and flowers" (501-6). The weeds, described before as either nettling (109), destructive (415), inedible or poisonous (452), emerge in lines 514-18 as expressions of "an image of tranquility," "calm," "still," and "beautiful."

Besides making the vegetal overgrowth refer to high rather than low ideas, eternity rather than death, beauty rather than disorder, the concluding lines to the poem present a renovated world. Most conspicuous is the absence of the cottage in the narrator/addressee's final speech. The one reminder of the cottage's existence are its "walls," line 537, but the narrator mentions them only to remove their power to signify: those walls, he says, are "silent." This silence relates to the other, more significant, alteration of the phenomenal

world, namely, the shift in its sensory nature: from visual to auditory. At the end, the landscape is "peopled" by the songs of a "linnet" and a "trush," "and other melodies, / At distance heard" (531-33). Even the stars are not yet "visible" (537). And as for the "lofty elms," in line 531, they exist for the sake of the warbling birds by providing them with some realistic habitat.

The transition from sight to hearing symbolizes the change from an uneasy to a wiser perspective. While visual imagery relates to the surface of things and emphasizes their perpetual passing, auditory imagery relates to the depth of things and exposes the unseen beauty and permanence towards which all things should proceed. If we look back at other passages in the poem, we will realize that blindness, or the auditory faculty, is associated with the wiser mind and its deep vision. At the beginning of the poem, a contradictory ("embattled"), visual landscape of "sun"-light and "shadows" contrasts with a more "Pleasant," auditory scene filled with the "soothing melody" of a warbling "wren," and where a "dreaming man" lies content, "half-conscious," "on the soft cool moss" (1-18). Also, the first time the narrator encounters the old man, the latter's eyes are "shut" (46), a condition in harmony with his ability to "think" about what is "to the grosser sense [i.e. sight] / But ill adapted" (234-35). Interestingly, thought or reflection, to Locke, is the means by which the mind derives depth from surfaces. Hearing, in "The Ruined Cottage," is the sensory equivalent of this reflective faculty to derive the unseen from the seen, or to look behind the surface of things, those "silent walls," at a deeper reality where resides a renovated earth, "A rustic inn, our evening resting-place" (538). The auditory imagery, in accordance, stands for the materialization of the invisible ideals as they rise to the surface of things through the poet's imaginative powers.

The transition from visual to auditory imagery makes manifest an all-important element of the practical process of romantic idealization, an element not included (with reasons) in the theory. In short, what is supposed to be, in Phase II, a radical transformation of actuality turns out to be nothing more than a shift of sensory organ. Instead of re-arranging *all* the constituent parts of the phenomenal world to form a deep surface, Wordsworth merely *selects* certain particulars (e.g. bird songs) while *excluding* every other (e.g. ruins) lest they would destroy the illusion of peace and beauty he aims to create. In even more striking terms, as opposed to elevating the finite to the level of the infinite, Wordsworth reduces the finite to a fraction of its totality, a fraction that appears infinite simply because the observer is blind to his own blindness. Insofar as it is intended to convey "an image of tranquility," the ending of "The Ruined Cottage" functions only if the reader does not see the limits imposed by the poet upon his field of perception. Without the awareness of those limits, the reader is forced to assume that his vision comprehends all there is to be seen (or heard) and, thereby, that the world is indeed a "resting-place."

Thus, if nature and poetry, in Wordsworth's "Preface," constitute a privileged space where perceptions and representations stand free of all contextual or mediating influence, his poem indicates a very different situation. Far from sheltering the human subject from the conditions of subjectivity, "The Ruined Cottage" puts the reader's viewpoint under highly constrictive conditions as his gaze must follow a very narrow path upon the surface of things, from one set of particulars to another, while being under the false impression that it is the entire surface of things, and not his gaze, that changes.

McGann considers the exclusion of particulars, performed in the name of idealization, to be characteristic of all romantic poems. "The Poetry of Romanticism," he

writes in his introduction to *The Romantic Ideology*, "is everywhere marked by extreme forms of displacement and poetic conceptualization whereby the actual human issues with which the poetry is concerned are resituated in a variety of idealized localities" (1). Later, using "Tintern Abbey" and "The Ruined Cottage" as exemplary works, McGann demonstrates that the romantic "displacement" from an "actual" to an "idealized" landscape, while it "appears to be an immense gain," "is in reality the deepest and most piteous loss" (88).

In my reading of Wordsworth's "The Ruined Cottage," I described an instance of such displacement in terms of a shift between two sensory organs, from sight to hearing, a shift that idealizes to the extent that it excludes from the reader's perceptual field all visual reminders of Margaret's tragedy. McGann identifies in the same poem another similar displacement that would occur through a change of visual focus: "the historical origins and circumstantial causes of Margaret's tragedy," he explains, are not actually idealized; instead, they are altered in appearances only as the narrating eye centres its attention more and more on "a gathering mass of sensory, and chiefly vegetable, details" (83). Beginning with the decayed cottage, reminiscent of Margaret's failure to achieve an ideal of domestic life and industry, the narrative moves gradually, almost imperceptibly, towards the vegetation that "invades its neglected precincts" (83), "an emblem of the endurance of Nature's care and ceaseless dominance" (83). To McGann, Wordsworth idealizes the ruined cottage by carefully controlling the movement of his narrating gaze upon the surface of things. With a mere focal shift, what seems like a dismal illustration of social injustice and its destructive effects becomes a comforting evidence of Nature's supremacy over human history.

Speaking of "Tintern Abbey," but in a way that applies just as well to "The Ruined Cottage," McGann conjoins this displacement from history to ideality with the "penetrat[ion

of] the surface of a landscape to reach its indestructible heart and meaning" (86). In accordance with romantic theory, Wordsworth would idealize the real by bringing up to the surface of the phenomenal world a deep "meaning" that ordinarily escapes our attention. The vegetable overgrowth would be the materialization of that invisible depth. But, as McGann's reading of "The Ruined Cottage" shows, depth emerges as a result of a careful selection of superficial elements. Some would argue that the romantic genius consists precisely in this power to transport the reader from a world of loss to a realm of ideals without having to leave the surface of things (actuality), while others, like McGann and myself, would be more concerned by the fact that this idealizing process entails an "erasure" (90) of particulars, as well as an attempted erasure of that erasure.

BYRON'S "CHILDE HAROLD," CANTOS I-II

Byron's "Childe Harold," cantos I-II, is another interesting case of romantic displacement because, in a way typical of Byron's scepticism, it performs at the same time that it resists the act of erasure. In the first two cantos, we observe young Childe Harold who, out of disgust for his home country, decides to set out on the Grand Tour. From Portugal to Spain, Greece, and, finally, Albania, the narrative brings us to "the borderlands of contemporary civilization" (Martin 83) as it presents a sequence of deathward landscapes that are idealized through two practical modes of perception. The one idealizes earth's ruins by generalization, the other by accumulation of contrary perspectives. If Wordsworth renovates his world by simply removing his gaze from objects symbolic of change, loss, and death, Byron develops two methods of idealization that do not involve such a removal. In fact, it is by looking straight at those objects, in one case from an increasing distance, in the

other from multiple angles, that Byron beautifies his surroundings and so makes himself at home in the world.

Stanzas 22-23, canto I, instance the poem's first idealization of ruins. One obvious difference between this passage and "The Ruined Cottage" relates to the poets' respective uses of Nature. In Byron's poem, the ideal of permanence conveyed by natural overgrowth does not replace actuality, nor does it erase from the reader's consciousness the idea of change. It fulfills in reality the opposite aim: that of emphasizing the lack of permanence in human things. When he mentions that "now the wild flowers round them [the domes] only breathe," the poet has recourse to nature's endurance so as to underscore humanity's disappearance from the "domes where whilome kings did make repair." The presence of "wild flowers" makes the dome's deserted state all the more conspicuous. Not content with mere emphasis, Byron even obstructs the "passage" to the ruins with "giant weeds," as if to mark the impossibility ever to restore a human presence back into the empty domes.

Following this blunt refusal to idealize the perceived landscape by obscuring its ruins with Nature, Byron then derives from this particular scene, symbolic of loss, a general claim about the passing of *all* earthly pleasures: "Fresh lessons to the thinking bosom, how / Vain are the pleasaunces on earth supplied, / Swept into wrecks anon by Time's ungentle tide!" Although this movement towards generalization originates in a resistance to the idealizing process, it is, in fact, just another form (much more subtle) of idealization. Note that this single instance of generalization is by no means exceptional in the first two, or even the four, cantos. To Malcolm Kelsall, throughout "Childe Harold," the purpose of the verse, as opposed to the prose note, is to "seek out the general rather than particular; to philosophise current politics as a part of a greater paradigm" (59).

The elevation of particulars to a general status has a remarkable transformative power. In a world of particulars, the poet finds himself in the midst of singular and unrelated losses, each of which is a great cause of grief on account of its involvement with unique circumstances and people. The poet's own existence is just as particular as any other, just as defenceless in the face of change; he exists in the world and has no perspective on it, nor power over it. Generalization, on the other hand, transforms a world of particulars into one great paradigm involving all and no one simultaneously, as the generalizing process erases the borders distinguishing events, persons, and objects. Deprived of its individual character, each loss fails to maintain its power to signify in its own terms and vanishes into a mass of identical, featureless losses. The poet's own existence becomes just one more commonplace, a fact of no interest in itself. Thus liberated from the specifics of his tragic life, as well as other's, and possessing a grasp of all particulars, the 'generalizer' gains a sense of looking at the historical world from the outside, at a safe distance from the change and decay that govern its surface.

In sum, at the same that the movement towards generalization erases distinctions and (re)presents particulars as illustrations of the same comprehensive idea, it also displaces the human subject outside the world of actuality into a realm of ideas which, insofar as they are *about* history and change, are not subjected to them. The generalizing act, accordingly, idealizes earth by substituting for the surface of things deep-like, infinite and permanent, generalities, with the crucial effect of providing the observer with a sense of detachment from, and mastery over, actual losses.

To return to the gaze, we can define this idealizing process as consequent upon the observer's backing away from the perceived object, a withdrawal that offers a new perspective on the object as it gradually loses its distinctness and eventually disappears into

the growing multitude that crowds into the widening field of vision. Ultimately, it is the totality of perceivable objects that finds itself contained, and so controlled, within the visual horizon.

While Wordsworth in "The Ruined Cottage" idealizes his surroundings by directing his gaze towards vegetal symbols of peace and permanence, or, more simply, by shutting his eyes to visible signs of decay, Byron rejects both these alternatives (possibly on account of their obvious blindness to facts) and prefers to keep his gaze at all times fixed on the ruins. Such fixity, however, does not prevent Byron from manifesting his own kind of blindness. For, however motionless and wide open his eyes, the ever-increasing distance that separates the poet from the perceived object in the course of the generalizing process, can only result in an eventual loss of details. Even though the ruins remain the point of focus, they move so far away that, to all practical ends, they cease to exist. Insofar as the surface of things appears beautiful only at a distance, the romantic elevation of actuality to the ideal thus proves itself, once again, to be just a trick of the gaze.

Still typical of Byron's scepticism, stanzas 17-18 of canto II seem to adopt a critical stance on the generalizing process and to oppose any movement towards idealization. Not only do these two stanzas perform the reverse of idealization, i.e. actualization, but they also demonstrate that a distant, generalizing worldview conceals important details that stand out in close-up.

At his point on his pilgrimage, Harold is aboard a warship in the Mediterranean Sea. In stanza 17 the poet describes what we can assume to be Harold's view as he looks outwards at "the dark blue sea." Dotted with distant, swan-like ships, the "gaily" and "glorious main" is so beautiful and inspiring that it revives even the "dullest sailor," who

gains new strength as he looks upon this landscape seemingly devoid of scars, conflicts, or declines. In the next stanza, the poet zooms in on "the little warlike world within" a particular ship, likely the ship transporting Harold, and provides a new perspective on the pilgrim's surroundings. At closer range, the fair and harmless "wild swans" reveal themselves to be combat ships busy with the life of sea and war duties.

Clearly, such a drastic transition, from sea to ship, quiet revival to war duties, contemplation and life to labour and death, calls into question and even negates the reality of the ideal of peace and permanence that emerges at the end of romantic displacements. While a poet like Wordsworth can renovate his environment by directing his gaze towards symbols of the good and the beautiful, a poet like Byron can do just the opposite and direct his gaze away from such symbols towards reminders of the harshness and brutality of our worldly lives. Within this bi-directional movement, neither the ideal nor the actual can be seen as the true end towards which all things proceed. Both are equally products of a highly selective process and, on this account, neither has a right to claim authenticity.

Likewise, stanzas 17-18 also invalidate Byron's own mode of idealization through generalization. At a distance the various ships that constitute the "convoy" look generally inoffensive, even beautiful. Dispersed and yet all gathered within the poet's purview, they remind him of "wild swans in their flight." Yet, at close range one of the same ships reveals a different reality: in place of white plumes, we find such "warlike" particulars as "guns," "the busy humming din," "The hoarse command," the instant execution of orders, and the like. This surprising turn of events makes manifest the act of erasure (or deception) inherent in the generalizing perspective, which, as we saw, seeks to know the world from an ever-increasing distance. Seen from afar, particulars become other things altogether. As they are being

subsumed under one generic name ("The convoy"), they practically vanish out of existence and reappear as whatever one wishes them to be ("swans").

The scepticism of those two stanzas extends even further by noticing that the movement toward a particular ship coincides with a movement towards the observer, since, as stated above, we can assume that "the little warlike world within" of stanza 18 details the ship from which Harold surveys the sea landscape in stanza 17. One effect of the generalizing process is to provide the observer with a sense of complete detachment not only from the perceived object but also from his own particular situation, for one can induce generalities about the historical world only if one can (in theory) perceive history from its outside, *in its totality*, including one's historical situation. Accordingly, the observer in stanza 17, "He that has sail'd upon the dark blue sea," remains indefinite. "He" is everyone, and no one in particular. And if that vague observer does not specify his own "gallant frigate" beyond mentioning its "white sails," it is because he sees it not as an individual ship or location but as a member of a collective, the "convoy" spread out before him and whose many ships are united by their common whiteness, or swan-like look.

By shifting focus and making the particulars of the observer's warship the new centre of attention, stanza 18 confronts head-on the conception of the human subject as a disembodied being separate from the sphere of the perceivable. The shift, moreover, reveals Harold to be located *in the convoy*, the very object he contemplates at a distance in stanza 17, a revelation that invalidates the general perspective on the ground that no subject exists apart from the object he perceives. There is, therefore, no external viewpoint from which generalities about history can be derived. Harold is a historical being like any other person or thing, a world of particulars confined to a larger world of particulars.

One way of understanding the sceptical implications of stanzas 17-18, a passage that goes even as far as undermining Byron's own inclination to generalize, is to realize that those stanzas annul other modes of idealization to create a space for a new idealizing process, a correction, however, that preserves, even extends, erasure. An important distinction between Wordsworth's and Byron's displacements is the abruptness of the latter. While in "The Ruined Cottage" the transition from devastation to vegetal overgrowth takes places almost imperceptibly, the shifts in "Childe Harold" are generally so sudden that they instantly draw attention to themselves. If Wordsworth wants to conceal the idealizing process, Byron, on the contrary, does all he can to make his transitions as conspicuous as possible. Why? Because Byron does not want to displace his reader from one world to another. Instead, he wants his reader to notice a shift, a contradiction, between two different worldviews. Thus, in the passage on the "domes where whilome kings did make repair," the transition between lines 6 and 7 (I.23) is so sudden that it does not transform a world of particulars into a world of generalities so much as it *superimposes* a (particularizing) view that looks for distinctions with a (generalizing) view that seeks similarities. Likewise, Byron could hardly mark with greater emphasis the change of focus between the sea landscape and the detailed ship than by exclaiming: "And oh, the little warlike world within!" (II.18).

Now, to understand the idealizing effect of the superimposition of contrary perspectives, we must turn to Harold's "last 'Good Night'" (I.13.1-13), a farewell song where he elaborates a theory of 'the comic' founded on the incongruity between multiple viewpoints. Upon hearing one of his fellow travellers explain the cause of his seeming "so pale" – i.e. his grieving over his "absent wife," but, more exactly, over his own absence as his sons will "their father call" in vain (7) – Harold replies,

'Enough, enough, my yeoman good,
  Thy grief let none gainsay;
But I, who am of lighter mood,
  Will laugh to flee away.'

Harold is of a "lighter mood" than the grieving "yeoman" because of his knowing that human affections, may that be a wife's or a son's love, last only for a time and, therefore, do not merit causing that much sorrow:

For who would trust the seeming sighs
  Of wife or paramour?
Fresh feeres will dry the bright blue eyes
  We late saw streaming o'er. (I.13.8)

People change as "Fresh feeres" and new circumstances give rise to new concerns. Our world is a flux, and our thoughts and emotions fluctuate as they flow along the random course of history. If all things come to pass, why, then, should we take anything seriously? Should we not "laugh" at their passing and "flee away"? Thus Harold embraces a life of change and aimlessness:

With thee, my bark, I'll swiftly go
  Athwart the foaming brine;
Nor care what land thou bear'st me to,
  So not again to mine. (I.13.10)

Laughter comes with the capacity to let oneself be born away by external circumstances, here the seam, and with the capacity to adopt diverse, even contrary viewpoints along the way, without holding fast to any. Harold's decision to set out on his pilgrimage signifies his longing for such a changeful life, and the journey that awaits him is a journey where laughs and incongruities will be commonplace, as the same object will appear different under different lightings. The revelation of this "immense complexity" of viewpoints, and its

correlate resistance to "oversimplification," represent, to Ernest Lovell, the essence of "the comic vision" (48).

To illustrate "the comic vision," we can examine how Byron, in canto I stanza 5, speaks of Harold's broken heartedness from two contrary perspectives. The poet first adopts Harold's viewpoint, emphasizing his loss:

> For he through Sin's long labyrinth had run,
> Nor made atonement when he did amiss,
> Had sigh'd to many, though he lov'd but one,
> And that lov'd one, alas! could ne'er be his.

The next five lines offer a humorous counterpoint by looking at Harold's misery from his beloved's perspective, so turning what was first a cause of grief into a reason for rejoicing:

> Ah, happy she! to 'scape from him whose kiss
> Had been pollution unto aught so chaste;
> Who soon had left her charms for vulgar bliss,
> And spoil'd her goodly lands to gild his waste,
> Nor calm domestic peace had ever deign'd to taste.

However much we sympathize with Harold's viewpoint in the first four lines, the abrupt change in the line 5 ("Ah, happy she!") encourages us to relativize his loss by showing that it means also somebody else's gain. Like Harold in "his last 'Good Night'," we grow aware not only of the fleetingness of our own affections, as the narrative (the fictional equivalent of history) leads us into new circumstances, viewpoints, and sympathies, but we also come to realize that any single event or moment is a history (a story) in itself, exceeding, by virtue of its "immense complexity," any single viewpoint. It is this twofold recognition in the end that makes us "laugh" at Harold's broken heart, and "flee away."

The laughter consequent upon the adoption of contrary perspectives signals the laugher's departure, his fleeing away, from a world of fixed and coherent viewpoints, a world where all things, painful and joyous, must be taken seriously for the simple reason that they seem *flat* absolute. By contrast, the laugher inhabits a world where all things are *multi-sided* and contrary. My emphasis on the flatness of the serious worldview, as opposed to the multi-sidedness (or depth) of the comic worldview, is, clearly, far from incidental, for, in terms of romantic displacement, the world of absolutes corresponds to the actual, and the world of contradictions to the ideal. The comic worldview is ideal because it deprives phenomenological events of a significant portion of their power to affect, harm or delight, the laugher, who knows that those events mean more than what they seem from his limited perspective. The comic observer never lets himself be completely overwhelmed by any single impression; in fact, he seeks always to vary his impressions so as to gain a comprehension of each object that is as complex as possible. At first glance, that accumulation of a virtually infinite amount of perspectives on the same object appears to be a rather effective, albeit extreme and, perhaps, maddening solution to the problem of erasure. However, it should be noted that seeing too much is not unlike seeing very little, since the endless superimposition of contrary perspectives makes the world a great confusion of images that interfere with the perception of each image; in place of particulars we find, as a result, an absolute blur. Byron's ultimate resistance to the process of erasure turns out to be another act of erasure that substitutes, for a concrete world where things are simple but clear, an abstract realm where each and all things blend into one great confused vision (barely worth a laugh to me).

Notably, if, like Lovell, we take Byron's "many-sided contradictions" to be his distinguishing mark as a poet and a man (26), we can assert that the Byronic movement

towards the ideal occurs not in the narrative, not in a succession of increasingly ideal representations, as in "Tintern Abbey," but in the reading process, as the reader superimposes consecutive perspectives to form a complex mental image that does not actually exist at any point in the text. While Wordsworth traces the path to the ideal himself, a path his reader then passively, effortlessly, follows, Byron provides only incentives, in the form of abrupt transitions, and leaves to his reader the reflective task of folding up the surface of the poem into depth.

Another means, I hope illuminating, of differentiating Byron from Wordsworth is to consider their respective treatments of the gaze. In "The Ruined Cottage," the displacement from ruin to vegetation is so gradual that the reader does not fully realize the eye movement involved in this displacement. As far as he is concerned, it is the perceived object that changes, while his gaze (or the narrative's) remains fixed upon it. In the "domes" passage of "Childe Harold," by contrast, the displacement from a particular to a general worldview lacks the gradations and moderation that would conceal its change in perspective. Owing to this lack, the sensible reader becomes instantly aware of the fact that it is *him*, and not the perceived object, who has been displaced (to a more distant position relative to the object). And as he perceives his ability to modify the appearance of things by a mere shift of the gaze, or of his position, Byron's reader should begin to realize, as Locke did over a century before "Childe Harold" was published, that the visible world has no inherent, stable appearance, and, therefore, that it cannot be actually renovated. But then again, this sceptical empiricism is just another form of idealization according to which the gaze duplicates itself to look at the world from every possible angle so as to generate a comprehensive image that is ideal insofar as its "immense complexity" frees the sceptic of

the emotional burden associated with an undue emphasis on any single perspective (and he laughs, I imagine, out of relief).

ROMANTIC DISSOCIATIONS (A CONCLUSION)

The above study of "Childe Harold" and "Tintern Abbey" indicates that Phase II of the romantic movement towards association, far from involving a profound refashioning of the surface of things to make it congruent with the moral ideal, is – in practice – a trick of perception. On the whole, four of such tricks have been identified, but they can be subsumed under two classes. In Wordsworth's poem, it is *the displacement of 'the gaze' upon the sensible surface* that creates the impression of change and idealization. That displacement takes two forms – (1) an eye movement or (2) a shift of sensory organ – both of which relegate physical symbols of loss and devastation to the outer boundary of the perceptual field, while bringing objects of peace and permanence into focus. In "Childe Harold" the situation is different because Byron's observer, unlike Wordsworth's, is free of movement within a three-dimensional space; therefore, whereas the observer in "Tintern Abbey" resembles an art critic looking at a painting, with only the movement of his eyes to modify his perception, the observer in "Childe Harold" behaves as if he were looking at and moving about a sculpture. In accordance, Byron's idealizing process, less beautifying, it should be noted, and more confusing than Wordsworth's, takes places through *the displacement of the observer in relation to the object*: the observer either (3) pulls back from the object to lose sight of its details or (4) circles the object to merge its varying appearances into one blur.

All four romantic modes of perception move towards a world that is super-sensuous only to the extent that they provide an incomplete, distant, or confused representation of the

sensuous. The ideal of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, towards which all things romantic should proceed, proves then to be a *reduced* version of the phenomenal world as we experience it here and now. Some romantic enthusiasts inclined to accept that conclusion might retort that despite its illusory and selective nature, the romantic trope of idealization remains admirably ingenious; for the romantic escapes his subjective prison to seek refuge in a 'true' ideal home by way of mastering and manipulating his conditions of imprisonment, that is, by altering his position relative to the surface that walls him in and by carefully controlling his gaze's motions upon that surface. That liberation, however, means a double confinement. While he capitalizes on his subjective state and looks at his prison walls (*from* within) *from* a position of his own choosing, the romantic creates for himself a context within a context, a smaller home within a larger world. It is as if the thought of perpetual confinement publicized by the empirical school was so unbearable to him that he was even willing to imprison himself away from his imprisonment, with, as sole relief, the blurred and beautiful pictures that wall up his walls. And to make things worse, these consoling pictures are the products of a creative faculty which, on account of its universal and absolute nature, functions while ignoring the particularities that make the romantic a distinct person. What is a true home: a place for people in general, or a place that reflects one's personality?

The allegory of the prison walls applies equally to the rational sciences which, as discussed in the first chapter, tend also to exclude the particulars of the self and the world. Yet, rather than control his position and eye movement, the rational scientist, who does not recognize and, thereby, cannot take advantage of his subjectivity, finds another way out of prison. Through a very precise examination of his cell's physical details, he discovers a unifying design that would originate from an unseen world, more real and infinitely larger than those thin walls blocking his view. A much greater purpose, however, lies behind this

discovery, for in the process of breaking his prison apart to reveal its structural unity, the rational scientist comes to identify with the almighty force that assembled it (and possibly locked him in it). Whereas the romantic sits calm and contemplative, imagining his cell smaller, yet more beautiful and confused than it actually is, his scientist fellow inmate then proclaims with force and conviction that he could have built it himself and that, had he the chance to build it all over again, he would not change a thing.

An important distinction between the romantic's and the rational scientist's predicament is that the former inhabits a world that is primarily sensuous, though incomplete and confused; by contrast, the latter concerns himself with the sensuous only to derive from it a supersensible realm or power that is utterly intangible, though real.

If the romantic and the rational scientist invent ways of escape because they both feel captive, the empiricist does not perceive himself as confined. Rather than a barrier between the self and the world, the walling surface represents, to the empiricist, the medium through which we interact with the world. In the mode of 'association by extension,' the walls act like extensions of the human subject. To feel their presence is simply to feel the instrument by which we come into contact with the external world. Without those walls, we would be nowhere, no one; we need a closed space to distinguish ourselves from other objects, just as we need an intermediate surface to connect us to those objects. In the mode of 'association by contraction,' the walls stand now for the world itself. As far as we are subjects (i.e. impressible beings), the surface that surrounds us represents all that exists because it represents all that impresses us. And what lies beyond that surface is non-existent, or irrelevant, because it does not make any impression upon us. Captivity thus means two things to the empiricist: to be confined to the world or the space from which we

communicate with the world. Either way, escape inevitably results in the loss of the world: outside those walls there is nothing, only solitude and silence.

In his conclusion to *The Renaissance*, Pater could hardly express with more pathos the sense of utter isolation that, in the empirical view, follows liberation. Conceiving of man and the surface that walls him in as both constituted of loose particles, Pater literally fuses the prisoner with his cell to form one universal flux. While this situation could mean total association of the self with the world, it means, to Pater, total loss of the world *as well as* the self. Deprived of his hands, and of walls to touch, modern man suffers from an absolute freedom, the worst of confinements; he should therefore spend all his time and energy searching for something external to himself. That is to say: finally out of prison, we should look out for a new one (!) and until we find walls high and deep enough to feel captive once again, Pater urges us to build ourselves a temporary prison out of our art and poetry.

Can we associate with nature while seeking to free ourselves from it? Are association *and* freedom *mutually exclusive yet basic human needs? Can we reduce all human endeavours to a struggle between those two? between seeing external things and seeing without external constraints? Or should we just close our eyes and forget? All too simple.*

The only way out is in.

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